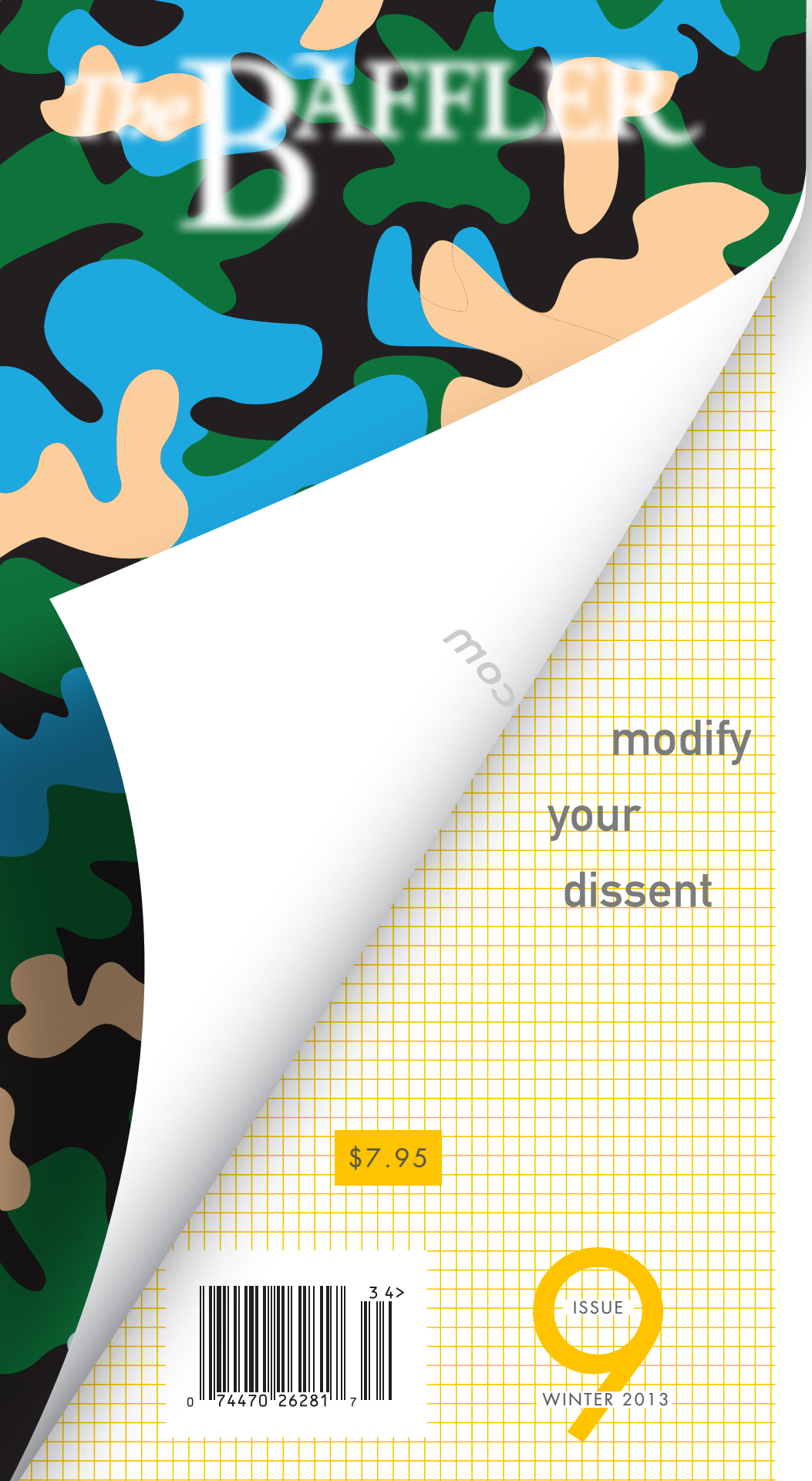

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MODIFY YOUR DISSENT

by Peter Frase

The *Baffler* was formative to my intellectual development. Founded by Thomas Frank and Keith White in Virginia in 1988, and published out of Chicago throughout most of the 1990s, the journal of political and cultural criticism was one of the brightest lights in the otherwise dim constellation of left-wing writing during those years. Hence I take comparisons between the *Baffler* and *Jacobin* as the greatest of compliments.

More than simply a collection of essays, each issue of the *Baffler* sang with a single voice, theoretically coherent, and yet undogmatic, led by Frank's vision but sprawling beyond it. Compiled into two book collections, its greatest hits dissect the spirit of the era, making it not implausible to speak of a "Baffler school" of criticism. Clear-eyed, angry, and free of jargon, the essays in *Commodify Your Dissent* exposed the fatuity of "alternative" culture and its corporatized rebellion, while those in *Boob Jubilee* tackled a dominant neoliberal populism that praised the market as demoracy's purest form.

