

DEAR CAPITALISM

IT'S NOT YOU, IT'S US
JUST KIDDING
IT'S YOU

WE THE PEOPLE

BIG
are too
to fail
ONE DAY

THE POOR WILL
HAVE NOTHING
LEFT TO EAT BUT



ISSUE

5

WINTER 2012

THIS IS NOT
BONNAROO!
THIS IS WAR!

99%

WELCOME BACK TO THE
FIGHT. THIS TIME, I KNOW
OUR SIDE WILL WIN



OFFICER,
DON'T
SPRAY

LOOK MOM
NO FUTURE

GENERAL STRIKE

SH!T
IS F*%KED UP
AND BULLSH!T

LOST MY JOB
FOUND AN
OCCUPATION

STUDENT
DEBT



WAKE UP

INDENTURED
SERVITUDE
TRICKLE TREAT!

PHASE TWO

The Strike and Its
Enemies

Seth Ackerman

Occupy Economics
Mike Beggs

Four Futures

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Who Killed Ekuru
Loruman?
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\$5.99

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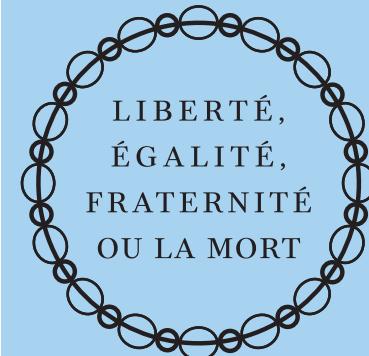
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Jacobin (2158–2602) is a magazine of culture and polemic that Edmund Burke ceaselessly berates on his Twitter page. Each of our issue's contents are pored over in taverns and other houses of ill-repute and best enjoyed with a well-shaken can of lukewarm beer.

Jacobin is published in-print four times per year and online at <http://jacobinmag.com>
Subscription price: \$24 per year,
\$34 intl.

P.O. Box #541336, Bronx NY 10454
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November 2011 – Occupy Wall Street holds national attention. The Left is at its most visible in decades. Thousands march in New York. There's a general strike in Oakland. The *New York Review of Books* publishes a reasonable young liberal with a lust for properly punctuated policy memos.

They don't realize we are in the last throes of the era of Ezra Klein.

There's room for a polemic here and, scribbled on the back of a month-old *Politico*, I actually have the outline of one next to me. But it feels absurd to denounce the self-evidently hilarious state of criticism. Who now is turning to the decaying organs of the liberal-left to understand unfolding events?

Jacobin has managed to find writers outside the *Washington Post*'s op-ed circuit. And here's the result, an outstanding issue – largely the product of precariously employed twentysomethings. Most of whom have never even seen a print copy of the *New York Review of Books*. The scene a few blocks away from that esteemed office offers inspiration enough – students and workers actively engaged in class struggle. Well, the majority of the protesters wouldn't immediately embrace a term like "class struggle." It strikes an arcane note, at which those weary of the radical left's sectarianism and general insanity instinctively recoil. Yet this is language that needs to be reclaimed and confidently articulated. It's *political* language that might have seemed out of place during decades of dormancy, but that will be increasingly relevant in the period to come.

The chasm between reality and rhetoric is impossible to ignore. Introducing a profile of web traffic and survey data taken from occupywallst.org by CUNY's Héctor R. Cordero-Guzmán, the site's operators proclaimed:

Among the most telling of his findings is that 70.3% of respondents identified as politically independent.

Dr. Cordero-Guzmán's findings strongly reinforce what we've known all along: Occupy Wall Street is a post-political movement representing something far greater than failed party politics. We are a movement of people empowerment, a collective realization that we ourselves have the power to create change from the bottom-up, because we don't need Wall Street and we don't need politicians.

A "post-political movement" of people who rec-

ognize they have the power to create change? It's an obvious contradiction. If one side is pushing austerity and the other is countering with calls for income redistribution and public goods, a high-stakes class struggle is being waged. Far from post-political, this is a reassertion of democratic politics at its purest.

Overcoming the conflation of Democrat-Republican partisanship with real politics requires clarifying what's implicit in the movement: it's class warfare, us versus them. The forces pushing austerity know what kind of fight they're waging; it behooves our side to understand the same. This doesn't mean we need sectarian sloganeering. The beauty of the "we are the 99 percent" proclamation is that it not only creates a polarization, it does so in a way that appeals to the vast majority. Inclusive rhetoric in defense of popular public goods does the same. And all that's a return to the political. We're just waiting for the language to catch up with this fact.

And it soon will. Movements can get politicized. No broad movement emerges out of an apolitical era and latches immediately onto some sort of unified and comprehensive critique. And new politics will emerge, in part, from the cauldron of occupation.

But real debates, the clash of ideas, beyond just rosy, impressionistic reports from the front, are required now more than ever. Our October roundtable on OWS political strategy caught some glib national attention (one of the reasons I was hanging onto that copy of *Politico*) after freelancer Natasha Lennard was dropped from the *New York Times* for committing the unforgivable sin of talking about a left-wing movement on a panel hosted by a left-wing magazine.

The fatwa hurled at us by Andrew, Rush, and Glenn overshadowed what was actually going on that night. We were having a political debate on pertinent topics – from anarchism and the state to demands and the role of unions – that needed to happen. There was even talk of Foucauldian sexual subjectivities that "real America" won't be ready for until at least 2014. At any rate, the room was packed.

We hope to foster this discussion. After all, with state repression ramping up and encampment after encampment dismantled by police, many are asking, "What's next?" I'm not exactly sure. All I know is that it won't have shit to do with Ezra Klein.



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EDITORIAL



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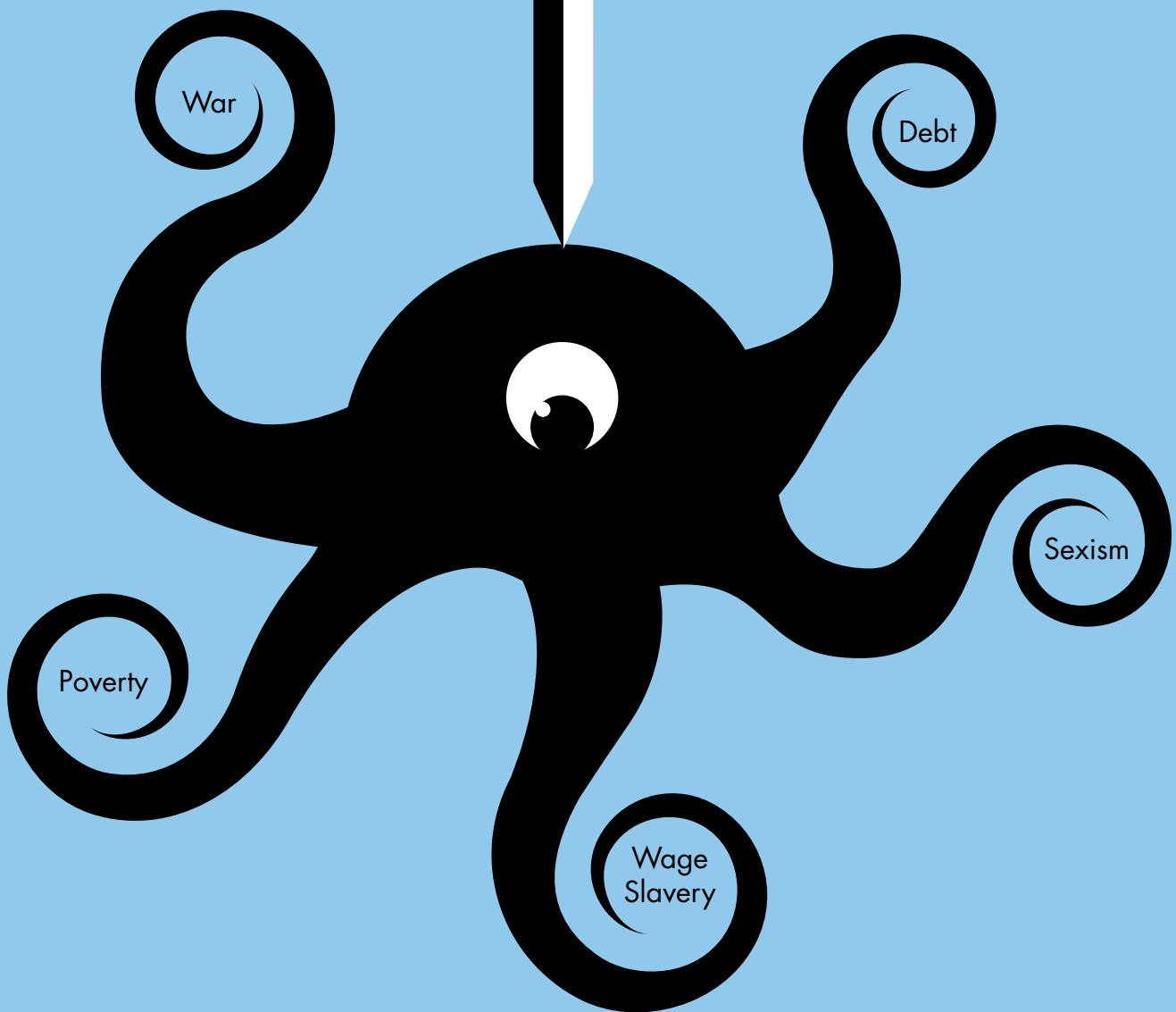
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STRIKE !



THE STRIKE AND ITS ENEMIES

In a noted 2008 essay, Mark Fisher reflected on the pervasive sense of capitalism's permanence, a feeling he termed "capitalist realism." But despite its gloomy tone, the piece ended on a note of hope:

The very oppressive pervasiveness of capitalist realism means that even glimmers of alternative political and economic possibilities can have a disproportionately great effect. The tiniest event can tear a hole in the grey curtain of reaction which has marked the horizons of possibility under capitalist realism. From a situation in which nothing can happen, suddenly anything is possible again.

For Occupy Wall Street, the hole in the curtain was definitively torn open on October 14. In the dead of night, when word went out that Michael Bloomberg was sending the police to Zuccotti Park to force an end to the month-long occupation, an emergency call for help went out from OWS. In response, New York City's Central Labor Council urged its 1.3 million members to rush to the square to protect the encampment from the cops, and by early morning roughly a thousand people, including hundreds of trade unionists

from the Communications Workers, SEIU and the Teamsters, had gathered and linked arms in defense.

On nearby Liberty Street, a cop was overheard asking a colleague: "How are they going to arrest all these people?"

The same question was dawning on City Hall. As the crowds gathered, according to the *New York Times'* reconstruction of what followed, the Bloomberg machine was besieged by "an intensifying sense of alarm." "This is not going in a good direction," a state senator warned the mayor's aides over the phone. Calls poured in through the night from officials who feared "that sending scores of police officers into the park would set off an ugly, public showdown that might damage the reputation of the city as well as its mayor." In the end, of course, Bloomberg blinked and that morning's raid was called off – giving the occupiers and their defenders not only a crucial month-long reprieve, but the unfamiliar and exhilarating feeling that they could defeat New York City's massed forces of guns and money. What happened that morning was important: the occupiers had defied the laws of private property – and through the power of numbers and solidarity they had gotten away with it.

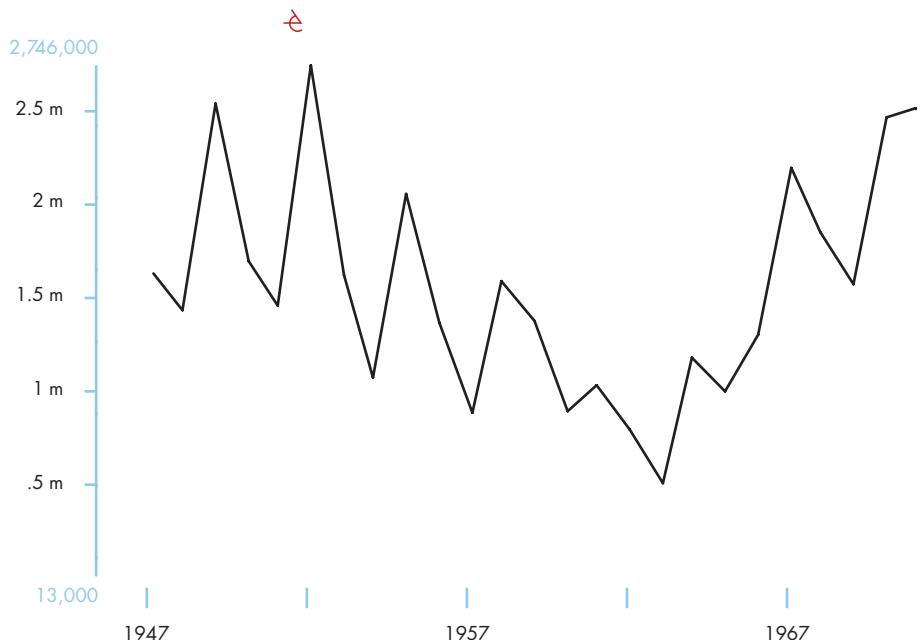
A lot of the younger contingent in Occupy Wall Street had never had many dealings with the unions that had rendered this act of solidarity. And despite the promising, if halting, attempts at cooperation, many of them – especially those who consider themselves to be on the movement's radical edge – are openly dismissive of unions. And why shouldn't they be? Not only has the organized section of the working class shrunk relentlessly to just 12 percent, but by all appearances its organizations long ago turned into the kind of hopelessly desiccated simulacra of resistance that young radicals and protoradicals avoid like the plague. In the public mind, union "activism" in recent years has been associated with images of defeat: hundreds of identically t-shirted workers bused in to forlorn protests on the National Mall; stultifying rallies featuring scripted speeches delivered in front of slogan-printed backdrops; and the occasional kabuki "strike" that seems more like a sullen and oddly masochistic PR stunt than an instance of direct action.

But while it is easy to see the external qualities that make the labor movement appear to be just another feature in the landscape of capitalist realism in the eyes of the young advocates of

WORKERS INVOLVED IN A MAJOR STRIKE

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Inspiration: *Left Business Observer*



militant direct action, few really understand how this situation came about. How did a movement, a practice, that once could inspire radicals with street battles and occupations, bravura feats of solidarity and heroism – that once tore holes in the curtain of capitalist hegemony almost as a matter of course – morph into the slick and routine management of decline personified by Andy Stern?

There are shelves of books on labor history that recount important aspects of this story, from state repression to working-class racism to party politics. But a little book published this year by Joe Burns, a union negotiator in Minneapolis, demystifies what is probably the most tangible element in modern labor's aura of lifelessness: the virtual disappearance of the strike. And in telling the story of the strike's disappearance, Burns inadvertently reveals that young radicals who scorn unions and the aging bureaucrats who run them have more in common than one might think.



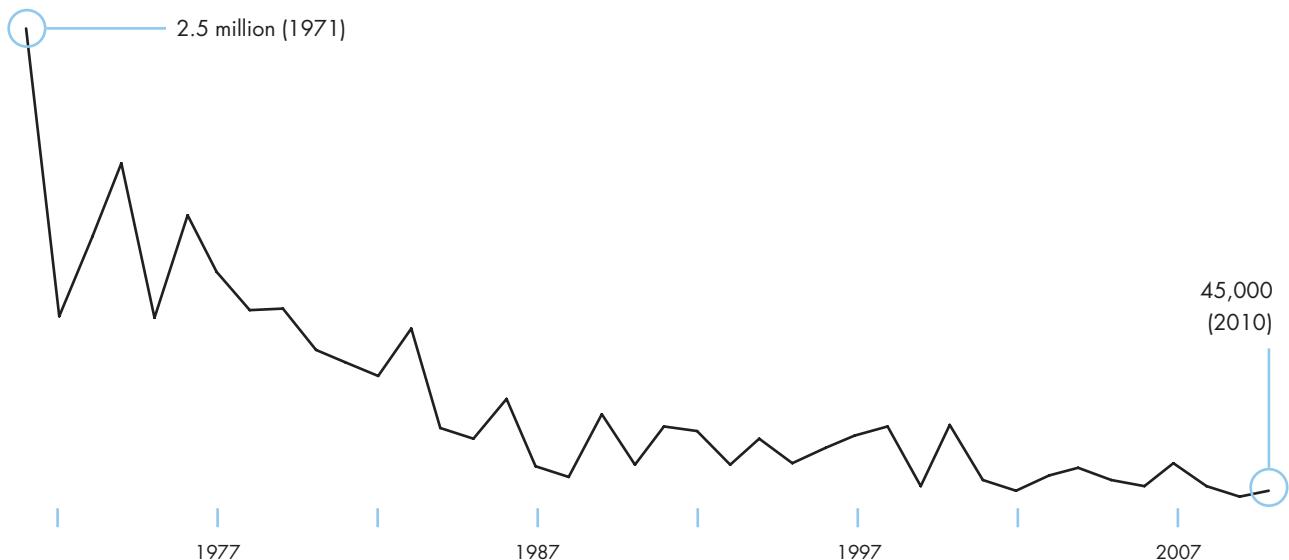
At the center of Burns' story is what he calls "the traditional strike," which was the heart of trade

union activity from the beginnings of labor history until its virtual disappearance after the 1970s. The crucial characteristic of the traditional strike – its sole reason for being – is that it *forces capital to stop production*. Although this fact may seem slightly obvious, its significance for both workers and radicals has been largely forgotten.

In the earliest days, when the labor movement was dominated by skilled craft workers who could not be easily replaced, a strike could simply consist of workers putting down their tools until their employers had met their demands. But with the advent of mass production, the majority of workers were now unskilled or semi-skilled and simply walking out on their jobs would only get them fired and replaced with scabs. Therefore, the strike became a military confrontation in which workers had to *physically prevent* the restarting of production using scab labor. Hence the images of confrontation that run through American labor history: the Homestead Strike, where thousands of workers lined the riverbeds to defend the town against invading Pinkertons. The urban streetcar strikes of the early twentieth century, featuring "a new form of guerilla warfare, with hand-to-hand combat, night

raids, cavalry charges, fighting from rooftops and behind barricades, and retreats in which the wounded were evacuated under heavy cover." Or the 1934 Toledo Auto-Light Strike, where picketers "broke into the plant and battled hand-to-hand to force the company, which had hired 1500 scabs, to stop production."

The traditional strike was an open and unabashed physical attack on the private property rights of the capitalist, and this fact was never denied by the mainstream leaders of the trade union movement. Perhaps the most convincing feature of Burns's account is that despite the author's personal identification with the radical strand of the union tradition, he goes out of his way to draw on examples from *the most conservative figures* in labor history: the Samuel Gompers, the Dave Becks, the George Meanys. These leaders not only accepted but took for granted that the labor movement must use or credibly threaten to use force to shut down capitalist production and that without this tool, nothing could be achieved by the trade union movement. "A strike can only be effective if and when it brings about a cessation of production. It is an absolute interference on the part of workers with the right of employers to



make profit." So said Homer Martin, the conservative former Baptist minister handpicked by the Gompersite AFL leadership to serve briefly as the first UAW president (before being overthrown by a more militant faction).

Radical tactics could only exist with a radical theory to support them. The act of blockading a private building in defiance of the police, the resort to forceful measures against scabs, are acts so deeply at odds with the law-abiding instincts of most people – working class, middle class or otherwise – that they will not do them without a clear account in their own minds of why such behavior is justified. That is why in the era of the traditional strike the labor movement was obliged to hold and propagate a counter-capitalist ideology based around the simple slogan that "labor is not a commodity" – the notion that it is illegitimate to treat human labor as something to be bought and sold for a market-clearing price, and that striking workers are therefore justified in using all necessary means to disrupt its sale. From the nineteenth century until well into the 1950s, this rallying cry was so ubiquitous in the world of mainstream, non-socialist unions as to be a platitude. A simple Google Books search shows the phrase

littering the pages of union journals from the Gilded Age onward. Walter Reuther was hardly a fiery radical, but when confronted with proto-neoliberal arguments about the sanctity of the free labor market, as he was on one occasion in 1953 while testifying before Congress, his ready-made reply was crisp: "Labor is not a commodity which you go and shop for in the free market place."

Unions not only believed stopping production was their sole effective means of striking; they considered it to be, ultimately, their only source of power. Again, this notion was a truism, enshrined in college labor textbooks. A 1956 industrial relations text baldly stated of "the strike, the boycott, and the picket line" that "there can be no collective bargaining, if, from the union's standpoint it cannot utilize these means." As late as 1980, a labor economics text explained simply: "The union's ability to strike, and thus halt the employer's production, is essential to the collective bargaining process.... [I]t is the potential of a disruption in production that induces employers to strive to effectuate agreement with the union."

All this should give some sense of why the near disappearance of the pro-

duction halting strike since the 1980s is a phenomenon of such far-reaching importance.

A large section of Burns's book is devoted to meticulously tracing the path that led to today's situation. Companies entered the post-WWII period sufficiently scarred by the militancy of the 1930s and sufficiently cowed by popular acceptance of working-class direct action that an "unspoken norm" developed, according to which management responded to any breakdown in collective bargaining by *shutting down production on its own*. This prevented the outbreaks of violence and embitterment associated with strikes and provided a calm atmosphere in which negotiations could take place.

But meanwhile, during this period of relative harmony, the judicial and political systems were quietly and insidiously entrapping the unions in a little understood web of repressive measures that collectively make up what Burns calls "the system of labor control." The system, which developed gradually from the late 1930s through the 1960s, functions as an

organic whole. No one piece destroyed the strike on its own; rather, each element carefully reinforces all the others. One of the system's remarkable aspects is how juridically unorthodox it often is: as law scholars regularly point out, many court decisions clearly contradict the stated text of the National Labor Relations Act. Meanwhile, labor legislation often resorts to startlingly coercive state intervention to achieve its capitalist ends. The system is too elaborate to explain here in full, but a few details will give a flavor of how it operates.

- The most familiar element, the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act, explicitly made solidarity a crime by outlawing the secondary strike – the crucial technique of striking or picketing in support of workers at another firm. In one blow, the production-halting potential of strikes was drastically curtailed. Tellingly, under current law, peacefully standing outside a toy store handing out fliers urging a boycott is considered protected speech if done by a college anti-sweatshop activist; but it is an illegal act subject to fines and arrest if done by a union worker employed in a striking shop.
- The traditional capitalist insistence on freedom of contract was swept aside in the 1959 Landrum-Griffin Act, which declared null and void voluntary agreements between an employer and a union exempting the workers from handling “hot cargo” – that is, products made in struck shops.
- Over the years, a series of court decisions have ruled on the “intermittent strike.” This is a particularly effective technique in which workers strike for only an hour or two without physically leaving their jobs, making orderly management practically impossible while leaving

workers largely invulnerable to replacement by scab labor. The intermittent strike has been ruled to be an unprotected strike act and therefore punishable by firing. But the finding so clearly runs counter to the literal text of the National Labor Relations Act that judges have been all but forced to admit that their real objection to the technique is its effectiveness. As one federal appeals court wrote, an intermittent strike “unreasonably interfere[s] with the employer without placing any commensurate economic burden on the employees.”

...he (inadvertently)
calls to mind some-
thing unexpected – the
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the anti-union radical-
ism within the Occupy
movements and the
well-ensconced union
bureaucrats themselves.

These measures placed serious obstacles in the way of successful strikes. But the real ticking time bomb of labor law was the Supreme Court's 1938 decision in *NLRB v. Mackay Radio* giving employers the right to permanently replace striking workers. One of the most criticized decisions in legal history, the “Mackay doctrine” discovered a previously unknown distinction between “discharging” striking workers – which the court acknowledged was not permitted by the NLRA – and

merely “replacing” them permanently with scabs. As a result of this decision, the United States remains one of the few democratic countries in the world where strikers can be permanently replaced.

Once capitalists regained the initiative in the 1970s and 1980s, permanent replacement was the critical weapon that allowed them to go on the offensive. The postwar gentleman's agreement that companies would shut down their own production rather than risk a confrontational strike came to an abrupt end. Now management actively sought to *provoke* strikes, with the intention of keeping production running and permanently replacing the workers, thereby getting rid of a union once and for all. Almost overnight, striking became a suicide mission for workers. The strike rate collapsed.

There are still strikes, of course, now and then. But they tend to be strikes of a new kind. Recent years have witnessed the growth of the “one-day strike,” for example, in which the union announces that it will strike for a day and then come back to work. The aim of the one-day strike is simply to generate publicity; it has no real value in stopping production. It would no doubt mystify Samuel Gompers if he were here to see it, to say nothing of Bill Haywood.



Since the 1980s, the very idea of the production-halting strike has gradually dropped out of circulation among labor leaders. Today it is virtually forgotten. In its place has sprouted a panoply of alternative panaceas for restoring labor's strength – social unionism, community partnerships, the focus on organizing – all of which avoid the central issue. In discussing this evasion, Burns scores the timidity of the dominant thinking within the labor movement. Yet in doing so he (inadvertently) calls

to mind something unexpected: the ironic parallel between the anti-union radicalism within the Occupy movements and the well-ensconced union bureaucrats themselves.

In a crucial passage, the author astutely sketches the contradictory profile of the labor “progressives” who have taken leadership roles throughout the AFL-CIO in the last fifteen years. These figures have brought desperately needed changes to the labor movement’s stance towards immigrants, race, women, and foreign policy. And yet he concludes:

During the late 1970s and 1980s, when many of these activists entered the labor establishment, the leadership of most international unions was intensely conservative and hostile to progressive ideas. Working within a labor movement that lacked an aggressive or cohesive left wing, many formerly progressive policymakers accepted the new, management-centric order that was being created within the movement by the employer onslaught of the 1980s. Adapting their own ideas to match this new conservative reality, these activists created the one-day strike, the corporate campaign, and social unionism tactics that functioned comfortably within the existing structures imposed by management and the legal system. As a result, for the past two decades, many of these “progressives” have been essentially pushing a pragmatic, non-confrontational agenda, whose main ideas can be summed up as follows:

1. Unions must only fight within the bounds of the law
2. Workers and the workplace are not at the center of the struggle
3. Middle-class progressive staffers know more than workers and thus should take a lead role in union strategy
4. Progressive union staffers do not have different material interests than rank-and-file workers

5. Building organization, rather than confronting management, should be labor’s main mission
6. One can accept the fundamentals of capitalism and still devise effective trade union tactics
7. Ultimately, workers must rely on the power of the government in order to make gains
8. Militancy is naïve and should be marginalized
9. To argue that unions need to break free from the current labor system is too radical

“Taken together,” he concludes, “these ideas amount to an extremely conservative philosophy of trade unionism, a philosophy that would have been summarily rejected by previous generations of union leaders, on the left and right.”