The *Baffler* was an important tributary of the faltering 1990s left, which helped form many of us who would later create *Jacobin*. It represents impulses that we strive to live up to and continue.

The *Baffler* was recently revived by John Summers. But despite carrying some valuable content, the new version is a pale reflection of the old. An attitude of generalized refusal that once seemed bracing and courageous now seems tired and redundant. And Frank himself, who still writes for the publication, has long been on a downward trajectory. It's been dispiriting to see his tone, never particularly optimistic to begin with, turn in an increasingly cramped and reactionary direction. Beginning with *What's the Matter With Kansas*, his voice has been ever more diminished, less telling it like it is and more unproductive carping from the sidelines of the struggle.

Frank's latest salvo in the *Baffler* is about Occupy, and it begins on a hopeful note before curdling into frustration and contempt. Occupy, says Frank, was a manifest failure, done in by a predilection for academic jargon and a fetish for horizontalism. The timing could hardly have been worse, as the essay circulated just before the hurricane that prompted the emergence of Occupy Sandy.

But it was not an argument wholly without merit. Frank leads the essay with a quote from Natasha Lennard taken from a *Jacobin*-sponsored panel on Occupy, a rambling bit of postructuralism that he derides as "pseudo-intellectual gibberish." It's a criticism others on the panel that night might have shared, but Frank blows it up out of all proportion. Though Lennard was actually a journalist covering Occupy rather than an organizer of it, her comments are sufficient that he "knew instantly that this thing was doomed."

The Theory-inflected quality of Occupy's rhetoric was inevitable, however, given the wasteland from which it emerged. Most young people didn't grow up reading the *Baffler*, nor did they have contact with whatever remains of the organized left.

Aside from a few isolated corners of the Internet, the only place they are likely to have encountered ideas to the left of liberalism is the classroom, where New Left exiles continued to teach radical thought through the lean years. Post-structuralism and related bodies of theory are therefore bound to make up much of the vocabulary for young activists attempting to develop their political analysis beyond gut-level rage. Frank mistakes these students for their teachers, carrying over grudges against nineties postmodernist academics into the present.

It is a mistake, moreover, to focus obsessively on the verbiage of Occupy's theorists, to the exclusion of the inchoate sentiments of its rank and file. Frank briefly expresses his respect for the "We are the 99 Percent" Tumblr feed, before quickly turning back to his preoccupation

with academia. His essay is, in fact, mostly not about Occupy at all, but about *books about Occupy*, some of them by aging academics who had little to do with it. In this regard it is far less useful than, for example, the effort of Roosevelt Institute fellow and *Jacobin* contributor Mike Konczal to extract the implicit ideology of the people who posted handwritten tales of hardship on the Tumblr.

Within his limited field of vision, Frank does score some points. He makes one especially astute observation, which he then misinterprets in a way that's symptomatic of his broader misapprehension. He notes a striking similarity in rhetoric emanating from Occupy and the Tea Party: leaderlessness, protesting as an end in itself, a hostility to explicit demands. For the Tea Party, this is largely a sham, since its strings were always pulled by a handful of moneymen and political operators. Occupy enacts the same themes for real and to its detriment, Frank believes, with its refusal of hierarchical organization and message coherence leading to its downfall.

Frank is hardly the first to point out the problems with this style of organizing. But he makes a wrong turn when he offers it all as a testament to "the lazy, reflexive libertarianism that suffuses our idea of protest these days." This demonstrates the limitations of the curmudgeonly politics that he pioneered with the *Baffler*, according to which apparent dissent was only so much viral marketing. Decrying the foolishness of everyone around you can be a revolutionary act when they're all stock market swindlers and MTV rebels. But when the target is a movement that is trying, however awkwardly, to challenge capitalism, it amounts to an anti-materialist insistence that the dogmatic verities of the critic are superior to the organic impulses of the masses. Here the laziness and reflexivity is Frank's.

Frank is unwilling to see the strains of thought in existing protest movements as raw material for something more effective, and treats them only as self-defeating dead ends. Perhaps this is why he seems to have no prospective vision whatsoever, beyond staging historical reenactments of the protest movements of the past. His essay ends by enjoining activists to "reenact Flint, Michigan, circa 1937," or even "Omaha, 1892."

The young Marx writes, in a letter to Arnold Ruge, that it is essential to avoid telling political movements "Cease your struggles, they are foolish; we will give you the true slogan of struggle." His alternative was to "merely show the world what it is really fighting for, and consciousness is something that it has to acquire, even if it does not want to." This is much more in the spirit of Konczal's approach of taking disorganized ideas and attempting to give them form, something I also tried to contribute to in an online essay about partisanship and ideology. There I claim that Occupy represents, in part, a move toward transcending the hollow partisanship of Republicans and Democrats as political brands, and develop a truly ideological politics grounded in class consciousness.