Meanwhile, today’s generation of young radicals, like the progressive labor bureaucrats have spent all of *their* formative years living in the era of capitalist realism – the era of There Is No Alternative. And it’s perhaps for this reason that each tenet of the union bureaucrat philosophy that Burns recounts finds its distorted mirror image in the views of the young anti-union radicals. After all, the prevailing attitude in certain precincts of the Occupy movement is that unions by their very nature will never break the law. That workplaces are not at the center of the struggle. That middle-class intellectuals and full-time activists should take the lead role in strategy and that these groups do not have different material interests than rank-and-file workers. That building “communes,” rather than confronting capital, should be the movement’s main mission. And, above all, that one can tacitly resign oneself to the permanence of capitalism and neoliberalism and still devise effective movement tactics. The irony is poignant. When Burns writes that “conservative trade unionists such as Samuel Gompers were more radical than even today’s labor left,” the same

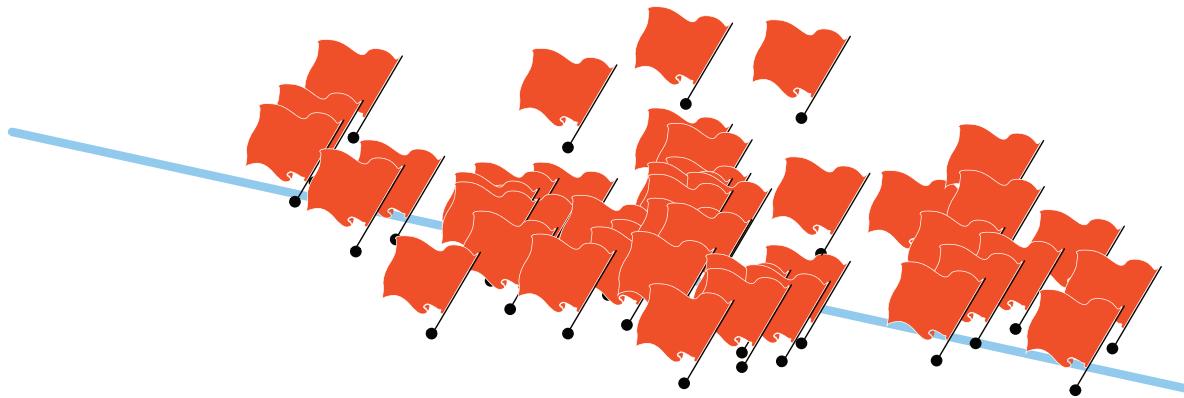
could be said of many of the Occupy movement’s young intellectuals.

What is refreshing about Burns’s approach is that he rejects the fatalism of both the union bureaucrats and anti-union radicals. Instead, he makes a practical yet audacious proposal for breaking free from the system of labor control so that workers can once again directly challenge the dominance of their employers’ property rights.

He argues that a militant current within the existing unions could support the creation of independent worker organizations possessing no assets and no property. These organizations would be able to violate Taft-Hartley and other laws: to strike and organize using tactics that defy the authorities and target the shutdown of production without fear of losing years of accumulated strike funds in lawsuits or court fines. There are precedents: the Mineworkers’ sponsorship of Communist-led steelworker organizing in the mid-1930s; the establishment of AFL federal unions in the same period, most of whose members ended up joining the CIO. The basic concept was even endorsed by the American Federation of Teachers in a 2005 memo on possible future labor strategies.

The idea is straightforward, but it is sufficiently unconventional and risky that it is hard to imagine it happening in the absence of a once-in-a-generation radical upsurge. Burns published his book last May – four months before the occupation of Zuccotti Park. Since then, a radical mobilization that many of us doubted we would see in our lifetimes has erupted. If we, as activists, students and intellectuals are serious about challenging capitalism, we will ask how we can help to foster a militant rank-and-file led workers’ movement. Because there are millions of them and far fewer of us. And without mass radicalization within the working class, sooner or later the oppressive curtain of capitalist realism will descend on us once again. 

OCCUPY ECONOMICS



by Mike Beggs



 Occupy Wall Street has thrown off many sparks. A little one landed in academic economics. On November 2, a group of Harvard students walked out on Greg Mankiw's intro economics course – according to the professor himself “about 5 to 10 percent of the class stood up and quietly left.” Later that day, the *Harvard Political Review* posted an open letter the dissenters had written to Mankiw:

We are walking out today to join a Boston-wide march protesting the corporatization of higher education as part of the global Occupy movement. Since the biased nature of Economics 10 con-

tributes to and symbolizes the increasing economic inequality in America, we are walking out of your class today both to protest your inadequate discussion of basic economic theory and to lend our support to a movement that is changing American discourse on economic injustice.

The main complaint of the dissenters, expressed in every paragraph, was bias: “There is no justification for presenting Adam Smith’s economic theories as more fundamental or basic than, for example, Keynesian theory.”

A trope began in the comments thread below: it was ironic that these undergraduates had walked out on

Mankiw, a leading light of the New Keynesians, apparently thinking that he was an anti-Keynesian. Had they waited until the second semester, when Econ 10 turns to macroeconomics, they would have found the class steeped in Keynes, learning from a guy who said in 2008: “If you were going to turn to only one economist to understand the problems facing the economy, there is little doubt that the economist would be John Maynard Keynes.”

Professor Mankiw, naturally, was given space to defend himself and his course not in the *Harvard Political Review* or the *Crimson*, but in the *New York Times*. He learned his first economics from the famous, blockbuster

If economics is more monolithic than most social sciences, it is less so than it seems from the outside. Radicals should think of it as terrain, not the enemy itself.



In April 1973, most of an audience walked out on Paul Samuelson. It was not a coordinated walkout but an aggregate expression of the preferences of many individuals. At that time he was the most famous living economist, a Nobel laureate, author not only of the dominant introductory textbook but the template for all introductory textbooks, and dean of the liberal technocratic economics that had framed policy debate since the 1940s. He was an establishment Democrat, having been adviser to Kennedy and LBJ, and he wrote a regular column for *Newsweek*, communicating to a popular audience his take on the unsettled economic landscape of the decade. The neoclassical-Keynesian synthesis – “bastard Keynesianism” as Joan Robinson called it – was fraying as unemployment and inflation climbed together. Samuelson was more closely associated with the Phillips curve – the idea of a trade-off between inflation and unemployment – than Bill Phillips himself. He and everything he stood for were under attack from two sides.

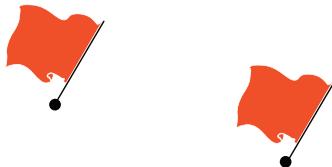
Everyone remembers the man on his right – Milton Friedman – whose columns alternated with Samuelson’s in *Newsweek*. The challenge from his left is less familiar. But in the early 1970s Samuelson felt it sufficiently to revisit that “minor post-Ricardian” Karl Marx and write papers in major journals on the “transformation problem” – ultimately dismissive, but serious. In April 1973 he came to speak at the University of Sydney and found

a department riven by ideological tension.

Samuelson had spoken elsewhere about the radical challenge to economic orthodoxy that was developing in the USA and internationally, providing his own rebuttal of the dissidents’ arguments. Many students and staff at the University of Sydney would have been interested to hear him on that theme. Instead, influenced by Professor Simkin who chaired the event, Samuelson talked on an abstract topic in mathematical economics that was neither interesting nor intelligible to most of his audience. It was as if this distinguished economist were illustrating the very problem with which the dissidents were concerned. When he started his lecture, the largest lecture theatre in the Merewether Building (where the Faculty of Economics was located) had been packed; by the time he was finished it was nearly empty. [Gavan Butler, Evan Jones and Frank Stilwell, *Political Economy Now!*, Sydney University Press, 2009, pp. 8–9]

It turned out to be a foreshock. Four months later at Sydney two hundred students boycotted their normal economics lectures for a day of protest and began collaborating with dissident academics to design and fight for an alternative curriculum. It was the beginning of a long and bitter campaign that would over the next few years escalate from petitions and teach-ins to occupations and a university-wide strike. “Political economy,” as the movement was known, achieved alternative classes, then a major, and finally – years later – an independent department.

What happened at Sydney was part of a much wider, international movement. Greg Mankiw, in his *New York Times* apologia, wrote that the walkout of his own class triggered nostalgia for his own 1970s undergraduate days “when the memory of the Vietnam War was still fresh and student activism



textbook of Paul Samuelson, whose “own politics were decidedly left of center,” and he turned out just fine. His text is widely seen as the successor to Samuelson’s and he sees himself as following Samuelson’s path, representing the mainstream. “If my profession is slanted toward any particular worldview, I am as guilty as anyone for perpetuating the problem. Yet, like most economists, I don’t view the study of economics as laden with ideology.” Funnily enough, when the first edition of Mankiw’s text came out in 1997, the *Economist* welcomed it as an antidote to the bias of Samuelson: “Mankiw’s aim, unlike Samuelson, is to elucidate rather than advocate.”

... the fight for radical economics became a protracted war of position in the labyrinthine trenches of academia.

was more common.” Harvard itself was an early battleground in the struggle for space for radical economics. In December 1969, a group led by young Harvard economist Arthur MacEwan stormed the business meeting at the American Economic Association’s annual convention to throw down a gauntlet: “Our conflict is a basic conflict of interests. The economists have chosen to serve the status quo. We have chosen to fight it.” At the same conference eminent Harvard professor John Kenneth Galbraith presented a paper on “economics as a system of belief”: “[E]conomics has excluded socially inconvenient analyses, at least until some combination of pressure – the need for practical action, the social intuition of the nonprofessional, competent heresy within the profession – has upset the accepted view.”

In the next few years, radical economics flowered at Harvard, thanks to a coalition of undergrads and grad students and untenured faculty, with the tacit support of some of the established professors, including some big names – not only Galbraith, but Nobel prizewinners Kenneth Arrow and Wassily Leontief. By 1973 orthodoxy had asserted itself in the form of tenure denials to MacEwan, Samuel Bowles, Herbert Gintis, and Thomas Weisskopf. Only Stephen Marglin survived, having already received tenure before the storm. (He’s still there teaching critical courses in economics – the open letter to Mankiw complains that his alternative intro course is not available this year.)

Similar dramas were played out on campuses all over, and the fight for radical economics became a protracted war of position in the labyrinthine trenches of academia. Tenure is denied in one department, while another across town reaches critical mass: Bowles and Gintis were snapped up by the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, alongside Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff, in a package deal deliberately creating a heterodox economics department. The Marxists, feminists and other radicals made common cause with others exiled from the kingdom of modernizing economics departments: the economic historians and historians of economic thought, the post-Keynesians, the institutionalists, even in some cases the Austrians. New conference circuits developed, and radicals tried to make themselves useful outside academia – to activists, to unions, to their communities. Journals sprung up, many of which are with us today: the *Review of Radical Political Economics*, *Capital and Class*, the *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, the *Journal of Post Keynesian Economics*, the *Journal of Australian Political Economy*. Fortresses rose – at Sydney, at Amherst, at the New School for Social Research – and fortresses fell – most regrettably, at Cambridge.



t would be a mistake to see the issue simply in terms of a battle of ideas, with mainstream economics wholly misguided, a delusional worldview. The radical critique has always been more subtle than that. The founding statement of the Union for Radical Political Economics (URPE), from 1968, did not criticize mainstream economics for being wrong, or for using misguided techniques or methodologies – in fact, it went out of its way to acknowledge “the value of some of the tools and concepts of modern economics.”

Mainstream economics is both an

ideological bastion of capitalism and a genuine social science. As Julio Huato put it in a talk to the membership meeting of URPE this past October, “the ideas of the economists would not be as consequential, as practically important, in fact as harmful as they are, if they simply were a bunch of absurdities without connection to the society we live in.” There is, to be sure, an awful lot of plain bad economics out there, from the doctrine of Ricardian equivalence to real business cycle theory. Abstraction is necessary to all science, and especially social science, but the wide streak of formalistic rationalism in economics effectively shields a lot of theoretical economics from any encounter with evidence.

But many economists are genuinely interested in how the economy actually works, and there are heavy pressures on economics to be *useful*. A large proportion of the profession works outside the academy, and much of the discipline is shaped there – in central banks, treasuries, international regulatory bodies, and financial institutions, where practical considerations reign.

The figure of Mankiw exposes a strange cultural dissonance in a certain liberal view of economics. He is on the side of the devils: chair of the Council of Economic Advisers under President Bush, then official adviser to Mitt Romney. He is on the side of the angels: a self-proclaimed Keynesian, scourge of the conservative New Classical, “saltwater” economist fellow to Paul Krugman, and card-carrying member of the reality-based community. As he put it in a politely devastating take-down of real business cycle theory in 1989, when it was still in the ascendant, “One theory may be more ‘beautiful,’ while another may be easier to reconcile with observation ... Without such evidence, their theories will be judged as not persuasive.”

Mainstream economics is a bulwark of the center, not the right. At least since the great march of economists

into the state during and after World War II, its heart has been technocratic. The rise of “rational expectations” and the revanchist New Classicals in the 1970s and 1980s was really an aberration – and its impact outside of academia was shallower and more fleeting than many realize. The movement of mainstream economics and policy back towards neoclassical-Keynesianism long predates the crisis; in fact, in some respects, it never went away. When Willem Buiter said in 2009 that the past thirty years of academic macroeconomics had been “a costly waste of time,” and Paul Krugman called it “spectacularly useless at best, and positively harmful at worst,” they were repeating a line that had been common among central bankers for years. A Reserve Bank of Australia paper noted in 1999 that the 1990s had seen macroeconomic analysis return to where it was circa 1971: “the intervening years had led to some refinement of the analysis, but the expectations-augmented Phillips curve had returned and once again was at center stage.”

That puts the wrong turn, according to the technocrats, somewhere between Milton Friedman and Robert Lucas – or really, somewhere during Milton Friedman’s own career. Friedman’s monetarism was a mistake. His politics may be gauche. But the Friedman of the “natural rate of unemployment” and the “expectations-adjusted Phillips curve” was not at all a mistake for the technocrats. In fact, he represents the apogee of the technocratic neoclassical-Keynesian synthesis rather than a rejection of it. Brad DeLong, doyen of the liberal econo-bloggers, is quite explicit about it: “Friedman completed Keynes.”

There is no surprise, then, in a New Keynesian being Bush’s chief economic adviser. We are all Keynesians still. If economics is back where it was at the turn of the 1970s, so, in a sense are its critics. The chief complaint raised in the founding document of URPE was

not that mainstream economics was delusional, or biased to the right, but that it was technocratic. It framed the economy as a technical problem to be solved with the correct application of scientific principles by policymakers. It had nothing to say about the truly burning problems of the day – “the economics of the ghetto, poverty in the American economy, international imperialism, interest-group analysis, the military-industrial-university complex...” – because they were not amenable to mere policy solution. The point of radical economics was to address itself to new agents: not policymakers but “the social movements of our day,” who “need an economic analysis offered in a sensitive manner.” Economics must change to “reflect the urgencies of its day,” integrate with political science, sociology and social psychology to “break out of the bonds of narrow specialization,” and move beyond the piecemeal treatment of “tiny fragments of large interrelated problems.”

Professor Mankiw’s response to the burning problem raised by his dissident students fits the pattern: “Widening economic inequality is a real and troubling phenomenon, albeit one without an obvious explanation or easy solution.”



If economics is more monolithic than most social sciences, it is less so than it seems from the outside. Radicals should think of it as terrain, not the enemy itself. Many of its strategic points favor the enemy, but parts of it are open for contest. Occupying economics is about widening and shoring up the space in which radicals can survive, so as to develop analysis aimed at social movements. It is not about politicizing economics, because economics has always been politicized.

What are the prospects? Some signs are better than at any time since the 1970s. Radical and heterodox econom-

ics have hung on for many years in isolated departments and across networks of lonely researchers. For years, conferences ended with gloomy plenary sessions on the future of heterodox economics, the attendees edging towards retirement, likely to be replaced by game theorists and experts in behavioral finance. The crisis that broke out in 2007 brought a new lease on life, new associations, new journals, and even a \$50 million fund from George Soros. At the same time, it plunged many universities and the states and endowments that fund them into trouble. At the height of the struggle in economics in the mid-1970s, an American Economic Association committee was charged with investigating cases of alleged political discrimination in dismissals and tenure denials. Its chair, Kenneth Arrow “explained that there was great difficulty in determining whether dismissals resulted from political beliefs, the quality of a professor’s work, or the recession, which had forced some colleges to lay off faculty.” The same forces are at work today amid a much more precarious situation, especially for junior faculty.

The Mankiw walkout seemed to come from nowhere, the students apparently not plugged into the existing alternative economics networks. But it cheered those networks immensely. If it happened at Harvard, it could happen anywhere. What happens next will depend on the links being forged right now between disaffected students, tenured old-timers, and young grad students and faculty prepared to stake their careers on a new wave of critical economics. “The mainstream,” writes Duncan Foley, “dialectically produces its own negation.” 

What is to be done? The Jacobin blog will over the next few weeks cover the history and possible future of an occupied economics. “Links to all references are provided in the online version of this article.”



STEVE
JOBS

1955 - 2011

PAINT IT WHITE

by Sarah Leonard

On October 5, there were two tragedies. The first, under cover of twilight in New York City, unfolded after a thousands-strong Occupy Wall Street march against economic inequality. Some occupiers thought they might take their first amendment rights for a stroll down Wall Street, a public street, and got pepper sprayed, thrown on the concrete, and carted off by armed men in the bankshadows of the financial district. But the second tragedy wiped the first clean from the headlines: Steve Jobs was dead. The *New York Times'* website that night was a digital shrine to the CEO – to his vision, to his crankiness, his influence, his craftsmanship, his turtlenecks. Because who but Steve Jobs would've had the cartoon-like ability to wear only black turtlenecks? Was he merely a hero, or was he a god?

More interesting than the *Times'* homage was the reaction of an array of lefties: not just occupiers, who mourned Jobs in Liberty Square, but many self-described progressives testifying to their grief on Facebook, Twitter, and at Apple stores. Mourners downloaded candle apps onto their iPads and held them mournfully aloft. The global display of grief for this particular CEO, even among those actively battling his fellow 1 percenters, was at least a little surprising. His hero status

is, by any left-wing criteria, undeserved. And his particularly hip brand, and its quasi-countercultural messaging, have been the disguise with which Jobs has gotten away with murder, sometimes quite literally, in his quest to turn his expensive little gadgets into the vehicles of our individual liberation.

For months now, the long divided American Left has pursued a different sort of liberation, unifying under the spacious banner of “99 percent.” A whole movement has taken shape, at last, to empower working people. Apple has always stood on the other side of this battle. As journalists Donald L. Barlett and James B. Steele noted, “after only one generation, all the Apple manufacturing jobs in America disappeared, as the work of building and assembling the machines was turned over to laborers in sweatshops in China and other countries.” In 2011, Apple admitted that some of its Chinese factory workers had developed cancer in these factories. Jobs’s company found the discovery an opportunity to celebrate the effectiveness of Apple’s auditing process, which had uncovered the abuses, even as, according to ABC News, the company “admitted that some of its workers in China have been poisoned and that many are regularly working in unsafe conditions.” The enormous public anxiety expended on Jobs’s own cancer travails could not stand in starker

contrast to the flippancy with which he threw away the health of his most vulnerable employees.

Further problems in Chinese factories featured every classic in the labor exploitation repertoire. Anita Chan of the China Research Centre at Sydney’s University of Technology noted that while Apple may be investigating the worst of their factories, there are no mentions in the report of the dramatic speeding up of production. In part because China does not acknowledge speedups as a labor concern, “the speed of the production line is very fast and for big companies, if they are very good in de-skilling, that means having workers do very, very repetitive movements, very simple repetitive movements, and if you speed it up that means your chance of getting RSI [repetitive stress injury] is very high.” Labor activists have indeed claimed this brutal pace as a cause of the Foxconn suicides of 2010 among workers building the iPhone, iPod, iPad, and MacBook. Suicides about which Apple was “saddened” and which the company promised to investigate. “Apple is deeply committed to ensuring that conditions throughout our supply chain are safe,” read the company’s statement, “and workers are treated with respect and dignity.”

On October 5, occupiers marched arm-in-arm with labor, the movement

that brought you cancer-free work environments. The Chinese workers didn't have a strong enough labor movement to procure safety and wage regulations – that's why Steve Jobs used them. Some of those working people wrote Jobs a letter in February, noting that the hexyl hydride used to speed up the manufacturing of touch screens in their Chinese factory was, in fact, killing them. Jobs made no response, though the factory reverted to using alcohol. Those iPads sure are frictionless fun unless, it turns out, you happen to inhale while you're manufacturing them.

Let's glance toward the actual design of those Apple products. No description of Steve Jobs's accomplishments is complete without caressing the soft curves of the Macintosh or confessing the pleasures of stroking the iPod's sidebar. His products are sexy and accessible and California fun – the Katy Perrys, if you will, of gadgetland. Apple is notorious for letting no one inside their gorgeous handiwork. No tinkering, no fixing. If you need something done, bring it to the Genius Bar. This disempowerment says in the most explicit terms: "You are not smart enough to manage this tool, which is more perfect and more sophisticated than you." It's a similar attitude, come to think of it, to that of high financiers who have long won exemption from criticism by their reputation for "smartness" in an industry that claims to be too sophisticated for ordinary people to comprehend. It cultivates a dependency on the company's services, and replaces experimentation and choice with awe for what is.

This could not be in greater conflict with what might be described as the Left of the technological world – those who advocate open source technology, freeware, and so on. These micromovements have developed to prevent a tiny elite from holding a monopoly over the design and manipulation of increasingly integral parts of our lives. As

the blogger "Armed and Dangerous" pointed out, the "freedom" of a Mac was the myth that disguised an unyielding design; but "such was Jobs's genius as a marketer that he was able to spin that contradiction as a kind of artistic integrity, and gain praise for it when he should have been slammed for hypocrisy."

Combine these elements with Jobs's contempt for philanthropy, his shameless appropriation of others' ideas, and reputation for bullying subordinates, and you have a particularly despicable (or honest) card-carrying, private-jet-flying member of the 1 percent. But this is not Steve Jobs's reputation. Recently in *New York* magazine, Frank Rich wrote a tirade against the deprivations of the twenty-first century elite, called "Class War." He made the good and necessary point that these elites will not be the ones to save us from the crisis they ushered in. But it contains as well this nostalgic gem:

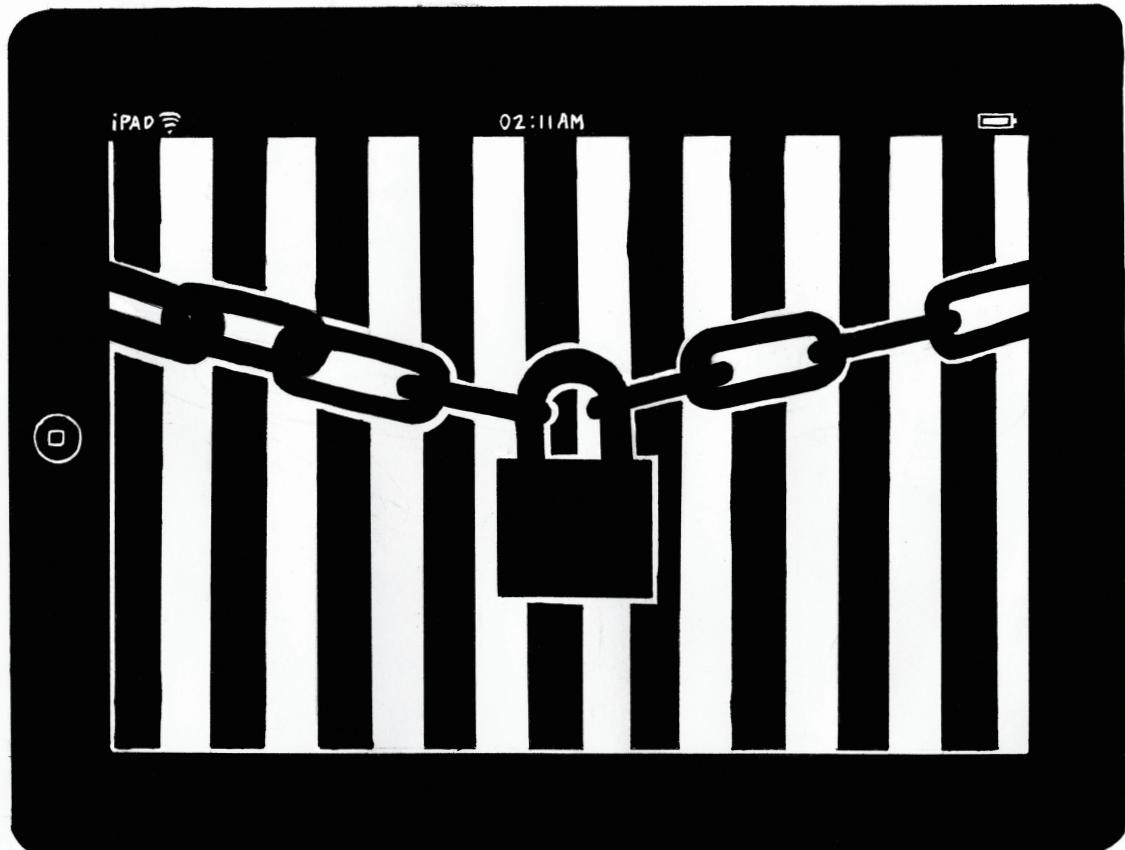
If you love your Mac and iPod, you can still despise CDOs and credit-default swaps. Jobs's genius – in the words of Regis McKenna, a Silicon Valley marketing executive who worked with him early on – was his ability "to strip away the excess layers of business, design, and innovation until only the simple, elegant reality remained." ... That bipartisan grief was arguably as much for the passing of a capitalist culture as for the man himself. Finance long ago supplanted visionary entrepreneurial careers like Jobs's as the most desired calling among [sic] America's top-tier university students, just as hedge-fund tycoons like John Paulson and Steve Cohen passed Jobs on the Forbes 400 list. Americans sense that something incalculable has been lost in this transformation that cannot be measured in dollars and cents.

Ah, shed a tear for the titans of old! There's a sort of producerist mythology that clings to Jobs and differentiates him in the public eye from the

evil CEOs of finance. Steve Jobs *made* things, beautiful things, while all those financiers have done is gamble. He was a craftsman or, in Malcolm Gladwell's insipid and mildly counterintuitive *New Yorker* article, a "tweaker" of great designs. He represents a friendly face of capitalism to people like Rich and Gladwell, where people aren't exploited for gain; great ideas are! But it's been a long time since Jobs was building his visions himself in a garage in Los Altos.

We all know that Jobs was a CEO's CEO – he exerted an huge amount of control over his workers, whose ideas he often presented as his own, brutally exploited labor where it was most downtrodden, and got filthy rich off our cravings for his well-marketed products. We've seen this before. But think of the treatment that other exploitative captains of industry receive. I recently saw Lloyd Blankfein's head on a pike in downtown Manhattan. Frank Rich wants to kill him too. Can you imagine this happening to Jobs? Huge student movements have arisen in the last couple decades to ban sweat-shopped goods from campuses. Alter-globalization activists have shamed Nike into reforming its global sweatshop system. But Steve Jobs is a hero.

Jobs, it would seem, gets moral credit for good design. Those "think different" ads still inform the company's marketing message. Now the ads feature a lame old dude (PC) and a hip young dude (Mac) whose amusing interactions underline the Mac's facility with the technologies of self-expression and its out-of-the-box integration with your daily life. In short, Macs are attractive add-ons to help you be you. They're the best parts of us – our creativity and wit – reaching out into the world in technological form. There's even some sociological evidence that we feel this way. In a 2009 study delightfully entitled "Self-admitted pretensions of Mac users on a predominantly PC university



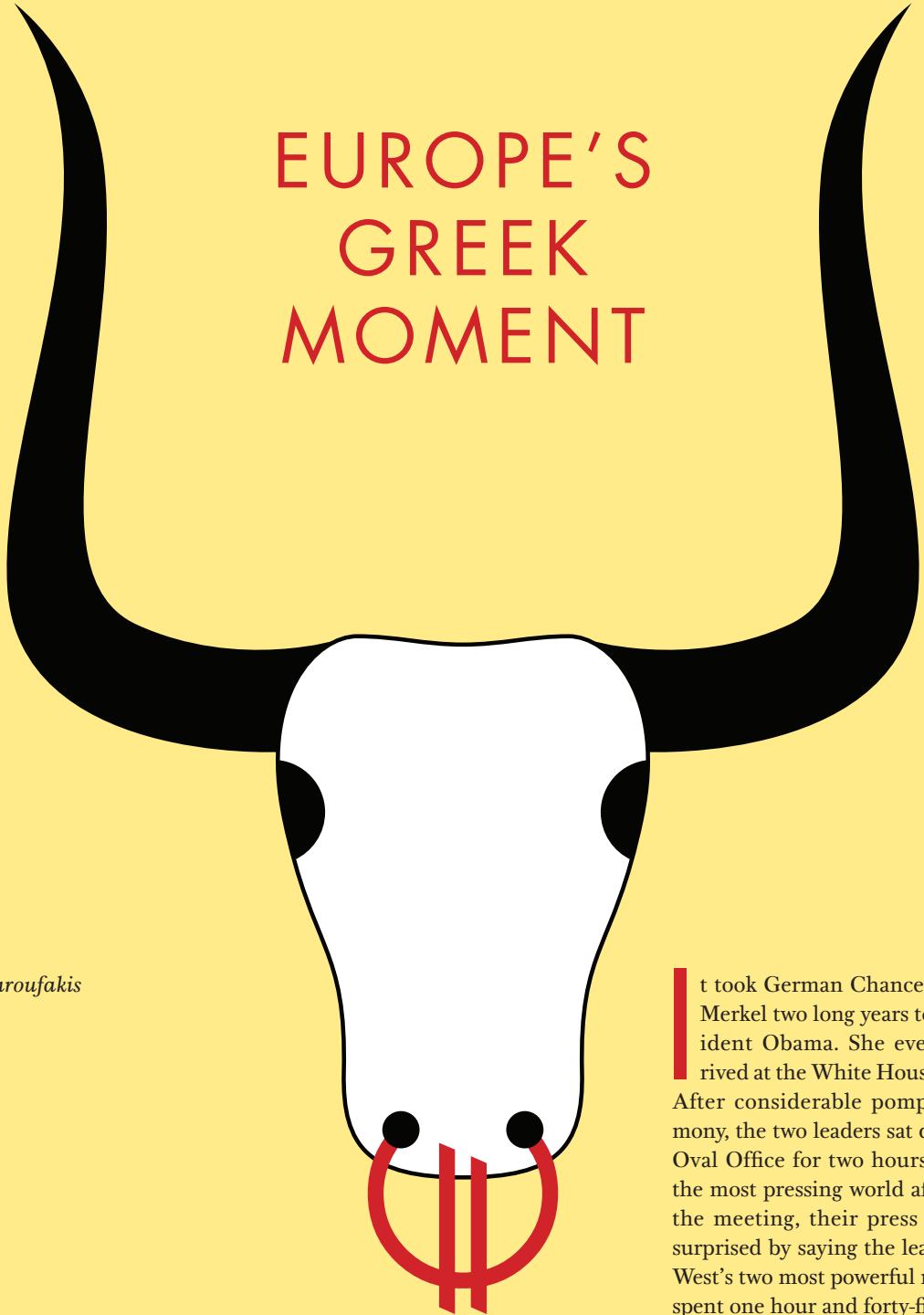
campus,” researchers found that “Mac users described various perceived social stigmas associated with owning Macs, such as the ‘artsy’ label, [and] the ‘cool’ factor,” and that Mac users found themselves, as if proselytizing for a noble cause, with a “tendency to vocalize personal opinions of Mac’s superiority, with the aim of ‘converting’ PC users.” And by converting PC users, they mean of course “causing them to buy Apple products.” It’s a complete absorption of the Apple marketing message, that these technologies are part of our spiritual lives, something to share earnestly with others so that they can purchase the feeling too.

And Apple products don’t just feel good, they feel like the future. With

their sleek, approachable designs, they seem to have captured the aesthetics of progress. The first popular product to really make use of the touchscreen, the iPod touch made you feel like Tom Cruise in *Minority Report*, moving visions of crimes yet to be committed around a transparent wall with his fingertips. This is a future where technology provides awesome, intuitive powers with which to bend the world to our creative wills. Everything is fun with a Mac – even schoolwork, even labor. In this future, we are all members of the spiritually fulfilled creative class and there are no losers. But it’s hard to squeeze the kind of labor performed at Foxconn into the same frame. The suffering factory workers just don’t fit

Apple’s narrative of liberated labor in a frictionless world.

They certainly haven’t prevented Jobs’s rise to Randian greatness as a singular genius of industry, but he’s managed it without all the naysayers that dogged poor John Galt. His background as a West Coast hippie, and the futuristic playfulness of his products, have produced an image that is rebellious and expressive, and turns computer work into something fun, while sweeping the project’s laboring human detritus by the wayside. Jobs was not the first to discover easily exploited laborers and exploit the living hell out of them; he was just the first to paint computers white and have the gall to call it thinking differently. 



EUROPE'S GREEK MOMENT

by Yanis Varoufakis

It took German Chancellor Angela Merkel two long years to visit President Obama. She eventually arrived at the White House this June. After considerable pomp and ceremony, the two leaders sat down at the Oval Office for two hours to discuss the most pressing world affairs. After the meeting, their press secretaries surprised by saying the leaders of the West's two most powerful nations had spent one hour and forty-five minutes on Greece (with the remaining fifteen minutes spent debating intervention in Libya).

Only once before has Greece managed such prominence in the minds of the Western elites. The month was December 1944; the occasion was the eruption of the Greek Civil War; and its significance was that it constituted the beginning of the Cold War, the Truman Doctrine and all that flowed from it. Could the Greek debt crisis be for the post-2008 world what the Greek Civil War was to the postwar era? Perhaps. But if so, the reason will not be Greece's debt – indeed it will not be anyone's debt.

Before examining the true origins of the crisis, it would be helpful to examine a more recent official visitation. On 18 September 2011 US Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner dropped in on European finance ministers' regular gathering to share some thoughts on how the bewildering euro crisis could be ended. Quite astonishingly, Geithner's sensible advice was rejected unceremoniously – the Treasury Secretary received the diplomatic equivalent of his marching orders. The Austrian Finance Minister, Maria Fikter, presumably summing up the predominant feeling among Europe's powers, declared her puzzlement that "even though the Americans have significantly worse fundamental data than the Eurozone ... they tell us what we should do and when we make a suggestion ... they say no straight away."

This statement reveals the deep ignorance in which European leaders are veiled. When they refer, for instance, to "fundamental data" comparatively worse in the United States, they are referring to the Eurozone's lower debt-to-GDP ratio. They believe that Europe's problem is a debt crisis which, courtesy of being less severe than the United States', is unlikely to be cured by the remedies purveyed by a visiting US secretary. Tragically, the euro crisis is as much of a debt crisis as the pain caused by a malignant tumor is a pain crisis. It is my contention that Europe's unravelling catastrophe is due to its leaders'

grand failure to grasp the essence of the crisis they are trying, unsuccessfully, to face down. And as if this were not troubling enough, theirs is a keenly motivated grand failure.

market forces can never obliterate, the deficit regions are unable to maintain demand for the goods and services of the surplus producers. Thus, without surplus recycling, stagnation beckons

Ancient myth has it that pre-classical Athenians maintained, in the name of peace and prosperity, a steady flow of tributes to the Cretan Minotaur.

THE MINOTAUR IN THE ROOM

With the sound of crashing markets and the roar of burgeoning uncertainty reverberating in our ears, it is time to take pause to ask a simple question: why is the global economy finding it so hard to regain its poise after the 2008 crash? In my recent book, *The Global Minotaur*, I argue that in 2008 the world lost a Global Surplus Recycling Mechanism (GSRM) which was keeping it in the precarious equilibrium that US Federal Chairman Ben Bernanke had mistaken for some "Great Moderation," and which had caused UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown to think, calamitously, that the era of boom-and-bust had ended. Grasping how this GSRM worked and why it perished is a prerequisite for coming to terms with our current global predicament – which, in turn, is key to understanding why Greece has become so prominent in the headlines.

Sustainable growth in a capitalist economy is a rare blessing that is predicated on the successful recycling of surpluses. Every nation, every trading bloc, every continent, indeed the global economy itself, is made up of deficit and surplus regions. California, Greater London, New South Wales and Germany will always be in surplus vis-à-vis Arizona, the North of England, Tasmania and Portugal respectively. Given this chronic chasm, which

for surplus and deficit regions alike.

Surplus recycling is commonplace at the national level. In the United States, for example, military procurement often comes with the precondition that new production facilities are built in depressed states; the Australian welfare state ensures that Western Australian and New South Welsh surpluses end up propping up demand for their goods and services in Tasmania. However, at the global level the issue of surplus recycling becomes more pressing and harder to institute.

The postwar era was remarkable in that two GSRMs saw to it that the world economy achieved unprecedented growth. The first GSRM lasted from the late 1940s to the early 1970s. The United States exited the war with enormous surpluses which it quickly sought to recycle to the rest of the Western world in a multitude of ways (the Marshall Plan, wide-ranging support for Japanese industry, endless backing of the European integration project and so on), effectively functioning as a GSRM itself. Alas, this first postwar GSRM broke down, predictably, when US surpluses turned into deficits toward the end of the 1960s. The loss of that meticulously planned GSRM threw the world into the 1970s crises which did not subside until a new – most peculiar – GSRM was put in place, again courtesy of the United States. This time the nation absorbed the surpluses of

the rest of the world, running ever increasing trade and government deficits. Those deficits were, in turn, financed by capital flowing *into* Wall Street, as the rest of the world recycled its profits by investing them in the United States.

Ancient myth has it that pre-classical Athenians maintained, in the name of peace and prosperity, a steady flow of tributes to the Cretan Minotaur. From 1980 onwards, the “rest of the world” sent a tsunami of capital to Wall Street to finance what I call a “global Minotaur” – a GSRM that served to pull the world economy onto higher growth planes, giving the semblance of some “Great Moderation.”

The world witnessed the most intense and profligate financialization possible, built upon the Minotaur-induced mass capital flows into Wall Street. Wall Street, the City of London and a host of international banks indulged in printing voluminous quantities of private, toxic money. When these paper pyramids combusted and burned down, the global Minotaur was mortally wounded – and the US deficits’ capacity to recycle the world’s surpluses disappeared.

Since then, the best paid plans of Central Banks, G20 nations, or the IMF have failed to restore the rude energy of the wounded beast. Without a functioning GSRM, the crisis that started in 2008 will continue to migrate across continents and sectors, regularly threatening us with imminent collapse.

THE EURO AS THE MINOTAUR’S SIMULACRUM

The euro was put together under the assumption that the global Minotaur would remain in rude health ad infinitum. Less allegorically, Germany came to believe that the Eurozone could operate like a Greater Germany built upon the twin postwar pillars of German prosperity: a hard currency (the Deutschmark cum euro) and aggressive trade surpluses to

be absorbed voraciously by the United States, which in turn would finance its trade deficits courtesy of the capital that flowed from the rest of the world (including from Germany) to Wall Street.

While the Eurozone was formed under those assumptions, the euro’s formation engendered deepening stagnation in Europe’s deficit countries, including France. It also enabled Germany and the surplus Eurozone nations to achieve exceptional surpluses that quickly found their way to Wall Street. They became the financial means by which German corporations internationalized their activities in the United States, China, and Eastern Europe. Thus Germany and the other surplus countries became the global Minotaur’s European opposite: its *simulacrum*. As the Minotaur was creating demand for the rest of the world, the simulacrum was draining the rest of Europe of it. It maintained Germany’s global dynamism by exporting stagnation into its own European backyard. So when the crisis hit, the European periphery was ripe for the fall.

FIRST AS HISTORY THEN AS FARCE: EUROPE’S BANK BAILOUTS

When the GFC shook the world in 2008, Wall Street and the City of London collapsed. Washington and London immediately sought to recapitalize the banks. By means ill and fair they dipped into taxpayers’ pockets and cranked up the central banks’ printing presses to ensure that the banks did not become black holes, as Japan’s had in the 1990s. In Europe, nothing of the sort happened.

Despite European gloating that the crash of 2008 was an Anglo-Celtic crisis, and that the continent’s own banks had not been taken over by financialization’s equivalent of a gold fever, the truth soon came out. German banks were caught with an average leverage ratio of €52 borrowed to every €1 of

own funds; a ratio worse than that raked up by Wall Street or London’s City. Even the most conservative and stolid state banks, the Landesbanken, proved bottomless pits for the German taxpayer. Similarly, France’s banks were forced to admit to having at least €33 billion invested in US sourced toxic derivatives. To this sad sum, we must add the European banks exposure to the indebted Eurozone states Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Italy, and Belgium (€849 billion); to Eastern Europe (more than €150 billion); to Latin America (more than €300 billion); and around €70 billion of bad Icelandic debts.

Between 2008 and 2009 the European Central Banks and the member-states socialized the banks’ losses and turned them into public debt. And yet, unlike their US or British counterparts, they failed to plug enough capital into Europe’s banks to stop them from being insolvent after the loss of their assets’ values. Instead they kept them on a drip feed (connected to the ECB) that kept the ATMs working without dealing with the root problem of Europe’s public sector: its fundamental insolvency. Interestingly, bankers did not mind. If their banks had been recapitalized by the European taxpayer, the bankers’ own control would have been diluted. Instead they found other ways of profiting while their banks were ... bankrupt. In early 2009, hedge funds and banks alike had an epiphany: why not use some of the public money they were given and bet that the strain on public finances (caused by the recession on the one hand, which depressed the governments’ tax take, and the huge increase in public debt on the other, for which they were themselves responsible) would sooner or later cause one or more of the Eurozone’s states to default?

The more they thought, the gladder they became. The fact that euro membership prevented the most heavily indebted countries (Greece et al.) from

devaluing their currencies – thus feeling more the brunt of the combination of debt and recession – focused the bankers' sights upon these countries. They started betting, small amounts initially, that the weakest link in that chain, Greece, would default. At the same time, they hedged their bets (that is, they also bet that the default would not come because Europe would not dare let one of its member-states declare bankruptcy). In addition, the bankers used the bonds (the IOUs) of countries like Greece as collateral to borrow from each other to place more of these bets. In short, every euro of Greek debt spawned countless euros of French and German bank bets and even more debts that one European bank owed to another.

Essentially, the European variant of the bank bailout gave the financial sector the opportunity to mint private money all over again. Once more, just like the private money created by Wall Street before 2008, it was unsustainable and bound to turn into thin ash. The onward march of the new private money was to lead, with mathematical precision, to another meltdown. This time it was the public (also known as sovereign) debt crisis whose first stirrings occurred at the beginning of 2010 in Athens, Greece.

THE TROUBLE WITH GREECE

Greece was bearing a large public debt-to-GDP ratio well before the crash. Nevertheless, while its GDP was growing healthily (between 4 percent and 5 percent for more than a decade), it was finding it spectacularly easy to borrow cheaply from international funds replete with the private money printed by the global financial sector. Once the pyramids of private money had turned into ashes and the global recession annulled Greek growth, it was only a matter of time before a run on Greek bonds would occur. It started in late 2009 and gathered

cruel pace in 2010.

Once a run on the bonds of a Eurozone member-state begins, with no possibility of shock absorbing devaluation, the country in question becomes insolvent; unable to refinance its public debt. And when its Eurozone partners offer it a lifeline in the form of expensive new loans on condition of GDP-crippling austerity, a wholesale depression is added to the state's insolvency. At that point it is game over for the poor country in question. Moreover, the domino effect begins as one failed member-state leans upon the next marginal state, which then stumbles on the next, and so on.

At some point, this sequential tumbling will force Europe's elites to let the ugly truth come to light about its banking sector's sorry state. Since there is only so much good money that can be thrown after bad to keep buying time, and given that there is a limit to how much depression the peoples of the indebted Eurozone can bear, the moment will come when the most indebted state – Greece, in other words – will have to be allowed to declare bankruptcy. However, given the mountains of derivative debts and bets that have been built upon the comparatively small Greek debts by bankers in Europe and elsewhere, a Greek default on its debts will cause these mountain ranges to subside, giving

Thus Germany and
the other surplus
countries became the
global Minotaur's
European opposite: its
simulacrum.

rise to a new 2008 – hence Chancellor Merkel and President Obama's long chat about little, otherwise insignificant, Greece.

EUROPE'S CONUNDRUM

Technically speaking, fixing the euro crisis is a relatively simple matter. If this is correct – and given that a Greek state bankruptcy will be Europe's Lehman moment – why is Germany resisting all rational approaches to resolving the crisis? The answer is, unfortunately, straightforward: to save the euro we need to implement policies that will make it economically impossible for Germany to exit the Eurozone. Even though Germany does not wish to exit presently, it knows that its "option to exit" (which as the main surplus country of the common currency area it possesses uniquely) guarantees it the exorbitant privilege of enormous hegemonic power within the zone. Thus Merkel does not feel she has the authority, or legitimacy, to renounce Germany's immense powers, fearing also that such a move would bring her government crashing down. And so the dithering continues.

While the world is laboring without the Global Surplus Recycling that it was used to under the global Minotaur, when one hears that Germany is planning for a Greek exit from the Eurozone, even for a Greek default, one ought immediately to suspect that Germany is planning a controlled disintegration of the Eurozone. One ought also to fear that such a move will only manage to achieve an uncontrolled disintegration whose end result will be massive recession in the European north, a gargantuan stagflation in the European periphery, and the descent of the global economy into a postmodern 1930s. Europe has managed twice in the last hundred years to drag the rest of the world down with it. It is about to do it again, with Greece as a convenient scapegoat. 

PLANET OF FIELDS

by Max Ajl



In a crisp vignette, the urban planner and social critic Lewis Mumford asked, “What is a City?” He answered: the city is a “Geographic plexus, an economic organization, an institutional process, a theater of social action, and an aesthetic symbol of collective unity... It fosters art and is art; the city creates the theater and is the theater.”

For Mumford, as for the slightly younger Paul Goodman and the slightly older Patrick Geddes, the city was an ark for social complexity, an incubator of human culture. They knew the urban form could grow wildly and lashed out at urbanism gone haywire: “Megalopolis is fast becoming a universal form,” Mumford wrote. And this would not be the first time it would be so. Those arguing that there were “no alternatives” – the recycled excuse of the addict – overlooked “too easily the historic outcome of such a concentration of urban power,” that it had “repeatedly marked the last stage in the classic cycle of civilization, before its complete disruption and downfall.” They did not merely forget the past. They spat upon it, embracing the forces of progress and urban concentration, as they arrived at a “universal megalopolis, mechanized, standardized, effectively dehumanized, as the final goal of urban evolution”: the city as dystopia.

Mumford presciently diagnosed the diseased late twentieth century urban form. He would have been chagrined, but probably not shocked, to find that the future had not merely borne out his diagnosis but that those charged with arresting the problem were still in denial about it. Outside the peasant international Via Campesina and its associated intellectuals, development debates are not about the relative weight of the city and the country, but about the technical minutiae of how to pack the residents of the latter into the former. This line of thinking is not just the province of Green Revolution-embracing devotees of industrial agriculture or semi-reformed apologists for capitalism like Jeffrey Sachs and Joseph Stiglitz but has captured the attention of a broad sweep of analysts, from the boosters of capitalism to its Cassandras.

For example, in a recent essay entitled, “Building the Ark,” urban theorist Mike Davis argues that the cities of the future and the cities of the South, the centers of both human population increase and carbon emissions, will become the arks in which the culture of twenty-first century human civilization will ride out the floods and tempests of the ecological devastation wrought by twentieth century carbon civilization. With sufficient care to safeguard public space, to make public the city’s pri-

vate riches, to turn sprawl into swards, the metropolis might be transformed from one of the major causes of climate change into the Great Ark.

The motif is widespread, and problematic in every way possible. For one thing, pushing for the remainder of the world’s peasants to flood their cities means forced migrations – whether as drawn out and excruciating as the British enclosure of the commons or as rapid as the modern day sales of state land in Africa. As soon as one talks of massive population shifts, turning the global South’s remaining two billion peasants into city dwellers, the upshot is that their consumption patterns will less resemble those of people living in organic economies reliant on biomass and transition to mineral economies: those relying on the buried forests of the past that time and pressure have turned into coal, oil and gas. If the 70 percent of the world’s population currently stuck in poverty – most of them rural, and most of those in China, India, and Africa – were to adopt industrial resource-use patterns replicating those in the global North, humanity would require between twenty and thirty times the amount of annual US energy use, about equal to the potential net primary production of all Earth’s terrestrial biota.

That will never work, for the simple



reason that it wouldn't leave anything for the rest of the living species with which we share the planet, never mind what would happen to the atmosphere if we cut down all the trees. Meanwhile, if the fuel came from coal, the world would swiftly turn to Venus, the reason more "progressive" environmentalists like James Lovelock are having a late-stage love affair with nuclear power. They simply can't imagine toning it down a bit.

And then there are those who think not of toning it down but of ramping it up. Bevies of development experts, roaming from Washington think tanks to conferences in the capitals of the global South, oblivious to the fallout from their forebears' inattention to agriculture, fetishization of urban living, and shrugging at the ashes and ruins that lay behind the juggernaut of the development project, peddle a second Green Revolution in agriculture, hoping to structure the sowing of the fields of Africa and Asia on a fully scientific and rational basis: capital-intensive, labor-light, and petroleum-fueled. On the social horizon is a completion of the denuding of the countryside of peasants and packing them ever-more tightly into the favelas, barrios, and shantytowns of Rio de Janeiro, Caracas, Mumbai, Shanghai, Lagos and Dakar while counting on a chimerical produc-

tivity increase to keep everyone fed. If it should happen that with enough technology, experts can conjure up that chimera, its presence will be evanescent, and with it will come the disappearance of the remainder of the rural smallholders who produce much of the world's food.

Like them, Davis seems to consider cities a kind of black box into which one can dump the human population and worry later. Cities come in all shapes and sizes, but if there is one rule, the larger their populations, the more resources they require. Cities are basically black holes, drawing in massive amounts of energy and matter, and then excreting it as degraded waste back into the biosphere. Of course, all organisms absorb biomass to survive and excrete it as waste. The vice of modern mega-cities is their size. Being so big, rather than having a smooth metabolism with their peripheries, they disrupt them radically. To construct cities on such a huge scale has meant making much of the global South and the global North peripheries – or to draw on a more familiar parlance, colonies. Imperialism has always had an ecological component.

As Kenneth Pomeranz has pointed out, the British Industrial Revolution relied on extraterritorial supplies of land to overcome the land squeeze

and the equilibrium trap it would have entailed, and fortuitously located coal supplies to overcome the timber squeeze. The cotton which fueled it was grown by slave labor in the American South. The slaves who worked that land were stolen from West Africa, whose land and resources England and the US planter class effectively pillaged in the form of the human bodies which that land and resources had nurtured to adulthood. For the West there has been enough, but only because resources have been stolen both spatially and temporally from the present inhabitants of the Third World and from the future inhabitants of the whole world.

William Rees and Mathis Wackernagel, who have formalized the notion of the ecological footprint to capture the spatial aspect of this dynamic, point out that "material flows in trade thus represent a form of thermodynamic imperialism. The low cost energy represented by commodity imports is required to sustain growth and maintain the internal order of the so-called 'advanced economies' of the urban North." As they go on to write, the "toys and tools" of industrial man, the "human-made 'capital' of economists" should be characterized as the "exosomatic equivalent of organs." And much like organs, they require circula-

tory flows in the form of continuous exogenous inputs of energy to keep them functioning.

However, it is impossible to put any reasonable price on those inputs: the temporal theft, in this case from the future. The subterranean forests that powered the transition to industrial civilization in most Northern societies should never have been burnt. Without the ability to re-fabricate fossil fuels or scatter dispersed ores, we must consider them nonrenewable. Since the energy stocks condensed in carbon fuels can't currently be replaced, they are not merely difficult but impossible to value. The corollary is that one should set up consumption patterns and social institutions such that future inheritors of the earth will have as much ability to use carbon and metallic ores as the present generations.

Contemporary inability and unwillingness to erect such institutions is related to the calorically dense form of energy we use to power our societies, oil, and its synergy with the capitalist economy. As Timothy Mitchell writes, "Oil contributed to the new conception of the economy as an object that could grow without limit in several ways," initially declining in price for the entire 1920–1970 period of national developmentalism, making it so that "the cost of energy did not appear to represent a limit to economic growth," while further allowing the new discipline of economics, which would soon spawn the stepchild discipline of development economics, to "conceive of long-run growth as something unrestrained by the availability of energy." The notion of limitless growth encourages a presentist morality: if we are sure that future generations will be geometrically wealthier than current ones, the upshot is that it seems increasingly reasonable to assume that they'll have the social wealth to find proxies for the resources upon which current generations have gorged.

The move to an economic system

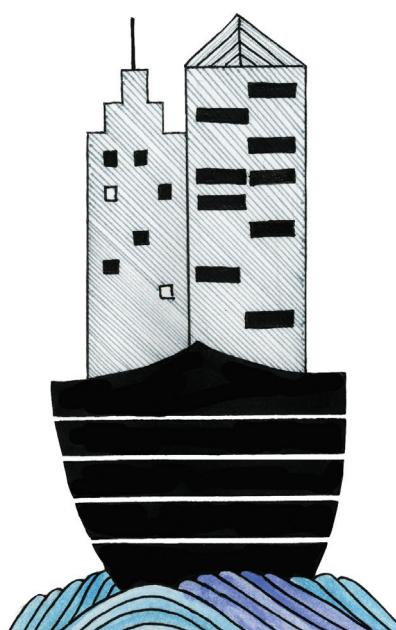
premised on limitless growth also has had an ecological component. Temporarily transcending direct use of the sun's energy was new in human history – a new energy regime. Previous ones were of far lower impact. In the first, that of hunter-gatherers, the human population took what it needed from foraging in the surrounding environs, corresponding to what Marshall Sahlins describes as stone-age affluence. That regime was very low impact. It also couldn't support more than a tiny population. Whatever the abstract merits of such societies, they cannot offer a way forward for the massive populations inundating the cities and countrysides of the South.

The second is a society based on farming, in which people consciously skim off an ecological surplus from the biome while managing it so as to increase the surplus usable by human beings in the form of cereals or other kinds of caloric or non-caloric goods. Of course, this represents a massive intrusion into natural cycles, as natural cycles of succession, in which increasingly dense and big forms of flora replace simpler ones, are continuously interrupted by human ingenuity and intervention, but the alternative is not having enough food for 7 billion people. For the time being, we cannot do without cereal-based agriculture.

And then there is a third energy regime, the one in which the global North and swathes of the global South live, work, and die: the industrial energy regime, which relies on the subterranean forests that previous generations have left us – and which has used them up at an astonishingly fast rate. This regime relies on industrial agriculture, substituting dead biotic energy in the form of fossil fuels for human and living biotic energy. Industrial agriculture goes hand-in-hand with industrial civilization: the making of modern cities, modern slums, and the factories and workshops within which the denizens of the former labor.

One way or another, regime two must be centralized, what environmental historian Colin Duncan refers to as the centrality of agriculture. As he writes, future forms of agriculture will have to provide much of the "materials and energy that we are now in the habit of procuring almost exclusively in the industrial style, from petroleum especially." In a sustainable setup, land use must yield a positive energy balance. The amount of energy put into agricultural production by man and animal traction must be less than the amount of energy that is withdrawn from it in the form of consumable harvest. Without hallucinating a pre-lapsarian idyll – agricultural civilizations have been capable of tremendous harm to their environments – such societies are capable of relative long-run sustainability and could take relatively good care of the people who live in them. Furthermore, it's an anthropocentrism to think that nature must always contain a large place within it for human beings, summed up in the surreal conceit of man's increasing dominance of nature. Nature always calls the shots. At the moment, the environment is arranged in such a manner as to facilitate large human populations and easy living. That could change very quickly.