The inability to empathize with the people who produced Occupy leads Frank to set himself up as a fun-loathing scold. He makes much of Slavoj Žižek's injunction that Occupy needed to guard against falling in love with itself, because "carnivals come cheap." The carnival is portrayed as a distraction from the real work of politics. But while the carnival was insufficient, it was not meaningless. The collective ecstasy of OWS's "carnival" is something that needs to be part of the Left, even if it can't be the whole of it. This is the point Audrea Lim makes in the last issue of *Jacobin*, and that Barbara Ehrenreich makes, about revolutionary joy more generally, in *Dancing in the Streets*.

This anhedonia is not a new problem for Frank, as pointed out in one of the sharpest critiques of his later style, by the late Ellen Willis. Willis classifies Frank as part of the vogue for class reductionist liberalism among a passel of mostly white men – Richard Rorty, Michael Tomasky, Michael Lind – who lamented the "culture wars" and argued that any serious liberal politics ought to be founded on a program of economic populism. But as Willis argues, the idea that cultural concerns are antithetical to class politics "rests on a populist identity politics that associates conventional morality with working class values." This dour politics makes it "a point of working-class pride, solidarity, and salt-of-the-earth status to reject the 'decadence' of the rich and the upper middle class as well as the fecklessness of the very poor."

I make a related point in my review of Kathi Weeks' recent book in an earlier issue of *Jacobin*, where I argued that we should not equate the work ethic with some kind of moral virtue. Instead, I follow Weeks in proposing that we must be open to "a politics that appeals to pleasure and desire, rather than to sacrifice and asceticism," one which "simultaneously takes up the cause of wage laborers while undermining their identity as wage laborers."

This way of thinking seems alien to Frank, and to the *Baffler* generally. The role of cultural scold, and the unwillingness to see positive aspects in popular culture, or to regard pleasure except in terms of accommodation, betrays his conservative streak. And the Baffler School's persistent hostility to the pop element of

populism telegraphs a later turn to crude economic reductionism, rooted in the conviction that the real working class only cares about the size of its paychecks. But the paycheck is only a means to something else, the ability to care more about other things – including the trivial, "academic," hedonistic, and merely cultural. Moreover, the crude separation of the economic from the cultural denies the way in which feminism, for example, is inseparable from economics, as Sarah Leonard pointed out in our last editorial.

Perhaps the trouble is not just theoretical but also historical. Whatever its limitations, Frank's brand of Mencken-esque dyspepsia was far better suited to the era of the original *Baffler* than to our own. Paging through the second act, it's easy to forget how essential and inspiring the original run was, and how necessary for its time.

"Lazy, reflexive libertarianism" fits the era in which the Baffler emerged, but does it really fit ours? At a time when capitalist apologetics and "There Is No Alternative" resignation were emanating even from allegedly radical quarters, there was value in reminding us that the market was still "the God that sucked."

Cultural studies was degenerating into a bizarre kind of obscurantist populism that found agency and resistance in every television sitcom. Investment boosterism elevated stock market speculation into an ecstatic demos in which the common man could command his own destiny. Drinking Mountain Dew and listening to Pearl Jam was sold as a revolutionary act. Even the best cultural criticism of the era, like the online magazine Suck.com, tended toward cynical snarking and what Fredric Jameson called "blank irony," a degenerate form of ridicule that no longer recognizes any authentic standard of comparison for the things it derides.

Snark and sarcasm, on the one hand, and market boosterism on the other, still dominate the discourse, but their content and purpose has changed. Today's culture is characterized not so much by pervasive nihilism as by a series of peculiar inversions, in which the *Onion* presents incisive news analysis in the guise of satire and TV news passes off cheap entertainment as useful information. Some of the most class-conscious and bitingly political commentary in the popular media can be found on Gawker, ostensibly a gossip site. These publications are the descendants of the Generation X culture of the nineties, but their young writers tend to use humor more as a container for sincere rage than as a vehicle for narcotizing apathetic detachment.

This represents an incipient failure mode of what Mark Fisher calls "Capitalist Realism," the condition in which all political alternatives are obliterated, and the system persists through sheer inevitability rather than legitimacy. The tech bubble represents, in retrospect, capitalism's last serious attempt at an overarching positive ideology, which Frank aptly diagnosed as market populism. What remains in the wake of its collapse is a grim politics based on fear – fear of terrorism, the Tea Party's fear of the Other, and the fear generated by economic insecurity and high unemployment. The housing bubble briefly graced the fear era with a parody of a positive ideology. But the notion that we can all be rich by selling ever-appreciating houses to the next greater fool was weak sauce even by the standards of market populism.