It is the task of humans to regulate the society-nature metabolism



and make sure it is not a destructive one. That means moving beyond high-modernist abstractions and especially beyond the notion that the rush to urbanization in the Third World should be accelerated rather than arrested. For Mumford, there was no rootless and restless dreaming about an abstract urban form. The hypertrophic city was an artifact of an incredibly sophisticated society. Byzantine, powerful, those cities and the civilizations within which they were embedded rested on hierarchical and complex technologies. He laid out the provenance and pathways of such megatechnics, contrasting them with democratic, organic, simple, and egalitarian technologies. Both have existed in all human societies. The former allowed for incredible population densities, miraculous feats of engineering, and most importantly, an enormous accumulation of wealth. The latter had a different merit: they survived. The traces of the former one can see in the ceaseless drive to industrialization, urbanization, and capital- and input-intensive agriculture. But agriculture is also a technology, and done properly, is the apotheosis of the democratic and resilient human-scale technologies Mumford lauded.

It's also an odd concession to the religion of progress to think that only modern industrialized society can secure healthy lives for people. For socialists, even for the heavy-industry worshipping Soviets, industrial progress was a means, never an end. As Duncan points out, "It is striking that those recognized elements of a 'good life' that are most strongly cross-cultural – good food and drink, nice garments, fine music and conversation, and comfortable housing – in no way require industry." Advanced medical care, as he points out, is a separate issue, but the Cuban example shows clearly that a healthcare system capable of achieving excellent quality-of-life indicators need not be dependent on either extensive energy use or a society

based on heavy industrialization and urbanization.

Of course, that runs against the grain of over one hundred years of development thinking, Marxist and mainstream alike. Yet the argument is not new. Nearly a century ago, as the Soviet Union was beginning its heavy industrial lock in, Ivan Kremnev penned a story of a time-traveler who woke up in 1980 after having been adrift for decades after the Bolshevik Revolution. Rather than the violent concentration of the peasantry in cities amid forced

The notion of limitless growth encourages a presentist morality ...

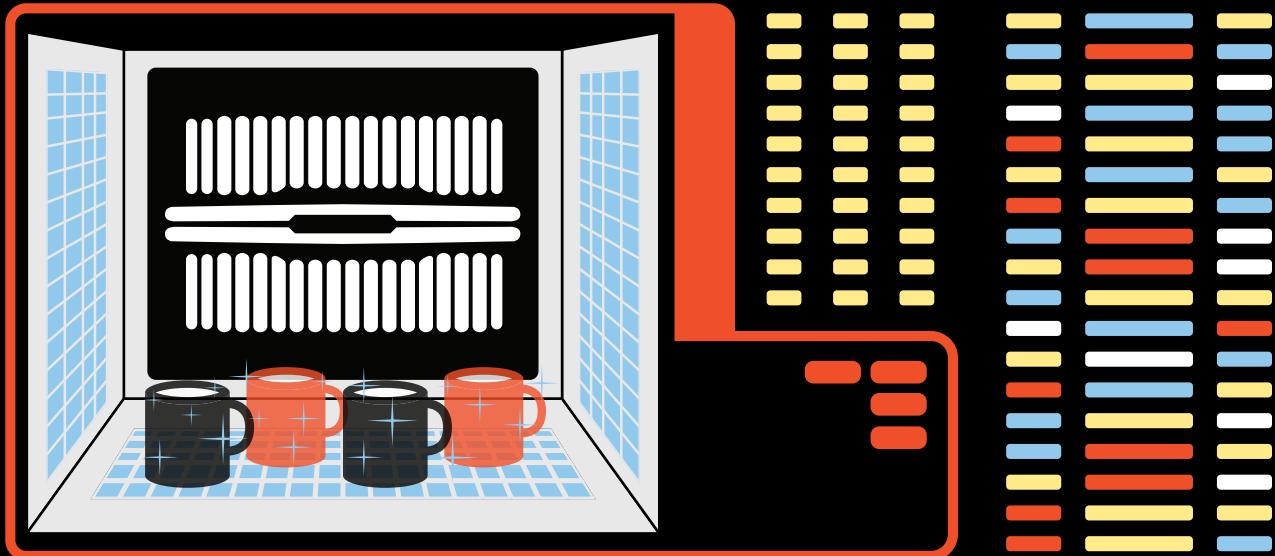
collectivization, peasant parties had captured the state. They rebuilt the entire country, abolishing towns of more than 20,000 people, dispersing the massive Moscow metropolis, creating local centers at railroad junctions, perfecting the communications network, and saturating the local centers in culture – theaters, museums, people's universities, sport activities, choral societies, all the classical accoutrements of city life that, he understood, did not need the dense and unsustainable conglomerations of people that inhabited Moscow. The text's English translation is introduced dismissively by another Soviet writer, P. Orlovskii: "The forms of the peasant economy ... are retrograde even compared with capitalist forms of agriculture," he writes, while the "peasantry generally follows the proletariat, its politically more advanced and better organized fellow," while the former struggles to preserve its "essentially reactionary ideals." Even then, dumb farmers.

It is with equally unmerited dismissiveness that development's contem-

porary priesthood treats models that center agriculture. In a world of unaffordable capital and unemployed – indeed, unemployable – labor, why would one worsen the situation by packing people into cities when labor is needed in the field? If industrial populations should be demanding shorter working days and guaranteed incomes, the countries of the South should be deploying policies removing them from commodity production loops, most importantly, through food sovereignty based on heavy investment in small-holder agriculture. Smallholder agriculture is not an antiquarian curio. Ghana experienced re-peasantization during the 1970–1984 period as its economy tumbled into disaster. The Cuban government has carried out a program of re-peasantization during the Special Period. Agriculture need not be an afterthought or an awkward adjunct to development. It could be, as Duncan writes, the scaffolding for a sustainable socialism nested in bioregions. The question is not one of plopping the populations of New York and London into fields with pitchforks in their hands. It's of keeping the populations currently on the land on the land, and working from there.

So is this a Luddite fantasy, a reincarnation of the Romantic penchant for the countryside? Perhaps. After all, that's the perspective of the neo-liberal clergy. Development economist Peter Collier writes of "the middle- and upper-class love affair with peasant agriculture ... With the near-total urbanization of these classes in both the United States and Europe, rural simplicity has acquired a strange allure. Peasant life is prized as organic in both its literal and its metaphoric sense." This is the same criticism those holding out the promise of perpetual growth and industrial development as a route to universal prosperity have been putting forward for over a century. And a century later, nothing has changed. They're still wrong. 

FOUR FUTURES



by Peter Frase

In his speech to the Occupy Wall Street encampment at Zuccotti Park, Slavoj Žižek lamented that “It’s easy to imagine the end of the world... but we cannot imagine the end of capitalism.” It’s a paraphrase of a remark that Fredric Jameson made some years ago, when the hegemony of neoliberalism still appeared absolute. Yet the very existence of Occupy Wall Street suggests that the end of capitalism has become a bit easier to imagine of late. At first, this imagining took a mostly grim and dystopian form: at the height of the financial crisis, with the global economy seemingly in full collapse, the end of capitalism looked like it might be the beginning of a period of anarchic violence and misery. And still it might, with the Eurozone teetering on the edge of collapse as I write. But more recently, the spread of global protest from Cairo to Madrid to Madison

to Wall Street has given the Left some reason to timidly raise its hopes for a better future after capitalism.

One thing we can be certain of is that capitalism *will* end. Maybe not soon, but probably before too long; humanity has never before managed to craft an eternal social system, after all, and capitalism is a notably more precarious and volatile order than most of those that preceded it. The question, then, is what will come next. Rosa Luxemburg, reacting to the beginnings of World War I, cited a line from Engels: “Bourgeois society stands at the crossroads, either transition to socialism or regression into barbarism.” In that spirit I offer a thought experiment, an attempt to make sense of our possible futures. These are a few of the socialisms we may reach if a resurgent Left is successful, and the barbarisms we may be consigned to if we fail.

Much of the literature on post-capitalist economies is preoccupied with the problem of managing labor in the absence of capitalist bosses. However, I will begin by assuming that problem away, in order to better illuminate other aspects of the issue. This can be done simply by extrapolating capitalism's tendency toward ever-increasing automation, which makes production ever more efficient while simultaneously challenging the system's ability to create jobs, and therefore to sustain demand for what is produced. This theme has been resurgent of late in bourgeois thought: in September 2011, *Slate*'s Farhad Manjoo wrote a long series on "The Robot Invasion," and shortly thereafter two MIT economists published *Race Against the Machine*, an e-book in which they argued that automation was rapidly overtaking many of the areas that until recently served as the capitalist economy's biggest motors of job creation. From fully automatic car factories to computers that can diagnose medical conditions, robotization is overtaking not only manufacturing, but much of the service sector as well.

Taken to its logical extreme, this dynamic brings us to the point where the economy does not require human labor at all. This does not automatically bring about the end of work or of wage labor, as has been falsely predicted over and over in response to new technological developments. But it does mean that human societies will increasingly face the *possibility* of freeing people from involuntary labor. Whether we take that opportunity, and how we do so, will depend on two major factors, one material and one social. The first question is resource scarcity: the ability to find cheap sources of energy, to extract or recycle raw materials, and generally to depend on the Earth's capacity to provide a high material standard of living to all. A society that has both labor-replacing technology and abundant resources can overcome scarcity

in a thoroughgoing way that a society with only the first element cannot. The second question is political: what kind of society will we be? One in which all people are treated as free and equal beings, with an equal right to share in society's wealth? Or a hierarchical order in which an elite dominates and controls the masses and their access to social resources?

There are therefore four logical combinations of the two oppositions, resource abundance versus scarcity and egalitarianism versus hierarchy. To put things in somewhat vulgar-Marxist terms, the first axis dictates the economic base of the post-capitalist future, while the second pertains to the socio-political superstructure. Two possible futures are socialisms (only one of which I will actually call by that name) while the other two are contrasting flavors of barbarism.



EGALITARIANISM AND ABUNDANCE: COMMUNISM

There is a famous passage in the third volume of *Capital*, in which Marx distinguishes between a "realm of necessity" and a "realm of freedom." In the realm of necessity we must "wrestle with Nature to satisfy [our] wants, to maintain and reproduce life," of physical labor in production. This realm of necessity, Marx says, exists "in all social formations and under all possible modes of production," presumably including socialism. What distinguishes socialism, then, is that production is rationally planned and democratically organized, rather than operating at the whim of the capitalist or the market. For Marx, however, this level of society was not the true objective of the revolution, but merely a precondition for "that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which,

however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis."

Elsewhere, Marx suggests that one day we may be able to free ourselves from the realm of necessity altogether. In the "Critique of the Gotha Program," he imagines that:

In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labor, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labor, has vanished; after labor has become not only a means of life but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-around development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly – only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!

Marx's critics have often turned this passage against him, portraying it as a hopelessly improbable utopia. What possible society could be so productive that humans are entirely liberated from having to perform some kind of involuntary and unfulfilling labor? Yet the promise of widespread automation is that it could enact just such a liberation, or at least approach it – if, that is, we find a way to deal with the need to generate power and secure resources. But recent technological developments have taken place not just in the production of commodities, but in the generation of the energy needed to operate the automatic factories and 3-D printers of the future. Hence one possible post-scarcity future combines labor-saving technology with an alternative to the current energy regime, which is ultimately limited by both the physical scarcity and ecological destructiveness of fossil fuels. This is far from guaranteed, but there are hopeful indicators. The cost of producing and operating solar panels, for example, has been

falling dramatically over the past decade; on the current path they would be cheaper than our current electricity sources by 2020. If cheap energy and automation are combined with methods of efficiently fabricating or recycling raw materials, then we have truly left behind “the economy” as a social mechanism for managing scarcity. What lies over that horizon?

It’s not that all work would cease, in the sense that we would all just sit around in dissipation and torpor. For as Marx puts it, “labor has become not only a means of life but life’s prime want.” Whatever activities and projects we undertook, we would participate in them because we found them inherently fulfilling, not because we

generations, “man will be faced with his real, his permanent problem – how to use his freedom from pressing economic cares, how to occupy the leisure, which science and compound interest will have won for him, to live wisely and agreeably and well.” And in a recently published discussion from 1956, Max Horkheimer begins by casually remarking to Theodor Adorno that “nowadays we have enough by way of productive forces; it is obvious that we could supply the entire world with goods and could then attempt to abolish work as a necessity for human beings.”

And Keynes and Adorno lived in a world where industry only appeared possible at a very large scale, whether

work is no longer a necessity, it’s probably more fruitful to draw on fiction than theory. Indeed, many people are already familiar with the utopia of a post-scarcity communism, because it has been represented in one of our most familiar works of popular culture: *Star Trek*. The economy and society of that show is premised on two basic technical elements. One is the technology of the “replicator,” which is capable of materializing any object out of thin air, with only the press of a button. The other is a fuzzily described source of apparently free (or nearly free) energy, which runs the replicators as well as everything else on the show.

The communistic quality of the *Star Trek* universe is often obscured because the films and TV shows are centered on the military hierarchy of Starfleet, which explores the galaxy and comes into conflict with alien races. But even this seems to be largely a voluntarily chosen hierarchy, drawing those who seek a life of adventure and exploration; to the extent that we see glimpses of civilian life, it seems mostly untroubled by hierarchy or compulsion. And to the extent that the show departs from communist utopia, it is because its writers introduce the external threat of hostile alien races or scarce resources in order to produce sufficient dramatic tension.

It is not necessary to conjure starships and aliens in order to imagine the tribulations of a communist future, however. Cory Doctorow’s novel *Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom* imagines a post-scarcity world that is set in a recognizable extrapolation of the present-day United States. Just as in *Star Trek*, material scarcity has been superseded in this world. But Doctorow grasps that within human societies, certain immaterial goods will always be inherently scarce: reputation, respect, esteem among one’s peers. Thus the book revolves around various characters’ attempts to accumulate “whuffie,” which are a kind of virtual brownie

If we want to imagine a world where work is no longer a necessity, it’s probably more fruitful to draw on fiction than theory.

needed a wage or owed our monthly hours to the cooperative. This is hardly so implausible, considering the degree to which decisions about work are already driven by non-material considerations, among those who are privileged enough to have the option: millions of people choose to go to graduate school, or become social workers, or start small organic farms, even when far more lucrative careers are open to them.

The demise of wage labor may seem like a faraway dream today. But once upon a time – before the labor movement retreated from the demand for shorter hours, and before the stagnation and reversal of the long trend toward reduced work weeks – people actually worried about what we would do after being liberated from work. In an essay on “Economic possibilities for our grandchildren,” John Maynard Keynes predicted that within a few

in capitalist factories or state-run enterprises; that form of industry implies hierarchy no matter what social formation it is embedded in. But recent technological advances suggest the possibility of returning to a less centralized structure, without drastically lowering material standards of living: the proliferation of 3-D printers and small scale “fabrication laboratories” is making it increasingly possible to reduce the scale of at least some manufacturing without completely sacrificing productivity. Thus, insofar as some human labor is still required in production in our imagined communist future, it could take the form of small collectives rather than capitalist or state-run firms.

But getting past wage labor economically also means getting past it *socially*, and this entails deep changes in our priorities and our way of life. If we want to imagine a world where

points that represent the goodwill you have accumulated from others. Whuffie, in turn, is used to determine who holds authority in any voluntary collective enterprise – such as, in the novel, running Disneyland.

The value of Doctorow's book, in contrast to *Star Trek*, is that it treats a post-scarcity world as one with its own hierarchies and conflicts, rather than one in which all live in perfect harmony and politics comes to a halt. Reputation, like capital, can be accumulated in an unequal and self-perpetuating way, as those who are already popular gain the ability to do things that get them more attention and make them more popular. Such dynamics are readily observable today, as blogs and other social media produce popular gatekeepers who are able to determine who gets attention and who does not, in a way that is not completely a function of who has money to spend. Organizing society according to who has the most 'likes' on Facebook has certain drawbacks, to say the least, even when dislodged from its capitalist integument.

But if it is not a vision of a perfect society, this version of communism is at least a world in which conflict is no longer based on the opposition between wage workers and capitalists, or on struggles over scarce resources. It is a world in which not everything ultimately comes down to money. A communist society would surely have hierarchies of status – as have all human societies, and as does capitalism. But in capitalism, all status hierarchies tend to be aligned, albeit imperfectly, with one master status hierarchy: the accumulation of capital and money. The ideal of a post-scarcity society is that various kinds of esteem are independent, so that the esteem in which one is held as a musician is independent of the regard one achieves as a political activist, and one can't use one kind of status to buy another. In a sense, then, it is a misnomer to refer to

this as an "egalitarian" configuration, since it is not a world of no hierarchies but one of *many* hierarchies, no one of which is superior to all the others.



HIERARCHY AND ABUNDANCE: RENTISM

Given the technical premises of complete automation and free energy, the *Star Trek* utopia of pure communism becomes a possibility, but hardly an inevitability. The bourgeois elite of the present day does not merely enjoy privileged access to scarce material goods, after all; they also enjoy exalted status and social power over the working masses, which should not be discounted as a source of capitalist motivation. Nobody can actually spend a billion dollars on themselves, after all, and yet there are hedge fund managers who make that much in a single year and then come back for more. For such people, money is a source of power over others, a status marker, and a way of keeping score – not really so different from Doctorow's whuffie, except that it is a form of status that depends on the material deprivation of others. It is therefore to be expected that even if labor were to become superfluous in production, the ruling classes would endeavor to preserve a system based on money, profit, and class power.

The embryonic form of class power in a post-scarcity economy can be found in our systems of intellectual property law. While contemporary defenders of intellectual property like to speak of it as though it is broadly analogous to other kinds of property, it is actually based on a quite different principle. As the economists Michele Boldrin and David K. Levine observe, IP rights go beyond the traditional conception of property. They do not merely ensure "your right to control your copy of your

idea," in the way that they protect my right to control my shoes or my house. Rather, they give rights-holders the ability to tell others how to use copies of an idea that they "own." As Boldrin and Levine say, "This is not a right ordinarily or automatically granted to the owners of other types of property. If I produce a cup of coffee, I have the right to choose whether or not to sell it to you or drink it myself. But my property right is not an automatic right both to sell you the cup of coffee and to tell you how to drink it."

The mutation of the property form, from real to intellectual, catalyzes the transformation of society into something which is not recognizable as *capitalism*, but is nevertheless just as unequal. Capitalism, at its root, isn't defined by the presence of capitalists, but by the existence of *capital*, which in turn is inseparable from the process of commodity production by means of wage labor, M-C-M'. When wage labor disappears, the ruling class can continue to accumulate money only if they retain the ability to appropriate a stream of rents, which arise from their control of intellectual property. Thus emerges a *rentist*, rather than capitalist society.

Suppose, for example, that all production is by means of *Star Trek*'s replicator. In order to make money from selling replicated items, people must somehow be prevented from just making whatever they want for free, and this is the function of intellectual property. A replicator is only available from a company that licenses you the right to use one, since anyone who tried to give you a replicator or make one with their own replicator would be violating the terms of their license. What's more, every time you make something with the replicator, you must pay a licensing fee to whoever owns the rights to that particular thing. In this world, if *Star Trek*'s Captain Jean-Luc Picard wanted to replicate his beloved "tea, Earl Grey, hot," he would have to pay

the company that has copyrighted the replicator pattern for hot Earl Grey tea.

This solves the problem of how to maintain for-profit enterprise, at least on the surface. Anyone who tries to supply their needs from their replicator without paying the copyright cartels would become an outlaw, like today's online file sharers. Despite its absurdity, this arrangement would likely have advocates among some contemporary critics of the Internet's sharing culture; Jaron Lanier's *You Are Not a Gadget*, for instance, explicitly calls for the imposition of "artificial scarcity" on digital content in order to restore its value. The consequences of such arguments are already apparent in the record industry's lawsuits against hapless MP3 downloaders, and in the continual intensification of the surveillance state under the guise of combating piracy. The extension of this regime to the micro-fabrication of physical objects will only make the problem worse. Once again, science fiction is enlightening, in this case the work of Charles Stross. *Accelerando* shows us a future in which copyright infringers are pursued by hitmen, while *Halting State* depicts furtive back-alley "fabbers" running their 3-D printers one step ahead of the law.

But an economy based on artificial scarcity is not only irrational, it is also dysfunctional. If everyone is constantly being forced to pay out money in licensing fees, then they need some way of earning money, and this generates a new problem. The fundamental dilemma of rentism is the problem of effective demand: that is, how to ensure that people are able to earn enough money to be able to pay the licensing fees on which private profit depends. Of course, this isn't so different from the problem that confronted industrial capitalism, but it becomes more severe as human labor is increasingly squeezed out of the system, and human beings become superfluous as elements of production, even as they remain necessary as consumers. So what kind of

jobs would still exist in this economy?

Some people would still be needed to dream up new things to be replicated, and so there will remain a place for a small "creative class" of designers and artists. And as their creations accumulate, the number of things that can be replicated will soon vastly outstrip the available time and money to enjoy them. The biggest threat to any given company's profits will not be the cost of labor or raw materials – both minimal or nonexistent – but rather the prospect that the licenses they own will lose out in popularity to those of competitors. Marketing and advertising, then, will continue to employ significant

The much-heralded rise of the service economy would evolve into a futuristic version of nine- teenth-century England or parts of India today, where the elite can afford to hire huge numbers of servants.

numbers. Alongside the marketers, there will also be an army of lawyers, as today's litigation over patent and copyright infringement swells to encompass every aspect of economic activity. And finally, as in any hierarchical society, there must be an apparatus of repression to keep the poor and powerless from taking a share back from the rich and powerful. Enforcing draconian intellectual property law will require large battalions of what Samuel Bowles and Arjun Jayadev call "guard labor":

"The efforts of the monitors, guards, and military personnel... directed not toward production, but toward the enforcement of claims arising from exchanges and the pursuit or prevention of unilateral transfers of property ownership."

Nevertheless, maintaining full employment in a rentist economy will be a constant struggle. It is unlikely that the four areas just described can fully replace all the jobs lost to automation. What's more, these jobs are themselves subject to labor-saving innovations. Marketing can be done with data mining and algorithms; much of the routine business of lawyering can be replaced with software; guard labor can be performed by surveillance drones rather than human police. Even some of the work of product invention could one day be given to computers that possess some rudimentary artificial creative intelligence.

And if automation fails, the rentist elite can colonize our leisure time in order to extract free labor. Facebook already relies on its users to create content for free, and the recent fad for "gamification" suggests that corporations are very interested in finding ways to turn the work of their employees into activities that people will find pleasurable, and will thus do for free on their own time. The computer scientist Luis von Ahn, for example, has specialized in developing "games with a purpose," applications that present themselves to end users as enjoyable diversions while also performing a useful computational task. One of von Ahn's games asked users to identify objects in photos, and the data was then fed back into a database that was used for searching images. This line of research evokes the world of Orson Scott Card's novel *Ender's Game*, in which children remotely fight an interstellar war through what they think are video games.

All of this means that the society of rentism would probably be subject

to a persistent trend toward underemployment, which the ruling class would have to find some way to counter in order to hold the system together. This entails realizing a vision that the late André Gorz had of post-industrial society: “the distribution of means of payment must correspond to the volume of wealth socially produced and not to the volume of work performed.” This might involve taxing the profits of profitable firms and redistributing the money back to consumers – possibly as a no-strings-attached guaranteed income, and possibly in return for performing some kind of meaningless make-work. But even if redistribution is desirable from the standpoint of the class as a whole, a collective action problem arises; any individual company or rich person will be tempted to free-ride on the payments of others, and will therefore resist efforts to impose a redistributive tax. The government could also simply print money to give to the working class, but the resulting inflation would just be an indirect form of redistribution and would also be resisted. Finally, there is the option of funding consumption through consumer indebtedness – but readers in the early twenty-first century presumably do not need to be reminded of the limitations inherent in that solution.

Given all these troubles, one might ask why the rentier class would bother trying to extract profits from people, since they could just replicate whatever they want anyway. What keeps society from simply dissolving into the communist scenario from the previous section? It might be that nobody would hold enough licenses to provide for *all* of their needs, so everyone needs revenue to pay their own licensing costs. You might own the replicator pattern for an apple, but just being able to make apples isn’t enough to survive. In this reading, the rentier class are just those who own enough licenses to cover all of their own license fees.

Or perhaps, as noted at the outset,

the ruling class would guard their privileged position in order to protect the power over others granted to those at the top of a class-divided society. This suggests another solution to rentism’s underemployment problem: hiring people to perform personal services might become a status marker, even if automation makes it strictly speaking unnecessary. The much-heralded rise of the service economy would evolve into a futuristic version of nineteenth-century England or parts of India today, where the elite can afford to hire huge numbers of servants.

But this society can persist only so long as most people accept the legitimacy of its governing hierarchy. Perhaps the power of ideology would be strong enough to induce people to accept the state of affairs described here. Or perhaps people would start to ask why the wealth of knowledge and culture was being enclosed within restrictive laws, when, to use a recently popular slogan, “another world is possible” beyond the regime of artificial scarcity.



EGALITARIANISM AND SCARCITY: SOCIALISM

We have seen that the combination of automated production and bounteous resources gives us either the pure utopia of communism or the absurdist dystopia of rentism; but what if energy and resources remain scarce? In that case, we arrive in a world characterized simultaneously by abundance and scarcity, in which the liberation of production occurs alongside an intensified planning and management of the inputs to that production. The need to control labor still disappears, but the need to manage scarcity remains.

Scarcity in the physical inputs to production must be understood to

encompass far more than particular commodities like oil or iron ore – capitalism’s malign effect on the environment threatens to do permanent damage to the climates and ecosystems on which much of our present economy depends. Climate change has already begun to play havoc with the world’s food system, and future generations may look back on the variety of foodstuffs available today as an unsustainable golden age. (Earlier generations of science fiction writers sometimes imagined that we would one day choose to consume all our nutrition in the form of a flavorless pill; we may yet do so by necessity.) And under the more severe projections, many areas that are now densely populated may become uninhabitable, imposing severe relocation and reconstruction costs on our descendants.

Our third future, then, is one in which nobody needs to perform labor, and yet people are not free to consume as much as they like. Some kind of government is required, and pure communism is excluded as a possibility; what we get instead is a version of socialism, and some form of economic planning. In contrast to the plans of the twentieth century, however, those of the resource-constrained future are mostly concerned with managing *consumption*, rather than production. That is, we still assume the replicator; the task is to manage the inputs that feed it.

This might seem less than promising. Consumption, after all, was precisely the area in which Soviet-style planning was found to be most deficient. A society that can arm itself for war with the Nazis, but is then subject to endless shortages and bread lines, is hardly an inspiring template. But the real lesson of the USSR and its imitators is that planning’s time had not yet come – and when it did begin to come, the bureaucratic sclerosis and political shortcomings of the Communist system proved unable to accommodate it. In the 1950s and 1960s, Soviet

economists tried heroically to reconstruct their economy into a more workable form – one of the leading figures in this effort was the Nobel prize-winner Leonid Kantorovich, whose story is told in fictional form in Francis Spufford’s recent book *Red Plenty*. The effort ran aground not because planning was impossible in principle, but because it was technically and politically impossible in the USSR of that time. Technically, because sufficient computing power was not yet available, and politically because the Soviet bureaucratic elite was unwilling to part with the power and privilege granted to them under the existing system.

But the efforts of Kantorovich, and of contemporary theorists of planning such as Paul Cockshott and Allin Cottrell, suggest that some form of efficient and democratic planning is possible. And it will be necessary in a world of scarce resources: while private capitalist production has been very successful at incentivizing labor-saving technological innovation, it has proven to be terrible at conserving the environment or rationing scarce resources. Even in a post-capitalist, post-work world, some kind of coordination is needed to ensure that individuals do not treat the Earth in a way that is, in the aggregate, unsustainable. What is needed, as Michael Löwy has said, is some kind of “global democratic planning” rooted in pluralistic, democratic debate rather than rule by bureaucrats.

A distinction should be made, however, between democratic planning and a completely non-market economy. A socialist economy could employ rational planning while still featuring market exchange of some sort, along with money and prices. This, in fact, was one of Kantorovich’s insights; rather than do away with price signals, he wanted to make prices into mechanisms for making planned production targets into economic realities. Current attempts to put a price on carbon emissions through cap-and-trade schemes

point in this direction: while they use the market as a coordinating mechanism, they are also a form of planning, since the key step is the non-market decision about what level of carbon emissions is acceptable. This approach could look quite different than it does today, if generalized and implemented without capitalist property relations and wealth inequalities.

Suppose that everyone received a wage, not as a return to labor but as a human right. The wage would not buy the products of others’ labor, but rather the right to use up a certain quantity of energy and resources as one went about using the replicator. Markets might develop insofar as people chose to trade one type of consumption permit for another, but this would be what the sociologist Erik Olin Wright calls “capitalism between consenting adults,” rather than the involuntary participation in wage labor driven by the threat of starvation.

Given the need to determine and target stable levels of consumption – and thus set prices – the state can’t quite wither away, as it does under the communist scenario. And where there is scarcity, there will surely be political conflict, even if this is no longer a *class* conflict. Conflicts between locales, between generations, between those who are more concerned with the long-term health of the environment and those who prefer more material consumption in the short run – none of these will be easy to solve. But we will at least have arrived on the other side of capitalism as a democratic society, and more or less in one piece.



HIERARCHY AND SCARCITY: EXTERMINISM

But if we do not arrive as equals, and environmental limits continue to press against us, we

come to the fourth and most disturbing of our possible futures. In a way, it resembles the communism that we began with – but it is a communism for the few.

A paradoxical truth about that global elite we have learned to call the “1 percent” is that, while they are defined by their control of a huge swathe of the world’s monetary wealth, they are at the same time the fragment of humanity whose daily lives are *least* dominated by money. As Charles Stross has written, the very richest inhabit an existence in which most worldly goods are, in effect, free. That is, their wealth is so great relative to the cost of food, housing, travel, and other amenities that they rarely have to consider the cost of anything. Whatever they want, they can have.

Which is to say that for the very rich, the world is already something like the communism described earlier. The difference, of course, is that their post-scarcity condition is made possible not just by machines but by the labor of the global working class. But an optimistic view of future developments – the future I have described as communism – is that we will eventually come to a state in which we are all, in some sense, the 1 percent. As William Gibson famously remarked, “the future is already here; it’s just unevenly distributed.”

But what if resources and energy are simply too scarce to allow everyone to enjoy the material standard of living of today’s rich? What if we arrive in a future that no longer requires the mass proletariat’s labor in production, but is unable to provide everyone with an arbitrarily high standard of consumption? If we arrive in that world as an egalitarian society, then the answer is the socialist regime of shared conservation described in the previous section. But if, instead, we remain a society polarized between a privileged elite and a downtrodden mass, then the most plausible trajectory leads to something

much darker; I will call it by the term that E. P. Thompson used to describe a different dystopia, during the peak of the Cold War: *exterminism*.

The great danger posed by the automation of production, in the context of a world of hierarchy and scarce resources, is that it makes the great mass of people superfluous from the standpoint of the ruling elite. This is in contrast to capitalism, where the antagonism between capital and labor was characterized by both a clash of interests and a relationship of mutual dependence: the workers depend on capitalists as long as they don't control the means of production themselves, while the capitalists need workers to run their factories and shops. It is as the lyrics of "Solidarity Forever" had it: "They have taken untold millions that they never toiled to earn / But without our brain and muscle not a single wheel can turn." With the rise of the robots, the second line ceases to hold.

The existence of an impoverished, economically superfluous rabble poses a great danger to the ruling class, which will naturally fear imminent expropriation; confronted with this threat, several courses of action present themselves. The masses can be bought off with some degree of redistribution of resources, as the rich share out their wealth in the form of social welfare programs, at least if resource constraints aren't too binding. But in addition to potentially reintroducing scarcity into the lives of the rich, this solution is liable to lead to an ever-rising tide of demands on the part of the masses, thus raising the specter of expropriation once again. This is essentially what happened at the high tide of the welfare state, when bosses began to fear that both profits and control over the workplace were slipping out of their hands.

If buying off the angry mob isn't a sustainable strategy, another option is simply to run away and hide from them. This is the trajectory of what

the sociologist Bryan Turner calls "enclave society," an order in which "governments and other agencies seek to regulate spaces and, where necessary, to immobilize flows of people, goods and services" by means of "enclosure, bureaucratic barriers, legal exclusions and registrations." Gated communities, private islands, ghettos, prisons, terrorism paranoia, biological quarantines; together, these amount to an inverted global gulag, where the rich live in tiny islands of wealth strewn around an ocean of misery. In *Tropic of Chaos*, Christian Parenti makes the case that we are already constructing this new order, as climate change brings about what he calls the "catastrophic convergence" of ecological disruption, economic inequality, and state failure. The legacy of colonialism and neoliberalism is that the rich countries, along with the elites of the poorer ones, have facilitated a disintegration into anarchic violence, as various tribal and political factions fight over the diminishing bounty of damaged ecosystems. Faced with this bleak reality, many of the rich – which, in global terms, includes many workers in the rich countries as well – have resigned themselves to barricading themselves into their fortresses, to be protected by unmanned drones and private military contractors. Guard labor, which we encountered in the rentist society, reappears in an even more malevolent form, as a lucky few are employed as enforcers and protectors for the rich.

But this too, is an unstable equilibrium, for the same basic reason that buying off the masses is. So long as the immiserated hordes exist, there is the danger that it may one day become impossible to hold them at bay. Once mass labor has been rendered superfluous, a final solution lurks: the genocidal war of the rich against the poor. Many have called the recent Justin Timberlake vehicle, *In Time*, a Marxist film, but it is more precisely a parable of the road to exterminism. In the movie, a tiny

ruling class literally lives forever in their gated enclaves due to genetic technology, while everyone else is programmed to die at 25 unless they can beg, borrow or steal more time. The only thing saving the workers is that the rich still have some need for their labor; when that need expires, so presumably will the working class itself.

Hence exterminism, as a description of this type of society. Such a genocidal *telos* may seem like an outlandish, comic book villain level of barbarism; perhaps it is unreasonable to think that a world scarred by the holocausts of the twentieth century could again sink to such depravity. Then again, the United States is already a country where a serious candidate for the Presidency revels in executing the innocent, while the sitting Commander in Chief casually orders the assassination of American citizens without even the pretense of due process, to widespread liberal applause.


These four visions are abstracted ideal types, Platonic essences of a society. They leave out many of the messy details of history, and they ignore the reality that scarcity-abundance and equality-hierarchy are not simple dichotomies but rather scales with many possible in-between points. But my inspiration, in drawing these simplified portraits, was the model of a purely capitalist society that Marx pursued in *Capital*: an ideal which can never be perfectly reflected in the complex assemblages of real economic history, but which illuminates unique and foundational elements of a particular social order. The socialisms and barbarisms described here should be thought of as roads humanity might travel down, even if they are destinations we will never reach. With some knowledge of what lies at the end of each road, perhaps we will be better able to avoid setting off in the wrong direction. 

HACK

THE

PLANET

by Malcolm Harris

t seemed obvious that someone was coordinating the national crackdown on occupations, but I always figured it was the FBI or the Department of Homeland Security. The revelation of the truth – that a non-governmental organization called the Police Executive Research Forum has been hosting calls between mayors and providing advice based on anti-protest tactics from the last twenty

years – is even more disturbing. **PERF** issued a hasty and unconvincing denial, but it was too late. A group of anonymous hackers aligned with the occupations were already on the attack, shutting down the Forum's site with a Distributed Denial of Service (**DDOS**) attack and publishing the Chief Executive's personal information online.

It's the vengeance of the internet,

and by now you have to agree with the anons: they should have expected it. After their early association with Occupy Wall Street, it shouldn't surprise anyone that anons would punish **PERF**. For the first time, hackers are playing an organized political role, imposing a little bit of their collective will upon the world. It's a fantasy that's existed at least as long as the internet: that the connection of people with

superior technical knowledge could result in a reverse-Galt, a mutually accountable hoisting of the world onto their shoulders. Now these kids (arrested anons range in age from 15 to 26) are political actors. Hack the planet.

All of which begs the question: what the hell took so long? Why now, when the internet security apparatus has never been stronger, when nation states and corporations alike are fully aware of its vital importance? Why didn't this happen twenty-five years ago, before they had time to prepare?

Tracing the history of hacking back to its first modern practitioners, it appears as a tool for curious and marginal young people to circumvent systems of depersonalized social control. Fugitive hacker turned security consultant Kevin Mitnick writes in the preface to *The Art of Deception*:

After my father split when I was three, my mother worked as a waitress to support us. To see me then – an only child being raised by a single mother who put in long, harried days on a sometimes erratic schedule – would have been to see a kid on his own almost all his waking hours...

[B]y the age of twelve I had discovered a way to travel free throughout the whole greater L.A. area. I realized one day while riding the bus that the security of the bus transfer I had purchased relied on the unusual pattern of the paper-punch that the drivers used to mark day, time, and route on the transfer slips. A friendly driver, answering my carefully planned question, told me where to buy that special kind of punch.

Mitnick would spend over two years on the run from the FBI, during which time he used his hacking prowess to stay one step ahead, even wire-tapping the NSA. There were whole communities of latch-key kids like Mitnick dumpster diving for corporate system information and using recorded tones

to get free long-distance calls. It was about pulling the coolest stunts, getting into the most secure systems, and finding the slickest work-arounds. It seems a fitting enough basis for a peripheral subculture, but far off from a global decentered revolutionary network.

movie's eighteen-year-old protagonist, is partially based on Mitnick. If you haven't seen *Hackers*, the plot goes like this: Dade is a former child hacker, who under the terms of his probation can begin using computers again just as he moves to a new town for his senior year

But whereas the global hacker imaginary imposes its will on others, the blogosphere is a market of alternatives; it's the difference between a mob and an editorial board.

A linear progressive narrative that builds from phone phreaking to anon ops, however, would be staggeringly wrong. For as long as there have been hackers, there has been the international hacker imaginary:

This is our world now. The world of the electron and the switch; the beauty of the baud. We exist without nationality, skin color, or religious bias. You wage wars, murder, cheat, lie to us and try to make us believe it's for our own good, yet we're the criminals. Yes, I am a criminal. My crime is that of curiosity.

These words could come from one of the many weekly communiques issued under the Anonymous banner, but they don't. They're from "The Hacker Manifesto," written in 1986 by a pseudonymous author called The Mentor. In the 1995 film *Hackers*, an FBI agent reads them to his partner with incredulity:

"That's cool."
"It's cool?"
"Yeah, that's cool."
"That's not cool. That's commie bullshit."

Dade Murphy (Jonny Lee Miller), the

of high school. He can't help himself, and falls in with a crew of local hackers. When one of them finds himself scapegoated for a sinister corporate plot, Dade bands together with his new friends to take down the real villains.

Although it wasn't released until the mid-nineties, *Hackers* is an early internet morality tale. Dade is stuck between his fellow hackers and a corrupt security systems administrator who calls himself The Plague, and has cooked up the whole plot to steal millions from his employer. The Plague and the FBI agents he has bamboozled offer Dade a way out: give up his friends and he can walk. His Mephistophelean appeal is characteristic of the crypto-Randian ideology that is the global hacker imaginary's reverse:

Let me explain the New World Order. Governments and corporations need people like you and me. We are Samurai... the Keyboard Cowboys... and all those other people who have no idea what's going on are the cattle... Moooo.

But when the cards are down, not only does Dade back his hacker comrades, they're able to call upon the entire global network. In the final battle

scene, the camera flips through tableaus: members from England to Russia to Japan. The community responds to an attack against its own, but announces a larger moral agenda. As Hacker “Cereal Killer” (Matthew Lillard) puts it: “We say we want the free flow of information? Well that comes with some responsibilities.” These are responsibilities the hackers voluntarily and collectively assume, they choose to intervene out of a moral duty to the anonymous global imaginary against the corporate-state axis. The final reveal comes via a fanciful takeover of the nation’s television screens, a temporary dictatorship of the hackers.

It’s a happy ending, and an optimistic one: hackers could connect across traditional boundaries and serve as a vigilante check on abuses of power. But this collective, like so many promises about the geopolitics of future technology, failed to materialize. The beast lay dormant as Bush stole the 2000 election and continued to slumber through the post-9/11 reduction of civil liberties and the war on Iraq based on manufactured evidence. Prefigured by the *Drudge Report*’s role in the right-wing conspiracy against Bill Clinton, blogs emerged as the main way people used computers to intervene in politics. But whereas the global hacker imaginary imposes its will on others, the blogosphere is a market of alternatives; it’s the difference between a mob and an editorial board.

So whither the mob? Where did it go, and why is it back now?

I turn to another movie, not a remake of the first, but a readjustment based on the end of the twentieth century. 2001’s *Antitrust* is the *Boiler Room* to *Hackers*’ *Wall Street*, an update made necessary by the general culture’s incorporation of the first film. Ryan Phillippe plays Milo Hoffman, a genius programmer about to graduate from Stanford. Milo’s dilemma is a rejiggering of Dade’s: should he go found an open source start-up with his

friends or go work for not-Microsoft (“NURV”) and Tim Robbins as not-Bill Gates (Gary Winston). He picks the latter, until he realizes that not-Microsoft is killing independent coders around the world and stealing their work.

When Milo realizes that not-Bill Gates controls the justice department, the mainstream media, and even his own girlfriend (Claire Forlani, a plant and ex-con to boot), he hatches a plan with his college friends to use NURV’s own Frankensteinian media streaming system to pull a *Hackers* redux and broadcast incriminating footage, along with liberated source code, onto every

However, the global hacker imaginary remains that: imaginary.

screen in the world. Victorious, Milo returns to the startup’s Palo Alto garage to be showered in venture capital.

In this version of the story, the online outlaws of *Hackers* have turned into Wikipedia founders, in it for the joy of coding with an allegiance to the unimpeded spread of knowledge. Whereas Dale is constantly reminded that if he gets caught hacking again no college will have him, we meet Milo in the Stanford computer science program. The international hacker imaginary becomes the international coder imaginary, united by a different form-of-life. We get another montage of kids at computers as Winston explains to the SEC that any of them could put him out of business. A murderous conspiracy makes visible the obscured violence of privatization. As Milo’s friend and programming partner Teddy says before he’s killed: “They don’t even know the meaning of open

source ... They just want to own everything. They clone stuff, they’re reverse engineering it.” The evil conspiracy is no longer a parasite on the corporation, it’s now the entire means of profit.

At the end of *Hackers*, the mechanism for delivering a video onto any (and every) screen in the world never gets even a token explanation. But *Antitrust* is centered around the system “SYNAPSE” and its promise to “unite the global village,” which it does by stitching together Frankenstein-like stolen coding labor. The international hacker imaginary is what could exist if not for capital’s enclosures. At the triumphant end, Milo tells the cameras: “We’ve given SYNAPSE back to the people it was stolen from. Human knowledge belongs to the world.”

Even in 2001 when the second web bubble had yet to pop as it would after 9/11, there exists the idea that the globally networked will constitute a collective subject capable of acting politically in struggle for a few invariants. The most prominent invariant is anti-property, more specifically the enclosures around intellectual property. Another is against corrupt institutional power – governments, corporations, but particularly the alliance of the two. Milo’s first real moment of panic is when he realizes a justice department official (if not the whole department) is in on not-Bill Gates’s plot, and when Dade gets a threatening home visit, it’s The Plague and an FBI officer. The profit motive leads quickly to institutionalized theft, and the government is either too stupid or corrupt to stop it.

The third invariant explains why anonymity is so central to the global hacker imaginary. Anonymity serves not only as a protection for lawbreakers, but as a crucial element in the imagining of a subject with a privileged relationship to equality and justice. The empty suit, hacker pseudonyms, the Guy Fawkes mask, and even Aaron Swartz’s bike helmet, held over his face in an attempt to disguise the program-

mer's face from an MIT security camera as he went to liberate enclosed JSTOR files, are all modes of abstracting to a generalized identity with the moral justification to act in the general interest. John Rawls describes this position as behind a veil of ignorance about one's individual identity. From there, he writes, we have the disinterested interest necessary to make just decisions. By assuming an unlimited anonymous collective subjectivity, they are able to claim social justice as an individual interest.

Fast forward ten years. Anonymous Operations are just that: hacker actions taken under this veil of collective anonymity. It's an international conspiracy that traces its lineages back to the darkest, dingiest corner of the internet: the random (/b/) board at 4Chan. As /b/tards, anons mostly restricted their wrath to the board, posting the worst of the worst the web has to offer, only occasionally spilling over into the mainstream with a prank. In 2008 after the Church of Scientology (Co\$ in anon-speak) used an intellectual property claim to remove an embarrassing video of spokesman and overly enthusiastic actor Tom Cruise from YouTube, anons first appeared in the street, physically trolling Scientologists in what would come to be their trademark Guy Fawkes masks in a campaign named Project Chanology.

The Church made a perfect target for the troll army. Scientology is the sort of abusive and internally coercive organization that most people recognize as malicious, but since it's technically voluntary, only nosy, nonstate nobodies can intervene. They may be vigilantes, but there are some jobs only vigilantes can do. In addition to turning out thousands of people IRL in cities around the world, anons shut down Co\$ sites with DDOS attacks and released threatening propaganda videos.

The emergence of WikiLeaks was a turning point for the identification "Anonymous," as the hackers took up

the cause of Bradley Manning and Julian Assange. Exposing information freely is a tactic and goal for the global hacker imaginary, especially to out warmongers. The release of the "Collateral Murder" video that shows US troops brutally killing civilians in Iraq could have come at the end of a third hacker film (and it may very well yet). Similarly, the ongoing sequence of occupations have provided a natural home for the hackers, with their appropriated mask becoming a visual representation of the abstracted and generalized "99 percent."

In its current global crisis, capital doesn't have the debt capacity to lure these young people into complicity any longer. Hackers today face a dilemma closer to Dade's ("Is the good life already foreclosed to me under the current social structures?") than Milo's ("vc cash or Microsoft cash?") while the three invariants remain. File sharing – which, as the industry suits make clear, is the largest and most generalized practice of enclosure razing in two centuries – has infected a whole generation with a bit of the hacker virus. The growth of precarious labor, the structuring of youth as a vehicle of debt, and massive proletarianization have pushed the imaginary onto the level of reality.

However, the global hacker imaginary remains that: imaginary. Though the story is global, the center is Western, white, and male, whether the requisite protagonist is Dade, Milo, or Julian (who, it's always important to note, is a rapist). The man behind the veil begins to look more *Avatar* than avatar. If the general figure, whether in the guise of the "99 percent" or Fawkes, is to be more than a traditional savior, it has to be subject to destabilizing struggle. "Anonymiss" was a campaign by anons to trouble the gender of anonymity, both by recruiting more women to the banner and increasing the visibility of those already behind it. The realization that generalizing anonymity isn't about the exclusion

of identity, but rather its constant play and reorganization, demonstrates the kind of collective intelligence and fluidity a properly politicized global hacker project requires.

The most important difference between the movies and the reality is that, contrary to the belief of neocons, history doesn't have a credit sequence. Publicly revealing corporate and state crimes doesn't have the problem-solving effects we were promised. As Sarah Leonard writes:

If a classified document falls on the internet, and it doesn't get debated on CNN, does it make a sound?... Predictably, the release of an abundance of information has not caused the mainstream media to reassess its fundamental bias toward lazy, easy-to-swallow news. The problem with our newsmedia is not a paucity of facts, but a lack of interest in putting the pieces together to produce structural criticisms or even coherent stories.

Facts alone do not make narratives, and without the right story, Dade or Milo would have ended up indefinitely detained like Bradley. But our silver-screen hackers didn't let anyone else put the pieces together; at the conclusions of both films, they take forcible control of the nation's screens and out the powerful and corrupt point by point. This is not an ideologically neutral act. Nor is it – like the DDOS attack – democratic. What right do they have to change my channel?

The real value of the international hacker imaginary is not just in the way it produces a general subject, but the way it self-authorizes to intervene in the social interest. The hacker is partially defined by a willingness to intentionally affect others without being invited to do so, to exercise the control necessary to break control. Not toward a libertarian market of perfect information, a fully articulated cybernetic network, but a dictatorship of the 99 percent. 

HIPSTERIZING



by Rob Horning

The Occupy protests galvanized a dormant spirit of American protest, but they have also prompted a certain amount of skeptical condescension. Even as the term “occupy” has shed its anticapitalist overtones and entered the vernacular as a zeitgeist-y term for the enthusiastic willingness to get involved with anything (“Occupy Wawa!” “Occupy this gym’s air conditioning!”), the protesters themselves have been subjected to trivializing trend pieces like “The Hot Chicks of Occupy Wall Street” that imply the protests are essentially about parading around for attention. They may say they have no demands, but that’s because it’s really just the same old demand: “Look at me!”

Are the occupiers just douchey hipsters, professional activist types, and far left outcasts, whose self-righteous-

ness conveys contempt for others who let petty concerns like their family and their job inhibit their participation in protests? Sometimes I want to believe the worst about protesters because it would exempt me from having to do more. I let myself be persuaded by the argument that, as libertarian *Economist* blogger Will Wilkinson puts it, “the Occupy movement fails to take pluralism seriously.” That is, a “self-selecting community” of protesters with short-sighted arrogance believes that everyone in their right mind agrees with its methods and its message. This leads to tactics that alienate the “real” people who show up in polling figures, who live outside urban centers, and so on. I start to think that doing nothing will allow me to be real too.

My eagerness to dismiss the protests as so much ego and vanity speaks to

a deep and pervasive cynicism about the political sincerity of the Left, and particularly middle-class leftists, who some would say have no legitimate reason to be complaining. The view that leftist protest is fundamentally inauthentic is a legacy of the youth movements of the 1960s, which were recast and denigrated as so much hippie hedonism. But it wasn’t the reactionaries on the Right who gave that interpretation its credibility and staying power; rather its broader plausibility has its roots in an intra-left debate about the role of lifestyle consumption in emancipatory struggle, a sort of proxy war in the fight over who can claim to be an organic intellectual (to use Gramsci’s term) and what exactly would constitute the genuine class composition of the revolutionary subject. Are the stupefied masses waiting for thought

leaders to liberate them from their vulgar tastes and the pacifying, infantilizing culture that is administered to them? Or are the masses the only genuine, authentic people who can inhabit a different subjectivity, who can see beyond capitalism's enticements and occupy a space beyond it?

Ever since culture became an industry, aggrieved critics have complained of the inauthenticity of cultural production and lamented the loss of genuine folk culture. Usually these complaints are paired with a sentimental nostalgia for folkways, which are held to generate culture as a by-product of a communal life organically lived. As André Malraux described this putative golden age in a 1951 essay for the *Partisan Review*, "Instruments played real music then, for there was no other" ("Art, Popular Art and the Illusion of the Folk"). Then the culture industry reared its massifying, instrumentalizing, hegemonizing head, and in its ruthless pursuit of profit, it alienated creators and audiences alike from that holistically integrated world, depriving us of our right to a real culture that serves not Mammon but some innocent, spontaneously flourishing essence of the human species.

From that point of view, the problem with commercial art is that it breaks the more or less "natural" system of hierarchical taste that allows each social strata to enjoy itself comfortably without having to be self-conscious. Instead it foments aspirational dreams that fuse pleasure to social mobility and bravura displays of ripening taste, which, needless to say, these critics regard as inappropriate. Rather than permit us to enjoy the pleasures of the simple life, the culture industry imposes invidious comparison and tactical, conspicuous consumption on us, and we become connoisseurs of distinction, preoccupied with self-presentation rather than losing ourselves in aesthetic enjoyment.

The fear that social mobility gener-

ates a phony culture made entirely of status symbols leads this sort of critic to champion a stable system of taste that supposedly protects art from being merely about cultural capital. Dwight Macdonald's "Midcult and Masscult" (1960) offers an especially clear example of this yearning: "If there were a clearly defined cultural elite here, then the masses could have their kitsch and the classes could have their High Culture, with everybody happy," he writes. But unfortunately, for a "significant part of the population," "the pattern of their cultural lives is 'open' to the point of being porous," which, Macdonald claims, they find "confusing." If only there were cultural sump-tuary laws that would constrain each stratum to the enjoyments appropriate to it, just as servants were kept to their livery. Then no one would have to be confused: the folk would be folk again, a source of vicarious authenticity and an alibi for all the cultural strivers – and cultural critics – determined to refine their own tastes and perfect their connoisseurship.

For Macdonald, the fear of aesthetic chaos resolves into a contempt for middlebrow culture – predigested simulations of high culture that don't require aesthetic training to appreciate but still convey an air of pseudosophistication and social betterment. He echoes Frankfurt School thinkers like Herbert Marcuse, whose concerns about administered culture, commodified art, and mass stupefaction have struck other critics as equally elitist as Macdonald's. Ellen Willis, in an obituary for Marcuse, highlights how high-minded defenses of high culture and condemnations of "thoughtless" consumerism mainly help police the boundaries of class:

What Marcuse had most obviously in common with many of his New Left children, or cousins, was the alienated snobbery of the middle-class intellectual. Classes that take money for granted

are always horrified at the naïve delight of the "vulgar" nouveau riche in getting and spending. But a deeper, more complicated kind of class bias defined the relationship between the New Left and the rest of America. Marcuse and like-minded radicals simply assumed that their perception of social reality was more accurate than that of the average nonrevolutionary worker. It did not occur to them that in some ways the opposite might be true. Yet I think their one-dimensional view of American life, their obsession with consumer goods as the root of all evil, and their conviction that most people were satisfied robots had less to do with the objective workings of the system than with the way many middle-class intellectuals experienced themselves. Trapped in abstractions, cut off from a sense of their own autonomous desires, they projected their self-estrangement onto others.

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"Middle-class intellectuals," Ellis suggests, are so alienated by their complicity with consumer society that they have a hard time regarding the consumption of the lower class as anything other than passive, as conditioned by the blandishments that they

themselves couldn't resist.

The current crop of "New Left children" – many of whom serve as commercial tastemakers, cultural curators, lifestyle engineers, or other functionaries of the creative class – have inherited this self-estrangement. This can be seen clearly in the trajectory of the term hipster: those who castigate others with the label are among the most likely to be accused of hipsterism themselves. Members of this new cohort of middle-class intellectuals (or hipsters or the creative class or whatever you want to call them), defensive to the point of disavowal about their cultural privilege, are nonetheless all too aware of the calculated way they must respond to culture to protect the identity they struggle to project. Enmeshed in far more elaborate communications networks than their predecessors, their consumption choices can circulate instantaneously and far more widely, serving not only to distribute a constructed, branded self that can accrue value in circulation, but also to enhance the value of the cultural signifiers they have augmented with their attention. This cohort shares Willis's lament that it has lost the pure, gut-level appreciation of pop culture and falls prey to nostalgia that other less mediated segments of society can still access a more "accurate" picture of social reality through their unadulterated responsiveness.

Thus the internecine debate over who can be a "genuine" revolutionary subject may evolve from the high-brow-lowbrow-nobrow arguments Macdonald was engaged in toward a preoccupation with who is corrupted by "prosumerism" (producing cool through conspicuous consumption). A romanticized class of untechnologized non-prosumers, unhipsters, are in danger of being transformed into a new authentic folk, whose social exclusion creative-class hipsters may misguidedly take to the streets to protect. The unhipsters become a reference point for

a backward-looking ideal, and are used to implicitly recast emerging progressive politics as a yearning to regress to a simpler time, as though an absence of technology and a suppression of the plenitude of cultural production could solve everything.

Armed with this diagnosis, middle-class intellectuals are in danger of pushing inappropriate or irrelevant solutions. Paralyzed by self-criticism, hipsters sense their alienation, the hollowness of their constructed identity, and misrecognize it as the fulcrum of social resistance. Perhaps if we could get everyone to unplug from the administered culture that has placated us, we would transform the world with spontaneous justice and generalized, self-evident righteousness – the sort of spirit that sympathetic observers have recognized in the Occupy protests. That unselfconscious, unestranged spirit of resistance performs the same symbolic function that genuine working-class glee in pop-culture consumption seems to have done for Willis, and which traditional folk culture did for Macdonald; it anchors an ability to see the truth. The gritty occupiers will lead us out of our suburbanized plastic hassle of a life and into the streets to speak truth to power and turn crony capitalism and the finance oligarchy on its head. Our voices, buoyed by a sense of incipient emancipation, would be raised in a communal chorus for peace. Rather than opposing specific conditions within existing power structures, a new scene will be generated, one that is not phony but forged in genuine struggle with the cops alongside genuine crust punks. We will all be real once more.

But as the creative class well knows, its attention to anyone it recognizes as unhipsters would invariably saturate them with cool. And if the protests simply become incubators for cool – if they grow mainly because they redefine cool in terms of Occupy memes and types – are they really even

protesting anything?



occupy would seem to need a rigorous program of dehipsterification to protect the purity of its revolution. But the matter is made more complicated by the political cross-currents generated by new technologies and the unevenly distributed enthusiasm for various forms of atomized participation they enable. As communication technology has become more intrusive and expansive, chances to transform society have, for some, come to seem inseparable from the more salient opportunities to transform the self. These technologies change the way the creative class conceives subjectivity – which becomes increasingly self-conscious and preoccupied with cultural-capital signifiers – and in the process create new temptations to romanticize those excluded, those who seem exempt from the self-branding traps social media set for us.

While social media enhance the possibility that the protests will grow, at the same time they allow the solidarity built there to be expropriated. It becomes fodder for what political theorist Jodi Dean has called communicative capitalism: an "economic-ideological form wherein reflexivity captures creativity and resistance so as to enrich the few as it placates and diverts the many." This kind of capitalism aims at completely drawing consumers into the process of production and innovation, into becoming prosumers. For techno-optimists, the subsumption of self-fashioning by capital – the ability to be heard as a prosumer by friends and corporations alike – meant the unheard people were finally being granted a voice in the everyday matters that affect their lives. It was the substance of revolution.

Not everyone was so optimistic. In fact, prior to Occupy some radi-

cal trends had identified this view as one of the critical problems with contemporary capitalism. *The Coming Insurrection*, a 2007 tract by French activists the Invisible Committee, argues that “producing oneself is becoming the dominant occupation of a society where production no longer has an object” and claims that “it now becomes possible to sell *oneself* rather than one’s labor power, to be remunerated not for what one does but for what one is, for our exquisite mastery of social codes, for our relational talents, for our smile and our way of presenting ourselves.”

Though composed before the 2008 global financial crisis, the book is well-suited to the soul searching that followed. What *The Coming Insurrection insisted* – that “the catastrophe is not coming, it is here,” that “we are already situated *within* the collapse of a civilization” – now seems more than ever to actually be the case. The growth of the Occupy movement this fall translated that sentiment to a more American idiom. In the atmosphere fostered at Zuccotti Park and the other occupations around the country, one could dare to dream about local, distributed small-scale economies replacing globalized capitalism and multinational corporations. One could foresee bands of urban homesteaders clearing the rubble of the capitalist crisis. That is to say, one could imagine that others might actually be taking the Invisible Committee’s advice: Form de facto communes, stay out of exclusionary milieus. Work out barter deals outside the open economy. Learn how to make things again. Seek an internal exile, an invisibility. Maybe ordinary people, people who didn’t read social theory or even the newspaper, were about to follow by instinct.

But in the midst of Occupy utopia the technology of hyperindividualism remains. *The Coming Insurrection* notes the seductive power of the network to empower individual nodes

while preventing the shared collective investment in an actual society:

To call this population of strangers in the midst of which we live “society” is such an usurpation that even sociologists dream of renouncing a concept that was, for a century, their bread and butter. Now they prefer the metaphor of a network to describe the connection of cybernetic solitudes, the intermeshing of weak interactions under names like “colleague,” “contact,” “buddy,” “acquaintance,” or “date.” Such networks sometimes condense into a milieu, where nothing is shared but codes, and where nothing is played out except the incessant recomposition of identity.

This identity-building project has the extra benefit for capital of producing a self that is always already alienated, so there remains no “I” that can recognize what has gone wrong. In the identity-formation process, consumerist capitalism hijacks our will to be autonomous,

have good reason to distrust the seemingly simple pleasures of consumerism, à la Macdonald. Acutely aware that their subjectivity is inescapably capital, they know that consumption can never really be about pure, personal, private pleasure but is always about positioning and status. But they still yearn for a guilt-free consumerism. Poor and working class people, by dint of their uncreative position in the economy, seem free from prosumerism, which prompts the hipster to envy their naïve ability to bypass the production of authenticity. But this in turn makes their consumption especially productive of sign value – it seems so genuine that hipsters feel especially attracted to appropriating it, as Mark Greif argued in “What Was the Hipster?”

One might expect the Occupy protests to present an alternative to fetishized individuality. If capitalism produces the sort of subjectivity that allows it to perpetuate itself – if we learn to become selves and fulfill ourselves

Social movements can no longer promise us chances for a more creative life – that revolution has come and been co-opted.

rooting it in the same procedures that generates its codes. We make ourselves in the same way we breathe life into brands through “co-creation.” The very possibility of association and affiliation are under threat; that we might get together with other people for any reason other than to parade our identity and measure our influence has been undermined by the mediated, technologized situations in which our social interaction occurs. A chief function of social networks is to allow the value of sociability to be extracted, even the sociability of protest.

The middle-class Left, then, would

only by adopting capitalism’s incentive scheme – then resistance must ultimately be a matter of disrupting that subjectivity and creating a time-space where a different kind of subjectivity can be fostered. But the Occupy protests have taken place in the midst of what sociologists Nathan Jurgenson and P.J. Rey have called “ambient documentation,” where simple presence in any environment guarantees that one’s behavior will be recorded. As a result, they argue, “our present is increasingly lived as a potential document; the present is now always a future past.” We can no longer define “natural behavior” as

what we would do if unobserved. We can't escape the ability to shape the document we create for the world, we can't help but equate such documents with our identity, and we can't avoid knowing about the potential value of our deeds in crafting it. In this sense, the marketing fantasies about consumer co-creation and prosumerism have come true; virtually all our efforts to try to be cooler are automatically recaptured in communications networks and recirculated to generate more value. What goods can't we customize and enhance to better express who we really are? Given social-media technology, what sort of protest could be immune from such repurposing?

Cameras were ubiquitous at the Occupy sites. This assured that egregious acts of police repression were well-documented, but it also gave the protests a carnivalesque component, protest-performers endlessly posing for waves of tourists consuming the spectacle. In offshoots like "Occupy Xmas," the quest for personal cool also threatens to trump the desire for solidarity. Occupy Xmas risks the same pedantic condescension for the holiday-shopping masses that Willis's middle-class intellectuals had for the lower classes. Blindly confident that they will come across as playful liberators rather than bullying Grinches, some Occupy Xmas-ers planned to, among other things, "dress up as 'consumer zombies' and wander around shopping centers to protest what they see as the numbing effect of conspicuous consumption," according to a *Wall Street Journal* report. Such action seems unlikely to convince its targets to change their ways, but it has already proved effective in garnering press coverage for organizers.

From within the heart of ambient documentation, it can seem especially urgent to assume that the poor are not addressed as prosumers so that their consumption can remain unalienated and serve as a model, as proof that

such a thing can be. Aesthetically, the protests already relied on the evocation of ersatz folkways – think drum circles – to help guarantee their righteousness. If the perceived "folk" can continue to consume purely and innocently, their authenticity can continue to be harvested and refined into cultural capital by self-hating, now with an alibi steeped in protests on their behalf. Their genuineness offsets the posturing of everyone else.

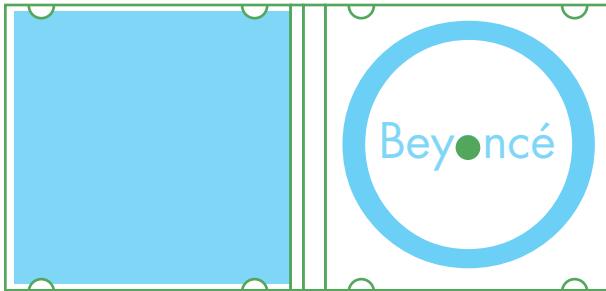
The fantasy of a non-prosuming sector in whose name we struggle only perpetuates what must be discarded in social upheaval. Social movements can no longer promise us chances for a more creative life – that revolution has come and been co-opted. The goal of boundless self-expression plays into the hands of the consumerist powers that be, which seductively amplify the quest for recognition into individualistic self-aggrandizement. Instead, the Occupy protests may, at last, offer an opportunity for a new kind of subject to emerge, one that is collective in character and can exist comfortably in parallel with a private, individual self.

But while the protests would ideally allow for reshaping subjectivity, they cannot be about policing authenticity or purifying consumer behavior. What accusations of hipsterism or inauthenticity often amount to are pleas to preserve the private ownership of a resource – identity – that could be held in common. That is the pitfall of green consumerism or personal boycotts or other heroic stances that always resolve into one's having improved one's own cultural capital in some way without making much of a difference in the operation of the world. In fact, there's an incentive to hope that the world continues to be bad and wrong so that one's own gestures stand out as courageous and valuable. Even if there were a virtuous cycle of oneupmanship in terms of good deeds ("everyone drives a Prius, so now I need to go one step further and put solar panels on my

roof"), the underlying structure of competitive individualism, so vital to capitalism, would be preserved, and along with it all the exploitation and Hobbesian mutual suspicion it justifies. It then becomes easy to mistake winning status as virtue, an elision capitalism counts on for its ideological hegemony.

Capitalism, particularly with its current emphasis on media and communications as a source of profit, prompts us to regard the public and private self as the same individualistic identity, negating the space for a civic persona. (This is Richard Sennett's argument in *Fall of Public Man*.) Protest can allow for a public persona to be reclaimed through the process of struggle, which then becomes not a hardship or an ascetic procedure of self-effacement but a source of deep pleasure. This is why unlikely people report being energized by General Assemblies, which in the abstract sound like tedious nightmares. The process becomes constitutive of a civic, collective self, which is liberating – it allows the private self to go private again, releasing us from the anxieties of ostentatious displays of identity. The use of social media is liberated from the personal-brand-building bullshit and becomes more a matter of transmissions that orchestrate solidarity among politically engaged groups. In a sense, the personal ceases to be political; everyday life in public begins to be lived in a civic space rather than a commercial one, and private everyday life starts to escape exploitative capture.

Ideally, the protests will usher the personal brand off the stage and supplant it with the emergence of a collective, civic subjectivity, held in common and in parallel to a private self, whose economic significance as a prosumer becomes more thoroughly anonymized and depoliticized. Paradoxically enough, I hope these highly public and publicized protests are actually about the recreation of privacy. 



C C

U P Y

by Gavin Mueller

Don't call it an occupation – they've been here for years. In fact, until an untimely – well, actually quite timely – fire put it out of commission, there were a bunch of guys occupying space in front of the DC Farmer's Market building, across from Gallaudet University in the Northeast quadrant of the city. They erected structures with wood, pallets, and tarps, but they weren't camping there, and they weren't protesting. They were working, selling, their hours as long as the market's, six days a week. And what they sold was illegal.

No, not drugs. The vendors sold bootleg and counterfeit merchandise. Knock-off Nikes, mysteriously cheap Newports, CDs and, to use the jingle, "all new movies." I quickly learned to avoid the DVDs: the new X-Men movie was terrible enough without the intrepid camcorder jockey munching popcorn and explaining plot points to his companion. My table of choice was the CDs, where I received a weekly lesson in go-go, the

Chocolate City's indigenous urban music.

Go-go is live band funk rooted in clip-clopping conga polyrhythms mastered by Chuck Brown's band in the 1970s. When the rise of hip hop overshadowed any nationwide interest in go-go, the genre went resolutely local, and has stayed that way ever since. It's still live band music, though by no means retro – bands have consistently experimented with the latest technology, including drum machines, samples, and delay effects. And bands incorporate current hip hop and R&B hits into their repertoires as fast as they hit radio, developing inventive cover versions of the latest Beyoncé or Drake hits. It's been called the soul of Washington, a city most people assume sold anything resembling its soul a long time ago.

It's fitting that I have to skirt the law to find go-go. Like hip hop, and like jazz and rock 'n' roll before it, the music and its fans have been criminalized and persecuted as instigators of violence. The police department issues a "go-go report" listing the clubs where go-go can be found (and

harassed), and a black guy carrying a conga drum into a bar is grounds for a liquor license inspection. “Local” radio abandons the sound for all but an hour a day. Even go-go’s core audience is being pushed over the Maryland border as virulent gentrification runs amok; the city’s black population dipped below 50 percent this year, amid cheers that were as reprehensible as they were tastefully circumspect. If I want a primer on go-go history and a chance to catch up on the sound, Don and Darrell’s table was the best place to do it.

Stacks of silver CDs shimmer in plastic sleeves, emblazoned in Sharpie with all manner of codes: “WHAT BAND TRADEWINDS 2-22-10,” “SUTTLE THOUGHTS L.F.B. 2009,” “YOUNG BANDS #32.” I get commentary while Darrell plays tracks for me off a battered CD mixer connected to an amp. “L. F. B., that’s Le Fontaine Bleu. Suttle Thoughts was cranking that night.” Go-go bands rarely bother with the studio, instead recording live sets distributed through bootleggers. As I’m shopping a man inspects a CD with a date from the late nineties. He tells the vendor he was at the show, and purchases the disc with a smile. Don and Darrell aren’t just vendors, and they aren’t just my erstwhile docents to go-go history; they work as librarians too, preserving community memories and making them available to the public for a nominal fee (one for three, two for five to be exact). And they’re redistributing income while they do it. Go-go bands may work with some DC bootleggers, but I’m pretty sure Rihanna and Trey Songz don’t, and their CDs are here too. And their songs show up in the go-go sets: corporate-funded culture appropriated and transformed for local tastes and local economies, akin to folk traditions. The flow of wealth into multinational media conglomerates is siphoned off at a thousand points, like Niger Delta oil pipelines. A small and devoted community continually fights to carve out its own autonomous niche in a hostile environment of racist policing, grinding unemployment, and overproduced entertainment by staying mobile and creative, sometimes underground, sometimes in the light of day. Somewhere, underneath his balaclava, Tony Negri is smiling. In a perfect world he’d be listening to “Bounce Beat Freak” too.

It might seem absurd to portray local music bootleggers as a political force. But the practices associated with certain groups’ pleasure – and survival – have always been political, subject to

state repression while serving as creative inspiration for cultural gentrifiers. Crack down on raves, but let people listen to DJs in places where there are dress codes, the bathrooms are monitored and the drink costs are in the double digits. Annihilate wildstyle graffiti from trains, but let a few art speculators round out their painting collections with works by a handful of artists. Push go-go off H Street so gimmicky bars and indistinguishable indie bands can soak up some of the strip’s remaining gritty authenticity. Hanging on – occupying – in the face of this is its own political statement.

Ensnioned among monuments and the headquarters of international organizations, its participants working for NGOs and think tanks, DC’s occupations have been slow to discover their local character. DC’s unique role in the national movement may very well be to keep pressure on organizations’ capital to manipulate national policy. But it has done little to engage with the majority of DC residents, outside of its admirable care for some of the city’s homeless and its support for the brief occupation of a shuttered homeless shelter. Go-go music has long been a component of city politics and community activism, and some go-go percussionists could enliven the occupation’s drum circle. But so far the funk is far from McPherson Square.

I’ve heard people say the Occupy movement is about taking back public space. I don’t agree. There is very little meaningfully public about public space. Unless you’re content with jogging or walking, a labyrinth of rules and regulations confronts anyone who tries to use spaces like city parks the way they wish. Occupy Wall Street has highlighted how often “public” spaces such as Zuccotti Park are actually privately owned. Even the police – supposedly supported by taxpayers – fund themselves through private donations and seizure of contraband. We are occupying private space – the power of accumulated wealth manifested in localized private property and the forces of the state marshaled to protect it. So far, the occupations haven’t stressed occupying the means of production as much as occupying the means of reproduction: the spaces in which we live, rest, recuperate, learn, and love that are increasingly commodified, policed, and dismantled. Go-go has fought this on multiple fronts. It speaks the language of struggle, even when it’s using Beyoncé’s lyrics. 

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A NATION OF LITTLE LEBOWSKI URBAN ACHIEVERS

by Megan Erickson

The year Reagan was elected to his first term, the GOP's educational agenda consisted of two main objectives: "bring God back into the classroom" and abolish the Department of Education. This put the Reagan-appointed Secretary of Education, Terrel Bell, in an awkward position. Pressured to dismantle the very organization he'd been chosen to oversee, Bell asked the President to devise a national task force on American education, which he hoped would show the necessity of federal involvement in public schools. Bell, notorious within the cabinet for being too liberal, was ignored.

He responded by assembling the task force himself. Chaired by David Pierpont Gardner, president of the University of Utah and an active member of the Church of Latter Day Saints, the eighteen members of the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) were charged with synthesizing a vast archive of data that had been collected but never before analyzed by the Department of Education and making recommendations based on their findings. In his autobiography, *The Thirteenth Man: A Reagan Cabinet Memoir*, Bell insists that he did not even hint to the NCEE what these recommendations should be – and yet, his designs were evident: "I wanted to stage an event that would jar the people into action on behalf of their educational system," he writes. Milt Goldberg, a prominent member of the commission, later remarked in an interview that he believed Bell had al-

ways seen the NCEE "as a way to shore up the Department of Education."

In 1983, the NCEE released *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* – arguably the most influential document on education policy since Congress passed Title I in 1965. But where Title I took an *equalizing* approach to reform, prioritizing the distribution of funds to districts comprised primarily of students from low-income families, *A Nation at Risk* called for higher expectations for *all* students, regardless of socioeconomic status: "We must demand the best effort and performance from all students, whether they are gifted or less able, affluent or disadvantaged, whether destined for college, the farm, or industry."

At the time of the report's release, Americans were, as Bell recalls, fraught with anxiety over job loss, inflation, international industrial competition, and a perceived decline in prestige due to the hostage crisis in Iran. Education ranked low on the list of national priorities. So the NCEE used the language of warfare to conflate what was supposedly a crisis in public schools with a crisis in national security. The "risk" in the title refers to the once unthinkable loss of global dominance. The US was threatened by a "rising tide of mediocrity," said the authors of the report, and, somewhat more ambiguously, by a lack of a shared vision. Riding the most recent wave of hysteria over the Cold War, they warned, "If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today,

we might well have viewed it as an act of war."

The problem, as they saw it, was that kids were graduating from high school unprepared for success in a global economy. Their solution was more effort, with an emphasis on the advancement of students' personal, educational, and occupational goals. A list of action items to be implemented immediately included: performance-based salaries for teachers, the use of standardized tests for evaluation, grade placement determined by progress rather than by age, the shuttling of disruptive students to alternative schools, increased homework load, attendance policies with incentives and sanctions, and the extension of the school day – in other words, longer, harder hours. Every one of these ideas is rooted in the free-market ideology of business. For the first time since Sputnik, the role of the public schools had been reimagined as a kind of baptism by fire into the competitive world of adulthood.

"Overall, I felt that [Reagan] could support its findings and recommendations while rejecting massive federal spending," says Bell. As one journalist noted at the time, the language of *A Nation at Risk* was clearly meant to jar Reagan into action. By that measure, the report was a smashing success. The publicity inspired by the narrative of a hidden crisis in the public schools made it politically impossible for Reagan to shut down the Department of Education. And the incorporation of free-market language gave him a reason to embrace it, which he did, a year later – taking credit for having assembled the commission in his 1984 State of the Union Address.

In 1988, Congress's reauthorization

of ESEA (the bill that provides federal funding to American public schools) required for the first time that states “define the levels of academic achievement that poor students should attain” and “identify schools in which students were not achieving as expected.” George H. W. Bush, Reagan’s Republican successor, referred to himself as the “Education President,” an issue the Republicans had previously been happy to let the Democrats own. The conventional wisdom that schools were in crisis was now accepted as fact.

But had the NCEE really understood the data they were tasked with analyzing? *A Nation at Risk* contains zero citations, making its claims difficult to verify. Two sociologists of education, David Berliner and Bruce Biddle, have argued that a main point on which the authors based their recommendations – that SAT scores had steadily declined since the 1960s – was actually a misinterpretation of the data. As a voluntary test taken specifically by those intending to go to college, the SAT should never have been aggregated to evaluate the quality of teachers or schools. The slight drop in test scores interpreted by the commission to mean that America’s schools (and its prosperity, security, and civility) were spiraling downward, instead reflected a postwar shift toward inclusion, as more and more people signed up to take the test. Disaggregated data shows that math scores for all groups during the years preceding the release of the report increased, while verbal scores remained constant.

A Nation at Risk also failed to recognize that achievement in the more affluent districts of the US is relatively strong compared to students in other countries. US test scores are lower than those of Canada and Sweden because we have a disproportionate amount of low-income students compared to those countries (over 20 percent of children in the United States live in poverty). One of the few consistent

findings of education researchers is that concentrated poverty lowers the quality of education in every school where the percentage of poor students rises above a certain level. Class integration, it seems, is the only proven means of raising educational outcomes.

The American habit of viewing public schools as the great equalizer of our society has often lead us to graft our fantasies, anxieties, and dreams onto the education system. For most of our history, education has been the only real form of a social safety net, meaning that the schools are the arena in which social apprehensions are played out. It makes sense then, that as mainstream attitudes toward the problems of the country’s growing lower class changed in the 1980s, the way politicians and policymakers talked about the problems facing the nation’s schools also changed. If self-reliance was all that was required to compete financially, it followed that raising standards and holding students, parents, and schools accountable was all that was required to succeed academically.

Over the past thirty years, as the focus of educational policy has shifted from equity to excellence, the gaps in achievement between black and white students and rich and poor students have widened. The gains of the 1970s are gone. “Excellence” and equity have been shown to be almost mutually exclusive in practice.

Of course, *A Nation at Risk* wasn’t influential because it was accurate. It was influential because it was the version of events that American voters and policymakers wanted to believe at the time. It had the convenient effect of converting what had been a material crisis into a struggle for the soul of American schools, a corporeal problem into a deficiency of gumption. Its tantalizingly simplistic implication was that social problems arise not from a specific set of policies and realities – segregation, discrimination, poverty – but from a lack of willpower: the obscure

malaise hinted at in *A Nation At Risk*. If a poor kid couldn’t succeed, she just didn’t have the right attitude. That is not an overstatement; it is the central assumption that animates every initiative we gather together and call education reform.

And though today this view usually hides behind the kind of technocratic utopianism we associate with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Newt Gingrich’s recent comments about what to do with “a school that is failing with a teacher that is failing” cut to the vulgar core of the whole enterprise. Gingrich believes that such schools “ought to get rid of the unionized janitors ... and pay local students to take care of the school. The kids would actually do work, they would have cash ... they’d begin the process of rising.” This may sound crass, but it shouldn’t be surprising. It is simply a tactless articulation of the market-based mindset – advocating for choice, merit-pay, and standardization of assessments and curriculum – that has dominated policy discussions since the 1980s.

The problem, according to Gingrich, is that poor kids just aren’t up to the bootstrapping required for success in today’s economy: “Really poor children, in really poor neighborhoods have no habits of working and have nobody around them who works so they have no habit of showing up on Monday.” The problem, according to proponents of marketization and accountability, is that poor kids don’t have access to the kinds of opportunities – or the system of goals, rewards, and punishments – that would allow them to pull themselves up. The diagnosis is the same: better yourself, work harder, perhaps find a rich mentor, and you will be rewarded. Days after Gingrich was excoriated in the *New York Times*, a blogger at the pro-charter Hoover Institute asked, *Is it time for education reformers to pay Gingrich some more attention?* Yeah,

Newt's a goofball, and an easy target for bleeding-heart liberals, the writer argued, but he's also right.

Under the influence of these reformers, the American education system has become less about curriculum and critical thinking, and more like *Oprah*: a program of self-mastery framed as a moral imperative. In public schools across the country, particularly urban ones, social studies and music classes are commonly replaced by the kind of glorified vocational training called for in *A Nation at Risk*. The pro-charter Gates Foundation, which has spent \$5 billion on urban education initiatives over the past ten years, began to advocate that summer internships be made a permanent part of the high school curriculum in 2006. Andrew Carnegie was content to control the building and naming of cultural institutions; the new wave of philanthropic capitalists, with Gates at the forefront, wants a say in what goes on inside them.

With donor cash comes a set of beliefs, awkwardly transplanted from the business world to the classroom: the management guru's vision of empowerment as a personal struggle, the CEO's conviction that individual success is limited only by a lack of ambition, life as a series of goals waiting to be met. The type of advice once reserved for dieters, rookie sales associates, and the unemployed is now repeated to public school children with new age fervor: *Think positive. Set goals and achieve them. Reach for the stars. Race to the top. It's never too early to network. Just smile.* Like the promise of *A Nation at Risk*, these admonitions are at once wildly idealistic and bitterly cruel: "You forfeit your chance for life at its fullest when you withhold your best effort in learning... When you work to your full capacity, you can hope to attain the knowledge and skills that will enable you to create your future and control your destiny. If you do not, you will have your future thrust upon you by others." Convert every challenge

into an opportunity, or else.

But who will coach you towards your goals? As it happens, this is exactly the kind of thing at which the business community excels. A new genre of nonprofits has been invented solely for the purpose of connecting business leaders with high school principals. The website for PENCIL, one such organization, features pictures of prominent business people (the VP of human capital management at Goldman Sachs, the CEO of Jetblue) smiling in front of a chalkboard, surrounded by drawings of mountains, and spaceships. "See how an airline mogul is encouraging students at Aviation High School to soar. See how a visionary is helping students at P.S. 86K build a greener planet," reads the accompanying text. The business leader is the ultimate embodiment of success. When you conceive of the schools as a holding pen for grooming tomorrow's talent, it makes sense to turn to him or her for expert counsel. This is exactly the kind of thinking that lead New York City Schools Chancellor Dennis Walcott to plea to the business community for support on PENCIL's behalf. The message to businesses: we need you now more than ever.

Just as Oprah's exhortation to Live Your Best Life was eventually stamped and sold on a line of low-calorie packaged foods, a for-profit testing industry has risen to provide the instruments of American students' transformation into fearless, proficient, and likable employees. However, neither the food sales, nor the Scantron tests, are the point. The most radical change currently underway in American public schools is the reconceptualization of the role of the student from learner to beneficiary.

A press release for the Goldman Sachs Foundations' Next Generation Fund refers paternalistically to "disadvantaged youth" as "undeveloped 'diamonds in the rough,' unprepared for the intense competition for coveted places in higher education and

the professional world." But, as John Dewey wrote, perhaps too optimistically, "Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself." Children are by definition low performers compared to adults. The business leader and the education reformer seek to improve the child, because childhood, in the logic of capitalism, is a temporary setback from productivity which must be overcome. There are two conditions that students and teachers can feel in response: self-mastery or gratitude.

The movement towards higher standards and market-based reforms ignited by *A Nation at Risk* took place within the historical context of an intensifying stratification of resources along race and class lines, and the division of people into leaders and subordinates is an intrinsic aspect of education reform. Its leaders are overwhelmingly adult administrators, philanthropists, and venture capitalists (usually men) while the people who are most affected by it are teachers (usually women) and children with comparatively little or no economic power. The crisis we face is one of inequality and wealth distribution, not a vague collective decline towards sloppiness.

It is questionable whether public schools have actually "failed" on a national level, but even if that's the case, the failure is systemic, not the product of the inexplicable, synchronized mediocrity of a few individuals who need a little encouragement. The religion of self-improvement is a way of redirecting criticisms or outrage from socioeconomic structures back to the individual, imprisoning any reformist or revolutionary impulse within our own feelings of inadequacy – which is why the process of improving our nation's schools has taken on the tone of a spiritual cleansing rather than a political reckoning. Now, instead of saying "our socioeconomic system is failing us," an entire generation of children will learn to say, "I have failed myself." 

TEACH FOR AMERICA

by Andrew Hartman

the hidden agenda of liberal do-gooders

The job of the American public school teacher has never been so thankless. In states across America, cutting teacher salaries and pensions has become the most popular method for fixing budget deficits. New Jersey Republican Governor Chris Christie's deep cuts, for instance, force teachers to contribute a much higher percentage of their salaries to their pensions, while doubling or even tripling their health care contributions and eliminating cost-of-living adjustments. Republican Governors Scott Walker of Wisconsin and John Kasich of Ohio took their austerity measures a step further by abolishing collective bargaining rights for teachers. Such legislation is possible because the image of teachers has never been so degraded, especially of unionized teachers, whom Christie routinely refers to as "thugs" and "bullies."

The liberals of the education reform movement, often more surreptitiously than the overstated former Washington, DC Chancellor of Schools during Democratic Mayor Adrian Fenty's term in office Michelle Rhee, have for decades advanced negative assumptions about public school teachers that now power the attacks by Christie, Walker, Kasich and their ilk. This is particularly true of Teach for America (TFA), the prototypical liberal education reform organization, where Rhee first made her mark. The history of TFA reveals the ironies of contemporary education reform. In its mission to deliver justice to underprivileged children, TFA and the liberal educa-

tion reform movement have advanced an agenda that advances conservative attempts to undercut teachers' unions. More broadly, TFA has been in the vanguard in forming a neoliberal consensus about the role of public education – and the role of public school teachers – in a deeply unequal society.

In 1988, Princeton student Wendy Kopp wrote a thesis arguing for a national teacher corps, modeled on the Peace Corps – the archetype of liberal volunteerism – that "would mobilize some of the most passionate, dedicated members of my generation to change the fact that where a child is born in the United States largely determines his or her chances in life." Kopp launched TFA in 1990 as a not-for-profit charged with selecting the brightest, most idealistic recent college graduates as corps members who would commit to teach for two years in some of the nation's toughest schools. From its inception, the media anointed TFA the savior of American education. Prior to a single corps member stepping foot in a classroom, *The New York Times* and *Newsweek* lavished Kopp's new organization with cover stories full of insipid praise. Adulation has remained the norm. Its recent twenty-year anniversary summit, held in Washington, DC, featured fawning video remarks by President Obama and a glitzy "who's who" roster of liberal cheerleaders, including John Lewis, Malcolm Gladwell, Gloria Steinem, and TFA board member John Legend. The organs of middlebrow centrist opinion – *Time* magazine, *Atlantic Monthly*, the *New*

Republic – glorify TFA at every opportunity. The *Washington Post* heralds the nation's education reform movement as the "TFA insurgency" – a perplexing linguistic choice given so-called "insurgency" methods have informed national education policies from Reagan to Obama. TFA is, at best, another chimerical attempt in a long history of chimerical attempts to sell educational reform as a solution to class inequality. At worst, it's a Trojan horse for all that is unseemly about the contemporary education reform movement.

The original TFA mission was based on a set of four somewhat noble if paternalistic rationales. First, by bringing the elite into the teaching profession, even if temporarily, TFA would burnish it with a much-needed "aura of status and selectivity." Second, by supplying its recruits to impoverished school districts, both urban and rural, TFA would compensate for the lack of quality teachers willing to work in such challenging settings. And third, although Kopp recognized that most corps members would not remain classroom teachers beyond their two-year commitments, she believed that TFA alums would form the nucleus of a new movement of educational leaders – that their transformative experiences teaching poor children would mold their ambitious career trajectories. Above these three foundational principles loomed a fourth: the mission to relegate educational inequality to the ash heap of history.

TFA goals derive, in theory, from laudable – if misguided – impulses. But each, in practice, has demonstrated to be deeply problematic. TFA, suitably representative of the liberal education reform more generally, underwrites,

intentionally or not, the conservative assumptions of the education reform movement: that teachers' unions serve as barriers to quality education; that testing is the best way to assess quality education; that educating poor children is best done by institutionalizing them; that meritocracy is an end-in-itself; that social class is an unimportant variable in education reform; that education policy is best made by evading politics proper; and that faith in public school teachers is misplaced.

Take the first rationale: that TFA would enhance the image of the teaching profession. On the contrary, the only brand TFA endows with an "aura of status and selectivity" is its own. As reported in the *New York Times*, eighteen percent of Harvard seniors applied to TFA in 2010, a rate only surpassed by the 22 percent of Yale seniors who sought to join the national teacher corps that year. All told, TFA selected 4,500 lucky recruits from a pool of 46,359 applicants in 2010. Although many applicants are no doubt motivated to join out of altruism, the two-year TFA experience has become a highly desirable notch on the resumes of the nation's most diligent strivers. The more exclusive TFA becomes, the more ordinary regular teachers seem. TFA corps members typically come from prestigious institutions of higher education, while most regular teachers are trained at the second- and third-tier state universities that house the nation's largest colleges of education. Whereas TFA corps members leverage the elite TFA brand to launch careers in law or finance – or, if they remain in education, to bypass the typical career path on their way to principalships and other positions of leadership – most regular teachers must plod along, negotiating their way through traditional career ladders. These distinctions are lost on nobody. They are what make regular teachers and their unions such low-hanging political fruit for the likes of Christie, Walker, and Kasich.

The second justification for TFA – that it exists to supply good teachers to schools where few venture to work – has also proven questionable. Though the assertion made some sense in 1990, when many impoverished school districts did in fact suffer from a dearth of teachers, the same is not so easily argued now. Following the economic collapse of 2008, which contributed to school revenue problems nationwide, massive teacher layoffs became

corps members tend to perform equal to teachers in similar situations – that is, they do as well as new teachers lacking formal training assigned to impoverished schools. Sometimes they do better, particularly in math instruction. Yet "the students of novice TFA teachers perform significantly less well," Vasquez Heilig and Jin Jez discovered, "than those of credentialed beginning teachers." It seems clear that TFA's vaunted thirty-day summer

Take the first rationale: that TFA would enhance the image of the teaching profession. On the contrary, the only brand TFA endows with an "aura of status and selectivity" is its own.

the new norm, including in districts where teacher shortages had provided an entry to TFA in the past. Thousands of Chicago teachers, for instance, have felt the sting of layoffs and furloughs in the past two years, even as the massive Chicago Public School system, bound by contract, continues to annually hire a specified number of TFA corps members. In the face of these altered conditions, the TFA public relations machine now deemphasizes teacher shortages and instead accentuates one crucial adjective: "quality." In other words, schools in poor urban and rural areas of the country might not suffer from a shortage of teachers in general, but they lack for the *quality* teachers that Kopp's organization provides.

After twenty years of sending academically gifted but untrained college graduates into the nation's toughest schools, the evidence regarding TFA corps member effectiveness is in, and it is decidedly mixed. Professors of education Julian Vasquez Heilig and Su Jin Jez, in the most thorough survey of such research yet, found that TFA

institute – TFA "boot camp" – is no replacement for the preparation given future teachers at traditional colleges of education.

Putting TFA forward to solve the problems of the teaching profession has turned out poorly. But the third premise for Kopp's national teacher corps – that it would "create a leadership force for long-term change" in how the nation's least privileged students are schooled – has been the most destructive. Such destructiveness is directly related to Kopp's success in attaching TFA to the education reform movement. In this, Kopp's timing could not have been more fortuitous. When TFA was founded, the education reform movement was beginning to make serious headway in policy-making circles. This movement had been in the works since as far back as the notorious Coleman Report, a massive 1966 government study written by sociologist James Coleman, officially titled "Equality of Educational Opportunity." Coleman contended that school funding had little bearing

on educational achievement and, thus, efforts to achieve resource “equity” were wasteful. The Coleman Report became a touchstone for those who argued that pushing for educational “excellence,” measurable by standardized tests, was the best method to improve schools and hold teachers accountable. Chester Finn, an influential conservative policy analyst who worked in the Reagan Department of Education, put his finger on the educational pulse of our age when he wrote that “holding schools” – and teachers – “to account for their students’ academic achievement” was the only educational policy that made sense in a “post-Coleman” world.

With unwavering support from powerful economic and political actors, who almost uniformly understood the state of American public education through the lens of “A Nation at Risk,” a widely publicized 1983 study that argued the failure of American schools was undermining the nation’s ability to compete in an increasingly global economy, education reformers set out to ensure that schools and teachers were held accountable for the achievement of their students, privileged or not. George H. W. Bush, dubbed the “Education President,” filled his Department of Education with advocates of “outcome-based education,” which emphasized “excellence” in contrast to “equity.” Educational progress was to be measured by what students produced (outputs) rather than by what resources were invested in schools (inputs). The TFA mantra – “we don’t need to wait to fix poverty in order to ensure that all children receive an excellent education” – meshed perfectly with this “post-Coleman” zeitgeist. One of the more salient aspects of the so-called “TFA insurgency” was that it operated from the assumption that more resources were not a prerequisite for improving schools. “Schools that transform their students’ trajectories aspire not to equality of inputs,”

Kopp declared, “but rather to equality of outputs.” Instead of more resources, underprivileged students needed better teachers. Reformers thus set out to devise a system that hired and retained effective teachers while also driving ineffective ones from the classroom.

The TFA network has been crucial in shaping efforts to improve the nation’s teacher force. Kopp’s second book, *A Chance to Make History* (2011), reads like a primer for such reform measures. Kopp is particularly enamored by high-performing charter schools, which succeed because they do whatever it takes to hire and retain good teachers, a zero-sum game that most schools cannot win without more resources – those dreaded “inputs.” But successful charter schools, Kopp maintains, also stop at nothing to remove bad teachers from the classroom. This is why charter schools are the preferred mechanism for delivery of education reform: as defined by Kopp, charter schools are “public schools empowered with flexibility over decision making in exchange for accountability for results.” And yet, “results,” or rather, academic improvement, act more like a fig leaf, especially in light of numerous recent studies that show charter schools, taken on the whole, actually do a worse job of educating students than regular public schools. Rather, crushing teachers’ unions – the real meaning behind Kopp’s “flexibility” euphemism – has become the ultimate end of the education reform movement. This cannot be emphasized enough: the precipitous growth of charter schools and the TFA insurgency are part and parcel precisely because both cohere with the larger push to marginalize teachers’ unions.

The TFA insurgency has, from its inception, sold education reform as above politics. The idea is to support ideas that work, plain and simple, no matter their source. But the biography of Michelle Rhee, the prototypical TFA corps member-turned-reformer and

the most divisive person in the education reform movement, defies such anti-political posturing. After serving a two-year stint in the Baltimore Public Schools as one of the earliest TFA corps members, she earned a Master’s Degree from the Harvard University Kennedy School of Government. From there Kopp tapped Rhee to be the founding CEO of The New Teacher Project, a TFA spin-off that sought to revolutionize the teacher accreditation process by helping school districts evade colleges of education. The notoriety she gained in her work with The New Teacher Project enabled her appointment as Chancellor of Schools in Washington, DC.

Rhee is adored in elite circles. Regularly feted by Oprah, Kopp touts her as a “transformational leader.” During her short tenure leading the infamously bad DC schools, Rhee gained national acclaim for applying, in Kopp’s admiring words, the corporate “principles of management and accountability.” In contrast to such devotion, teacher’s unions loathe Rhee. Rhee’s heavy-handedness in dealing with the Washington Teacher’s Union conveyed her attitude that a non-unionized teacher force would better serve justice for children, as if children would benefit from their teachers lacking the few remaining benefits accrued by collective bargaining, such as nominal job security and shrinking pensions. Rhee is also disliked by a large percentage of black DC citizens, who voted out former Mayor Adrian Fenty in part because of his unqualified support for Rhee’s actions. This included firing 4 percent of district teachers, mostly black, and replacing them largely with TFA-style teachers, mostly white, whom one astute black Washingtonian labeled “cultural tourists.”

TFA’s complicity in education reform insanity does not stop there. From its origins, the TFA-led movement to improve the teacher force has

Thus, in the KIPP model, we are presented with the solution to the nation's educational inequalities: for poor children to succeed, they must willingly submit to Taylorist institutionalization.

aligned itself with efforts to expand the role of high-stakes standardized testing in education. TFA insurgents, including Kopp and Rhee, maintain that, even if imperfect, standardized tests are the best means by which to quantify accountability. Prior to the enactment of Bush's bipartisan No Child Left Behind in 2001, high-stakes standardized testing was mostly limited to college-entrance exams such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). But since then, the high-stakes testing movement has blown up: with increasing frequency, student scores on standardized exams are tied to teacher, school, and district evaluations, upon which rewards and punishments are meted out. Obama's "Race to the Top" policy – the brainchild of Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, the former "CEO" of Chicago Public Schools – further codifies high-stakes testing by allocating scarce federal resources to those states most aggressively implementing these so-called accountability measures. The multi-billion dollar testing industry – dominated by a few large corporations that specialize in the making and scoring of standardized tests – has become an entrenched interest, a powerful component of a growing education-industrial complex.

TFA insurgents support standardized testing not only because they believe it ensures accountability. They also herald testing because it provides evidence that their efforts are working. The schools and districts that achieved celebrity as the reform movement's success stories did so by vastly improving standardized test scores. In

emphasizing testing, though, reformers tend to overlook the obvious incentives that ambitious educators have to manipulate statistics. President Bush appointed Houston Superintendent of Schools Rod Paige as Secretary of Education in 2001 because Paige's reform measures seemingly led to skyrocketing graduation rates. Not surprisingly, this so-called "Texas miracle," predicated on falsified numbers, was too good to be true.

More recently, cheating scandals have likewise discredited several celebrated reform projects. In Atlanta, a TFA hotbed, former superintendent and education reform darling Beverly Hall is implicated in a cheating scandal of unparalleled proportions, involving dozens of Atlanta principals and hundreds of teachers, including TFA corps members. Cheating was so brazen in Atlanta that principals hosted pizza parties where teachers and administrators systematically corrected student exams. Following a series of investigative reports in *USA Today*, a new cheating scandal seems to break every week. Cheating has now been confirmed not only in Atlanta, but also in New York City, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Orlando, Dallas, Houston, Dayton, and Memphis, education reform cities all. Rhee's DC "miracle" has also been clouded by suspicion: impossibly high wrong-to-right erasure rates indicate that several of Rhee's "blue ribbon" schools might have cheated their way to higher test scores. Such accusations are nothing new to Rhee. The legend of how she transformed

her Baltimore students – a fable resembling the Hollywood drama *Stand and Deliver*, based on East Los Angeles math teacher Jaime Escalante's work in helping several of his underprivileged students pass the Advanced Placement Calculus exam – has been called into question by investigative reports that suggest fraud.

That education reformers have long argued that "incentives" are necessary to improve the teaching profession underscores another in a series of ironies that mark the movement. Reformers believe that if teachers are subjected to "market forces," such as merit pay and job insecurity, they will work harder to improve the education they provide for their students. The need to incentivize the teaching profession is the most popular argument against teacher's unions, since unions supposedly protect bad teachers. But, in a predictable paradox, by attaching their incentives agenda to standardized testing, the reform movement has induced cheating on a never-before-seen scale, proving the maxim known as Campbell's Law: "The more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor." In sum, the TFA insurgency's singular success has been to empower those best at gaming the system.

In contrast to such "success," the TFA insurgency has failed to dent educational inequality. This comes as no surprise to anyone with the faintest grasp of the tight correlation between economic and educational inequality: TFA does nothing to address the former while spinning its wheels on the latter. In her writings, nowhere does Kopp reflect upon the patent ridiculousness of her expectation that loads of cash donated by corporations that exploit inequalities across the world – such as Union Carbide and Mobil, two of TFA's earliest contributors – will help

her solve some of the gravest injustices endemic to American society. Kopp shows some awareness of the absurdities of her own experiences – including a “fundraising schedule [that] shuttled me between two strikingly different economic spheres: our undersourced classrooms and the plush world of American philanthropy” – but she fails to grasp that this very gap is what makes her stated goal of equality unachievable. In short, Kopp, like education reformers more generally, is an innocent when it comes to political economy. She spouts platitudes about justice for American children, but rarely pauses to ask whether rapidly growing inequality might be a barrier to such justice. She celebrates twenty years of reform movement success, but never tempers such self-congratulatory narcissism with unpleasant questions about why those who have no interest in disrupting the American class structure – such as Bill Gates and the heirs to Sam Walton’s fortunes, by far the most generous education reform philanthropists – are so keen to support the TFA insurgency. Kopp is a parody of the liberal do-gooder.

Of course, liberal notions about the potential of education to serve the ends of justice are nothing new to American social thought. Progressive educators since John Dewey have sold their wares as instruments of justice. And yet, education reform has almost always propped up the social order: just as current reform success is calculated by how well students score on standardized tests, the progressive education movement’s most longstanding success story was its pedagogical program for “Americanization.” Educational progress as measured by how well students stack up against conventional standards will always and inevitably reinforce the status quo. Most of the time, schools are little more than engines of social reproduction.

TFA exists for nothing if not for adjusting poor children to the regime

otherwise known as the American meritocracy. Kopp’s model for how teachers should help poor students acclimate to the American meritocracy is the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP), a nationwide network of charter schools. Founded by TFA alums Mike Feinberg and Dave Levin, and currently lead by CEO Richard Barth, a former TFA staff member who also happens to be Kopp’s husband, KIPP now runs over one hundred schools, typically in cities that staff a multitude of TFA corps members, such as Houston, New Orleans, and New York City. Many KIPP teachers began their careers in education as TFA corps members, and an even higher percentage of KIPP administrators are TFA alums. KIPP schools are in such high demand that students must win lotteries for the opportunity to attend. The *pièce de résistance* of *Waiting for Superman* chronicles one such dramatic lottery drawing.

Slots in KIPP schools are in short supply because, unlike most charter schools, they have a track record of actually improving student performance and of helping poor children gain acceptance into college. Their methodology consists of nothing novel: teachers and students work very hard. But more than that, KIPP students and their families must sign contracts committing to a rigorous program of surveillance – the only way to ensure that underprivileged students overcome lives that otherwise drag them down. As one KIPP administrator described the philosophy: “At every moment, we asked ourselves, what about this moment of the day is or is not fostering college readiness in our students?” While visiting a KIPP school in New York City early one morning, where fifth graders were busy with drills at 7:00 AM, Kopp quietly lamented, without a touch of irony, that her own child of the same age was still in bed. Thus, in the KIPP model, we are presented with the solution to the nation’s edu-

cational inequalities: for poor children to succeed, they must willingly submit to Taylorist institutionalization. This is made starkly evident in the concluding scene of *Waiting for Superman*, when young “Anthony,” one of the lucky few, arrives at his charter school with suitcase in hand, since his particular school boards its students. Anthony is rightly ambivalent about giving up his life with his grandparents and friends in order to attend a SEED Foundation school – the prototype in education reform – where 24-hour supervision is the only way to ensure that poor children have a chance at success.

In working to perfect their approach to education, TFA insurgents miss the forest for the trees. They fail to ask big-picture questions. Will their pedagogy of surveillance make for a more humane society? Having spent their formative years in a classroom learning test-taking skills, will their students become good people? Will they know more history? Will they be more empathetic? Will they be better citizens? Will they be more inclined to challenge the meritocracy? Or, as its newest converts, will they be its most fervent disciples? What does it mean that for children born in the Bronx to go to college they must give up their childhoods, however bleak?

I teach at a second-tier state university in the Midwest that houses a large college of education, not exactly TFA’s prime recruiting territory. And yet, every year a TFA representative briefly stops by our campus to sell our students on TFA and encourage them to apply. Three of my best former students have, to my surprise, been chosen TFA corps members. Although I would never begrudge such hard-won personal victories for my students – well-meaning individuals who hail from decidedly non-privileged backgrounds – in the future I am determined to strongly encourage those students interested in becoming TFA corps members to read Paul Goodman’s *Compulsory*

Mis-Education (1964), in my opinion the single-best critique of the kind of education that the TFA insurgency seeks to perfect.

Goodman's disdain for what the corporate-organized society did to young people was first made apparent in his 1959 bestseller, *Growing Up Absurd*, a response to the "curious" fact that two of the most analyzed phenomena of the 1950s – the "disgrace of the Organized System" and the problem of disaffected youth – were given mutually exclusive treatment. Goodman combined these two popular strands of social commentary – a critique of the bureaucratic society with an analysis of juvenile delinquency – and argued that the former caused the latter. In *Compulsory Mis-Education*, Goodman extended this general critique of the "organized society" to a more specific attack on its socialization method: compulsory schooling. Schooling as socialization, which he described as "'vocational guidance' to fit people wherever they are needed in the productive system," troubled Goodman in means and ends. He both loathed the practice of adjusting children to society and despised the social regime in which children were being adjusted to – "our highly organized system of machine production and its corresponding social relations." For Goodman, compulsory schooling thus prepared "kids to take some part in a democratic society that does not need them."

Goodman was not against education in the strict sense of the word. For him, the question of education was always of kind. In Goodman's world, which I imagine as a sort of utopia, those who seek to institutionalize the poor are the enemies of the good. And teachers – real teachers, those who commit their lives (not two years) to expanding their students' imaginative universes – they are the heroes. I can hardly imagine a better inoculation against the hidden curriculum of liberal do-gooders. 

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LIBERALISM'S EXCLUSIONS AND EXPANSIONS

book review: *Liberalism: A Counter-History*

by Domenico Losurdo,
translated by Gregory Elliott

Verso, 2011, 375 pp.

by Nick Serpe

Domenico Losurdo sets *Liberalism: A Counter-History* with the ambitious task of redefining a centuries-old political tradition. He spends little time exploring the usual definition of liberalism – a system of thought and political organization built on individual liberty – and instead dredges up aspects of it that “have hitherto been largely and unjustly ignored.” Losurdo focuses on the exclusion clauses written into liberal ideas and societies for slaves, laborers, the poor, and colonial peoples. He doesn’t just want to correct a record too hagiographic for his tastes, but to say something profound about paradoxes at the heart of liberalism.

Liberalism argues with liberal thinkers, major and minor, but it isn’t clearly an intellectual history. Against “liberal thought in its abstract purity,” Losurdo draws attention to how liberal theorists, particularly when they wrote about people denied liberty, either justified or glossed troubling aspects of the societies they touted: foremost Great Britain after the Glorious Revolution and the United States, but also the Netherlands, France (at certain moments), post-revolutionary Latin America, and the Germany that emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century. These liberal bastions are responsible for innumerable repressive and even barbarous policies, which today would be called illiberal without hesitation but at the time had no shortage of liberal defenders.

One of Losurdo’s central contentions, however, is that institutions like racial chattel slavery, colonialism, and legally codified class hierarchies

not only found willing liberal apologists, but were expressions of liberal society itself. In his book’s opening salvo, he claims John C. Calhoun, theorist and statesman of the slave-holding American South, for liberalism. Calhoun inveighed against abolitionist “fanatics” and praised compromise; he declared himself an opponent of “absolute government” and believed firmly in constitutionalism. He argued for freedom – but only for some, and at the price of one of the least free and most brutal institutions in human history.

Placing Calhoun at the start of the book serves a few arguments that Losurdo wants to make. The first is that liberalism represented the revolt of civil society against central power, and therefore often led to new, more severe forms of power outside the state – the power of plantation owners, colonial corporations, and urban capitalists. Second, the harshness of these new forms was due in no small part to the foundational position in liberalism of property rights, including the right to human property. Third, membership restrictions on the “community of the free” made liberty all the more precious to its possessors, producing a caste of freemen eager to keep the lower castes (whose full emancipation would lead to far-reaching claims against private property) in place. The eventual enfranchisement of non-property owners, in turn, would rely on a “clear line of demarcation between whites, on the one hand, and blacks and redskins, on the other.”

This is a fairly sophisticated theory, but the inclusion of Calhoun in the liberal pantheon can’t help but raise some eyebrows. Do his arguments

against fanaticism and “absolute governments,” and for “compromise” and constitutionalism, make him a liberal, or a conservative who knew how to mobilize the language of freedom for the benefit of his class? At moments, Losurdo seems to embrace the idea that there was little difference between the two, writing that liberalism’s “celebration of liberty” was “bound up with the reality of an unprecedented absolute power” and “can clearly be interpreted as an ideology.” But as the book goes on, it becomes clear that he doesn’t see every liberal theorist as a shill for existing configurations of power and wealth.

At the same time, Losurdo opposes the idea that some internal dialectic of freedom pushed liberals to confront more honestly the exclusions of early liberalism. Instead, he points to major conflicts within the community of the free – during the American Revolution, the French and Haitian Revolutions, the American Civil War, and the First World War – as moments of mutual embarrassment and demystification, when those on opposite sides of a political question exposed the forms of unfreedom their adversaries had institutionalized. The American revolutionaries, for example, proclaimed that they suffered under the yoke of “political slavery.” The British replied by “ironiz[ing] about the flag of liberty waved by slave-owners” and pointing to the brutal treatment of Native Americans. It became trickier, though not impossible, for liberals to justify slavery in the aftermath of these polemics. In the aftermath of the Civil War, they abandoned that line of argument altogether, though not yet the principle of race-based democracy. As a result of these bloody conflicts, liberalism absorbed more inclusive and even egalitarian ideas, demonstrating the “flexibility” that is one of the few merits Losurdo attributes to the tradition.

Though in some cases, like the American Revolution, the opposing sides in a conflict were composed of liberals with competing interests, in others Losurdo finds a different dynamic at work. During the French Revolution, he argues, people once inspired by the American Revolution became saddened that its promise of freedom had succumbed to an entrenched racial state. They ceased, in their disillusionment, to analyze liberal societies solely from the stance of the community of the free. Losurdo’s word for disillusioned liberalism is “radicalism,” a tradition whose proponents recognized that freedom from the state did

not equal freedom in general, at least for the vast majority. According to Losurdo, more than any specific political commitment, radicalism entailed a shift from the perspective of those who enjoyed freedom to those who did not, and a willingness to allow the latter to take the “struggle for recognition” into their own hands.

The radical perspective gives lie to the division between what Benjamin Constant, in the wake of the French Revolution, called the “liberty of the ancients” (self-government) and the “liberty of the moderns” (the right to a private life and private property, free from state interference). Liberal defenders of the status quo praised modern, or (in Isaiah Berlin’s words) “negative,” liberty above all else, especially when it came to the redistribution of wealth. The majority, of course, did not have property to enjoy, in large part because they were denied the “positive” liberty to participate in governing their societies. More than disenfranchising the poor, however, liberals often showed a tendency, in theory and practice, “to govern the existence of the popular classes even in its smallest details” – through mandatory church attendance, internment of vagrants in workhouses, and restrictions on assembly, among other regulations. Both positive and negative liberty were out of their reach.

Losurdo argues, though only briefly, that radicalism owed as much to the Christian religion (which some liberals hoped to sweep away as so much superstition) as to the idea of freedom itself. By the end of the book, he mostly abandons that suggestion and instead describes “two liberalisms,” one that identified “true liberty” with untrammeled control by the master over *his* family, as well as *his* servants and *his* goods,” the other “mobilized by servants, who refused to let themselves be assimilated to the master’s belongings and pursued emancipation through intervention by political power on their behalf, be it existing political power or that formed in the wake of a revolution from below.” The latter, of course, sounds nearly identical to the “radicalism” described as a force opposing liberalism a few chapters earlier – an unresolved tension in Losurdo’s book that might lead us to question whether “liberalism” and “radicalism” can be so neatly separated. Even Kant and Mill, Losurdo admits, had something of the radical perspective in them; and on the other side, the *Rheinische Zeitung*, which Marx edited in the early 1840s, was

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"To be born, or at any rate, bred in a handbag, whether it had handles or not, seems to me to display a contempt for the ordinary decencies of family life that remind one of the worst excesses of the French Revolution."

—Oscar Wilde

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a radical paper but also a “liberal” one.

Losurdo's relentless muckraking sometimes comes at the expense of a fuller picture of liberalism. If he admits to “two liberalisms,” it’s the more conservative of them that he spends most of the book exposing, and the less conservative that he most often calls “radicalism” rather than liberalism as such. Losurdo’s book is, no doubt intentionally, a reading of liberalism from the perspective of those it marginalized or worse, but he often seems afraid of allowing “radicalism” and “liberalism” to bleed into one another. Both Hayek and Von Mises, for instance, make cameos in Losurdo’s scant comments on the twentieth century after the First World War, denouncing liberal concessions to socialism; Keynes and Rawls, on the other hand, receive not a single mention.

This selection-bias problem will dog any book that covers so much ground and ties together so many contested historical interpretations. Losurdo is almost unbelievably well-read, which perhaps explains why his wide-ranging text lacks a systematic explanation of what makes liberalism liberalism. In some ways, this is to Losurdo’s benefit: though one can pick apart some of his interpretations or his nearly automatic skepticism of liberalism, he reaches numerous provocative conclusions, not all of which must stand in order for his book to persuade. Take, for example, perhaps his most provocative conclusion of all, sketched quickly in the final chapter of *Liberalism*: that total war, extermination, and the racial ordering of society, which would gain such a bad name in the wake of the Second World War, found expression in liberal society and thought decades earlier. Although he draws the conclusion from other scholars’ work, students of fascism will rightly dispute a vulgar genealogy in which liberalism leads to Nazism. But attending to the contradictory and sometimes cruel results of the liberal emancipation of civil society – including the liberal embrace of eugenics – is an important task for anyone concerned with avoiding a characterization of “the catastrophe of the twentieth century as a kind of new barbarian invasion that unexpectedly attacked and overwhelmed a healthy, happy society.”

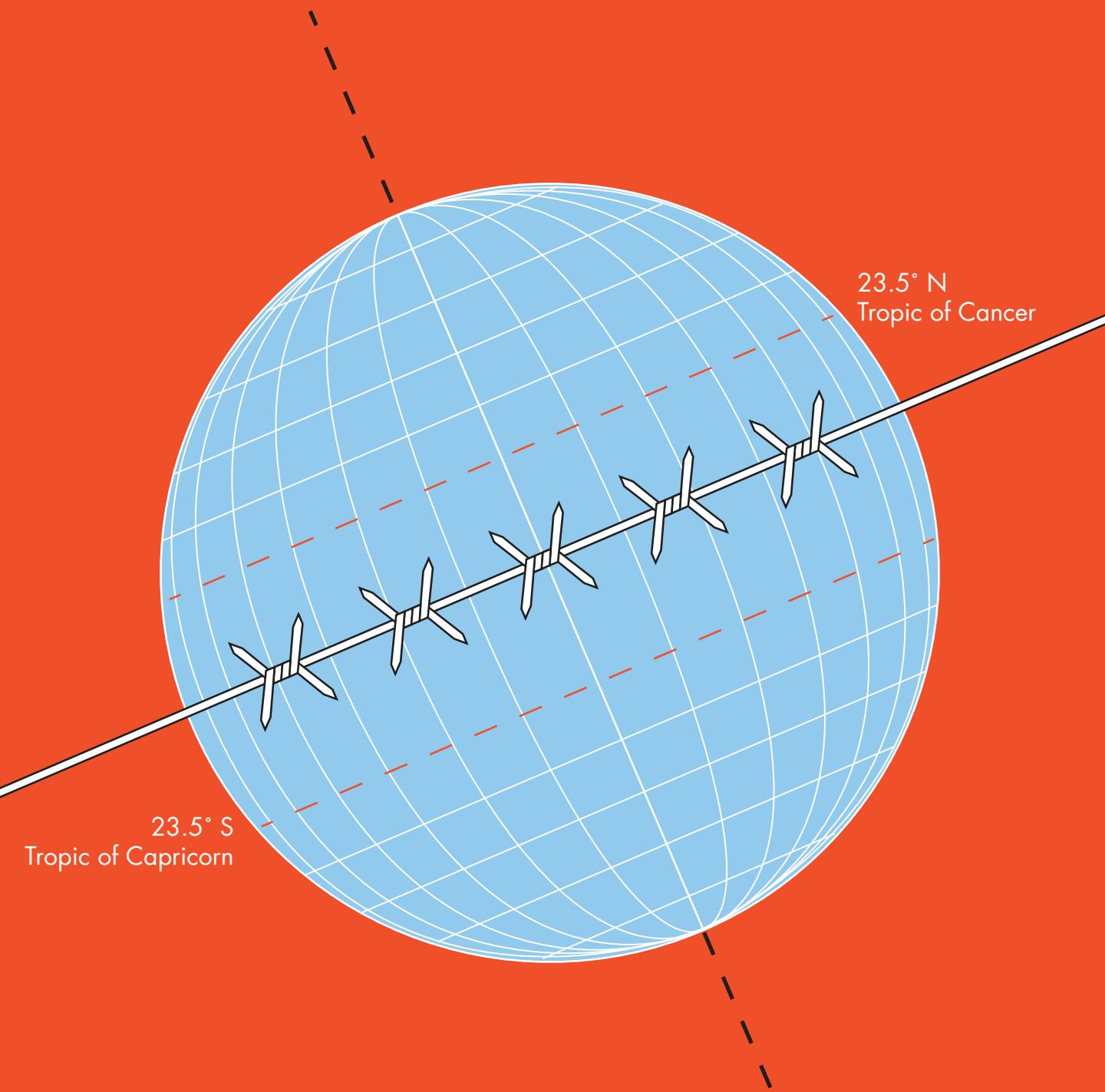
Losurdo’s book is more than just a useful intervention in liberal historiography. But because he cuts it off with some brief comments on the Second World War, he never integrates liberal-

ism’s developments since its encounter with socialism, the end of colonialism, legal desegregation, and the liberation of women with his theories stemming from the revolt of civil society. In particular, Losurdo’s silence on women’s struggles for recognition is so complete as to be puzzling. Does he leave these struggles aside because liberals like Bentham and Mill were fierce critics of their patriarchal society?

Instead of turning his critical eye to liberal ideas that blossomed in the twentieth century, like humanitarian interventionism and welfarism, he leaves off with open-ended questions like, “has liberalism definitely left behind it the dialectic of emancipation and dis-emancipation, with all the dangers of regression and restoration implicit in it?” Tacking an extra century onto his study would have required substantial additions to an already hefty book, but given the entanglements and paradoxes of contemporary liberalism, one can’t help but wish he’d undertaken the effort.

There is another absence in *Liberalism* that should trouble even readers sympathetic to the book’s arguments: capitalism is everywhere felt, but almost nowhere named. In one passage Losurdo explicitly distances “radicalism” from “socialism,” which he believes can involve exclusions (specifically with respect to colonies) similar to those in liberalism. In another passage he praises the liberal emphasis on “competition between individuals in the market” for creating social wealth and developing productive capacities, provided those markets meet certain conditions that prewar liberal societies never did. Liberals and radicals have found themselves on both sides of recent debates on imperialism and, after the victories of identity politics, seem to agree to a large extent on the “perspective” question that for Losurdo is a dividing line. Their disagreements on questions of economic organization and power should now be all the more salient.

Liberalism was published in Italy over five years ago, when the American empire probably seemed a more pressing concern than global capitalism. If it wasn’t obvious then, it should be now: critics of the forces that are subverting democracy and the free development of all individuals will need to do more than see through the eyes of the wretched of the earth. But for the crass realists who would say that this, alas, is the best of all possible worlds, a shift in perspective would be a very good place to start. 



WHO KILLED EKARU LORUMAN?

by Christian Parenti

Ekaru Loruman lay beneath a flat-topped acacia tree, its latticework of branches casting a soft mesh of shade upon his body. He wore a silver earring and khaki shorts, and lay on his side with his arm twisted awkwardly beneath him. The left side of Ekaru's forehead was gone, blown away by the exit of a bullet. His blood formed a greasy black slick on the desert floor. His sandals, shawl and gun had been stolen.

Ekaru had been a pastoralist from the Turkana tribe who live in northwest Kenya, on the arid savannas of the Rift Valley. He had been killed the day before when a neighboring and related tribe, the Pokot, launched a massive cattle raid. Ekaru's corpse lay here on the ground exposed to the elements with goats and sheep browsing nearby because the Turkana do not bury people killed in raids. They believe doing so is bad luck; that it will only invite more attacks. So they leave their dead to decompose where they fall. But these supernatural precautions will not hold the enemy at bay, for there are profound social and climatological forces driving them to attack.

The group of Turkana I was visiting had been pushed south by severe drought and were now grazing their herds at the very edge of their traditional range. In the pastoralist corridor of East

Africa a basic pattern is clear: during times of drought, water and grazing become scarce, the herds fall ill, many cattle die. To replenish stocks, young men raid their neighbors. The onset of anthropocentric climate change means Kenya is seeing rising temperatures and more frequent drought. Yet, overall it is actually receiving greater amounts of precipitation. The problem is, the rain now arrives erratically, in sudden violent bursts, all at once, rather than gradually over a season. This means eroding floods, followed by drought. The clockwork rains, upon which Kenyan agriculture and society depends, are increasingly out of sync.

Why did Ekaru Loruman die? What forces compelled his murder? Ekaru, who had been about thirty-five years old – age among the Turkana is usually just estimated – had three wives, eight children and about fifty head of cattle. He had been an important and powerful man in his community: a warrior in his prime – old enough to have plenty of experience and wisdom but still young and strong enough to run and fight for days on little food or water. And now he was dead. Why?

We could say tradition killed Ekaru, the age-old tradition of “stock theft,” cattle raiding among the Nilotics tribes of East Africa. Or, we could say

he was murdered by a specific man, a Pokot from the Karasuk Hills. Or, that Ekaru was killed by the drought. When the drought gets bad, the raiding picks up.

Or perhaps Ekaru was killed by forces yet larger; forces transcending the specifics of this regional drought, this raid, this geography and the Nilotic cattle cultures. To my mind, while walking through the desert among the Turkana warriors scanning the Karasuk hills for the Pokot war party, it seemed clear that Ekaru's death was caused by the most colossal set of events in human history: the catastrophic convergence of poverty, violence and climate change.

Climate change arrives in a world primed for crisis. The current and impending dislocations of climate change intersect with the already existing crises of poverty and violence. By this "catastrophic convergence," I do not merely mean that several disasters happen simultaneously, one problem atop another. Rather, I am arguing that problems compound and amplify each other, one expressing itself through another.

Societies, like people, deal with new challenges in ways that are conditioned by the traumas of their past. Thus damaged societies, like damaged people, often respond to new crises in ways that are irrational, shortsighted and self-destructive. In the case of climate change, the past traumas that set the stage for bad adaptation, a destructive social response, are Cold War era militarism and the economic pathologies of neoliberal capitalism. Over the last forty years both these forces have distorted the state's relationship to society – removing and undermining the state's collectivist, regulatory, and redistributive functions; while over developing its repressive and military capacities. And this, I argue, inhibits society's ability to avoid violent dislocations as climate change kicks in. Thus, in much of the world it seems that the only solidarity that can be deployed in response to climate change is an exclusionary tribalism, and the only state policy available is police repression. This is not "natural" and inevitable, but is rather the result of a history, particularly the Global North's use and abuse of the Global South, that has destroyed the institutions and social practices that would allow a different, more productive, response.

The Cold War sowed instability throughout the Third World; its myriad proxy wars left a legacy of armed groups, cheap weapons, smuggling

networks and corrupted officialdoms in developing countries. Neoliberal economic policies – radical privatization and economic deregulation enforced by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank – have pushed many economies in the Global South into permanent crisis and extreme inequality. In these societies, the state has often been reduced to a hollow shell, devoid of the institutional capacity it needs to guide economic development or address social crises.

Sometimes these two forces worked together simultaneously; sometimes they were quite distinct. For example, Somalia was destroyed by Cold War military interventions. It became a classic proxy battleground. Though it underwent some economic liberalization, the cause of its collapse was its use as a pawn on the chessboard of the grand game. Similarly, Afghanistan is a failed state produced by Cold War militarism. It never underwent structural adjustment, but it was a key proxy battleground. On the other hand, Mexico, the north of which is now in a profound violent crisis, was not a frontline state during the Cold War. But it was subject to radical and brutal economic liberalization.

Climate change now joins these crises, acting as an accelerant. The Pentagon calls it a "threat multiplier." All across the planet, extreme weather and water scarcity now inflame and escalate already existing social conflicts. Columbia University's Earth Institute and the International Crisis Group, combining databases on civil wars and water availability, found that: "When rainfall is significantly below normal, the risk of a low-level conflict escalating to a full-scale civil war approximately doubles the following year."^{*} The project cites the example of Nepal where the Maoist insurgency was most severe after droughts and almost nonexistent in areas that had normal rainfall. In some cases, when the rains were late or light, or came all at once, or at the wrong time, "semi-retired" armed groups often reemerged to start fighting again.

Between the Tropic of Capricorn and the Tropic of Cancer lies the Tropic of Chaos, a belt of economically and politically battered post-colonial states girding the planet's mid-latitudes. In this band, around the tropics, climate change is beginning to hit hardest. The societies in this belt are also heavily dependent on agriculture and fishing thus very vulnerable to shifts in weather patterns. This region was also on the front lines of

^{*}
Quoted in: Susan George, "Globalisation and war," *International Congress of IPPNW*, New Delhi, 10 March 2008; posted online at accessed 24 June 2008;

"Climate Change and Conflict," International Crisis Group Report, November 2007.

the cold war and of neoliberal economic restructuring. As a result, it is in this belt that we find clustered most of the failed and semi-failed states of the developing world.

According to a Swedish government study: “There are 46 countries – home to 2.7 billion people – in which the effects of climate change interacting with economic, social and political problems will create a high risk of violent conflict.”[†] Their list covers that same terrain. It is also these mid-latitudes that are now being most affected by the onset of anthropocentric climate change.

Western military planners, if not political leaders, recognize the dangers in the convergence of political disorder and climate change. Instead of worrying about conventional wars over food and water, they see an emerging geography of climatologically driven civil war, migration, pogroms and social breakdown. In response, they envision a project of open-ended counterinsurgency on a global scale.

Our challenge is to come up with other more just solutions. The watchwords of the climate discussion are *mitigation* and *adaptation*. We must mitigate the causes of climate change, while adapting to its effects. *Mitigation* means drastically cutting our production of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, like methane and chlorofluorocarbons that prevent the sun’s heat from radiating back out to space. Mitigation means moving towards clean energy sources such as wind, solar power, geothermal and tidal kinetics. It means closing coal-fired power plants, weaning our economy off oil, building a smart electrical grid, and possibly making massive investments in carbon capture and sequestration technologies.

Adaptation, on the other hand, means preparing to live with the *effects* of climatological changes, some of which are already underway, and some of which are inevitable, “in the pipeline.” Adaptation is both a technical and a political challenge.

Technical adaptation means transforming our relationship to nature as nature transforms: learning to live with the damage we have wrought by building seawalls around vulnerable coastal cities, giving land back to mangroves and everglades so they may act to break tidal surges during giant storms, opening wildlife migration corridors so species can move north as the climate warms, and developing sustainable forms of agriculture that can function on an industrial scale even as

weather patterns gyrate wildly.

Political adaptation, on the other hand, means transforming humanity’s relationship to itself, transforming social relations among people. Successful political adaptation to climate change will mean developing new ways of containing, avoiding and deescalating the violence that climate change fuels. That will require economic redistribution and development. It will also require a new diplomacy of peace building.

But there is another type of political adaptation already underway, which might be called the politics of the armed lifeboat: responding to climate change by arming, excluding, forgetting, repressing, policing and killing. One can imagine a green authoritarianism emerging in rich countries, while the climate crisis pushes the Third World into chaos. Already, as climate change fuels violence in the form of crime, repression, civil unrest, war and even state collapse in the Global South, the North is responding with a new authoritarianism. The Pentagon and its European allies are actively planning a militarized adaptation, which emphasizes the long-term, open-ended containment of failed or failing states – counterinsurgency forever.

This sort of “climate fascism” – a politics based on exclusion, segregation and repression – is horrific and bound to fail. There must be another path. The struggling states of the Global South cannot collapse without eventually taking down wealthy economies with them. If climate change is allowed to destroy whole economies and nations, no amount of walls, guns, barbed wire, armed aerial drones, and permanently deployed mercenaries can save one half of the planet from the other half.

The best way to address the effects of climate change, that is to adapt, is to tackle the political and economic crises that have rendered us so vulnerable to climate-induced chaos in the first place. That is, to roll back neoliberalism and reign in militarism. But ultimately, mitigation remains the most important strategy. The physical impacts of climate change – rising sea levels, desertification, freak storms and flooding – are frightening enough, but so too are the social and political aspects of adaptation also underway, and are too often taking destructive and repressive forms. We must change that. But ultimately, the most important thing is mitigation: we must de-carbonize our economy. 

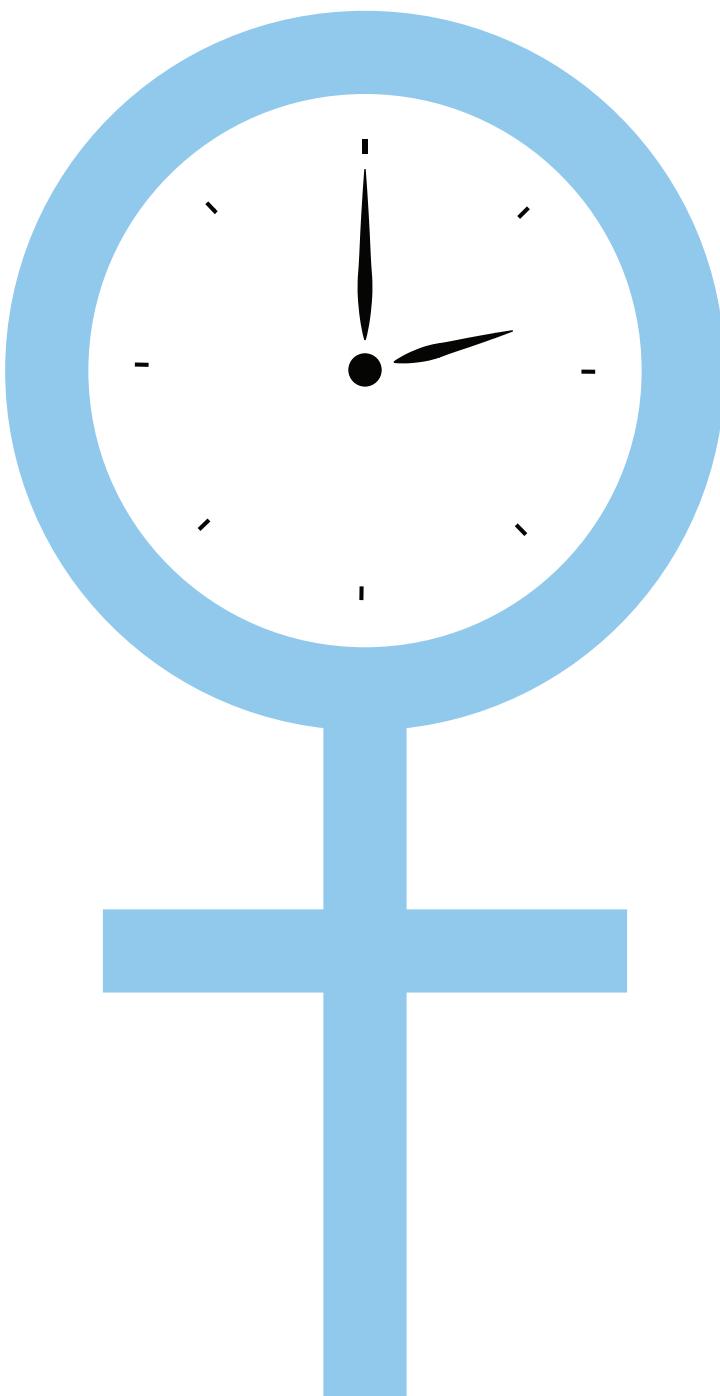
†

Dan Smith and Janani Vivekananda, “A Climate of Conflict: the Links between Climate Change, Peace and War,” (Stockholm: Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, February 2008) pp. 7.

The preceding was adapted from Tropic of Chaos: Climate Change and the New Geography of Violence, published by Nation Books.

WORKING TIME AND FEMINISM

by Peter Frase



The Great Recession and the Occupy Wall Street upheaval have finally made the distribution of income a topic of public discussion again, but seldom do we speak about the distribution of *time*. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, working-class movements struggled not just for higher wages, but also for shorter hours, as they successively won the ten hour day, the eight hour day, and the forty hour week. In recent years, however, reductions in work time have been off the agenda. At the household level, with more families containing two full-time workers, the hours of paid employment have risen dramatically. For radicals, the demand for reduced working time is a reclamation of the age-old insistence that leisure time is essential to a free and prosperous humanity: it was Marx who said, approvingly quoting an anonymous polemic, that “wealth is disposable time, and nothing more.” Yet time ought to be on the agenda for liberals, as well. Research suggests that workers are actually more productive when they work shorter schedules; taking some of our increased economic productivity in the form of free time rather than more commodities would be better for the environment; and, as Germany’s experience with work sharing has shown, reducing hours does less economic and human damage than firing employees in a weak economy.

And there is another, less widely appreciated reason to be concerned with working time: the issue is fundamentally linked to feminism and the struggle for gender equality. The length of the wage-working day is intimately connected to the time devoted to unwaged work – the unpaid cooking, cleaning, shopping, care of children and elders, and so on. Reducing time spent in wage labor creates more time for these other tasks, which according to a recent *OECD* report are as time consuming as paid labor. But the question then becomes whether this work will be shared equally between the sexes. The *OECD* study also

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found that American women daily spend nearly two hours more than men on unpaid work.

Given that fact, there is a danger that any reform which makes it easier to reduce paid working time will inadvertently tend to reinforce the gender division of labor, in which men do more paid work and women do more of the less-appreciated work in the home. Research suggests that women will generally be more likely to reduce their hours than men when the opportunity presents itself, for a complex set of cultural, political, and economic reasons. Women then face discrimination in the labor market as employers begin to assume that men will work more hours. This has become a matter of increasing concern even in countries such as the Netherlands, which offers a beguiling model for shorter-hours advocates due to its strong protections for part-timers and large number of part-time jobs. For supporters of what Janet Gornick and Marcia Meyers call the “dual caregiver, dual earner” model, in which men and women participate equally in both paid and unpaid labor, exacerbating these inequalities would be an unfortunate unintended consequence of a policy meant to shorten the work week for everyone.

Of course, even if men and women can be induced to reduce their hours equally, there’s no guarantee that a man will contribute more to household work. In the long run, the only solution to this dilemma is to make men do their share of unpaid labor. This will require a transformation of everyday life, a cultural revolution that goes far beyond what any change in the law can accomplish. But getting men to spend time in the home is a good start, so it’s worth examining how policies can be designed to facilitate reductions in paid working time for everyone.

Radicals are sometimes leery of detailed examinations of public policy, since “policy analysis” tends to be associated with a depoliticized kind of research, which tries to isolate the technocratic management of society from political and ideological struggle. But short of the final revolutionary reckoning, leftists inevitably find themselves fighting for reforms – that is, demanding the implementation of particular policies. So it’s important to place policy design within the larger framework of Left politics, rather than simply ignoring it.

With respect to the politics of time, legislation on paid parental leave is an instructive case study.

In almost every country – the United States being the notable exception – the government guarantees some paid leave from work after the birth of a child. However, the implementation of the policy differs widely and can lead to very different outcomes. One issue that bedevils all these systems is the fact that leave tends to be taken disproportionately by women, even when it’s available to fathers.

There have been some creative responses to this problem. In Sweden, for example, couples are guaranteed a total of 480 days of paid parental leave, but 75 percent are taken by women. In an attempt to address this imbalance, sixty days are now set aside specifically for men. (Single parents and same-sex couples are also fully eligible for leave, though, obviously, the gender-parity issue does not apply in that case.) This is a good start and it seems to be having some genuine impact on the gender division of labor, even if it doesn’t yet get us to a complete gender parity.

With traditional gender roles so hard to change, there is a good case for more aggressive action. In 2008, Sweden added a “gender equality bonus” of up to 275 euros per month, which is paid to families based on how equally leave time is divided between mother and father. Ariel Meysam Ayanna, writing in the *University of Pennsylvania Journal of Labor and Employment Law*, suggests a related policy, which not only replaces a parent’s wage but pays a *higher* wage while on parental leave. Whether or not these specific policies are the right ones, it’s apparent that something comparably forceful will be necessary to get men to take up their share of responsibility in the household.

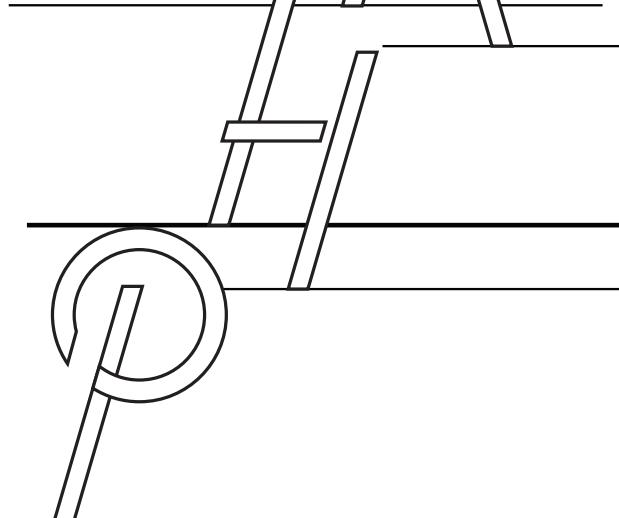
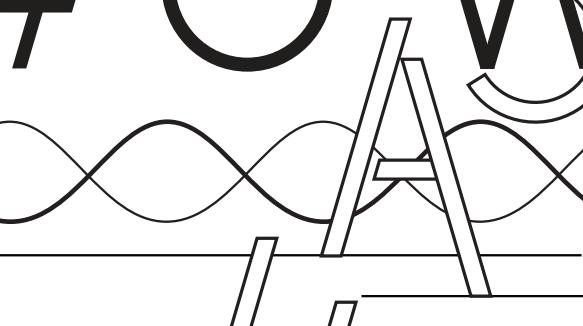
In the long run, moving toward equality in unpaid working time is in the interests of men, too. With de-industrialization and the transition to cultural and service industry jobs, the advantages men – particularly less educated men – once enjoyed in the labor market are being eroded. One possible result of this transition is that more and more men will feel embittered and hopeless, as they are cut off from the stable employment that has long been regarded as a source of social standing and self-worth for the male breadwinner. But the alternative is to change our view of what kind of work is socially valuable and to recognize that what happens outside of wage labor – work that sustains and reproduces all of us – should be held in equal esteem. 

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