Beneath the scares and bubbles there remains the exploitation of labor, which leads inexorably back to dissatisfaction and revolt. The thinkers of the young left have revived interest in Italian autonomist Marxism, which posited the resistance of workers at the point of production as the motor of history that impelled capitalists to transform their own productive relations. This approach is at least well-suited to the conditions of cultural workers churning out content for websites that soak up the attention of bored office workers. By identifying an appetite for class war in their audience, the blogging proletariat, doing a new kind of piece-work, has turned the amoral hunger for page views to subversive ends. This is not subversion in the shallow discursive sense of mediocre nineties cultural theory, but in that of fomenting solidarity with real movements, from striking fast food workers to Strike Debt activists.

The future favors the exploited. Predictions of a permanent Democratic majority in the wake of the 2012 election are premature, but the underlying trends are real. American politics is every year less dominated by the old and white. The class consciousness that seeps out of the pores of the culture these days may as yet be politically inchoate, but that it exists at all is a significant development.

Meanwhile, the Left is showing some hints of regeneration, with Occupy a symbol for broader developments, and Marxism is creeping back into the fringes of polite intellectual discussion. The trajectory of *Jacobin* itself is evidence of the increasing permeability of the media to leftist ideas. Despite frequently avowing solidly Marxist politics that place us well to the left of the *Baffler*, over our brief existence our content has been discussed or republished by mainstream media companies like the *Washington Post* and the *Boston Globe* and newer online outlets like Salon and Gawker. The *Baffler*'s best known mainstream media hit, meanwhile, was their role in hilariously

trolling the *New York Times* and other outlets for printing a made-up list of "Grunge slang."

A period of reawakening consciousness and militancy requires a different approach than a time of near-universal complacency. So even if the *Baffler* is one of the closest identifiable predecessors to *Jacobin*, the similarities conceal serious differences of purpose. Consider contributing editor Gavin Mueller, superficially the most Bafflerian of our regular writers: his stylistic panache and his amalgam of wit and insight about our ruling economic tropes evoke Tom Frank at the height of his powers. But when Mueller writes about culture, as the *Baffler* often did, he does so to quite different purposes. Compare his new bravura exegesis, of the *Onion*'s "Sex House," with a typical Baffler counterpart, J. D. Connor's essay on the Universal Pictures film "U-571" in issue 15 from 2002.

Mueller extracts positive political content from "Sex House," finding a satiric pop culture rendition of the autonomist Marxist account of work-refusal. It expresses a radical consciousness, albeit one that has not yet translated itself into political action. Connor finds no such glimmers in "U-571," which he portrays as a grim allegory of corporate filmmaking and media consolidation. "The submarine is an obvious symbol for the corporation, and the movie itself … is an allegory of its impending merger with a European conglomerate."

Connor's essay raises the reader's suspicion that it may be just an elaborate jape at the expense of cultural studies, but it ultimately doesn't matter. What Mueller does, and the *Baffler* almost never did, is seek out and foreground the radical elements impulses in pop culture, rather than portraying it all as noxious industry propaganda. In this, Mueller evokes the kind of cultural criticism that Ellen Willis pioneered in her rock journalism of the late 1960s. It's a criticism that doesn't try to locate subversion in the act of cultural consumption itself, as did a certain variety of cultural studies, but one which allows us to link culture to real politics – from "Sex House" to the class rage of Gawker to Strike Debt. The *Baffler*'s hostility to that approach is partly due to the intellectual biases Willis identified. But it's also a lot easier to find radicalism in culture in an era where there are a lot more such impulses to find.

This shift has been picked up by some of those who were involved with the original *Baffler* project. Recording engineer Steve Albini, whose "The Problem With Music" is one of the *Baffler*'s most famous essays, will appear in the next issue of *Jacobin* with a sequel, in which he strikes a more hopeful note about the post-Napster era than he did in his earlier anti-major label screed.

If Occupy, the Chicago Teacher's Strike, and all the rest don't prove to be the beginning of a renewed left, then *Jacobin* too will eventually fade from view. Hopefully we'll have the good sense to know when our time has passed. Our success and our relevance depend on historical conditions that we have only the tiniest influence over. By the same token, the *Baffler*'s creeping irrelevance reveals it to be a quintessential product of the "long 1990s" stretching from the fall of the Berlin Wall to 9/11, when capitalism seemed to have culminated in a neoliberal end of history.

For all its mordant criticism of cultural studies, the *Baffler* was more in sync with its time than it liked to admit. It was in fact deeply postmodern, not in its explicit allegiances but in the way it partook of a certain cultural weather of the sort theorized by Fredric Jameson. The penchant for interpreting texts – seen in Frank's privileging of books about Occupy over Occupy participants – mirrors the linguistic turn in academia. And Frank, in his insistence that the Left's future can only be a pastiche of a fondly remembered greatest hits of movement victories, echoes postmodernism's bricolage aesthetic and its privileging of the spatial over the temporal. It's as if there was nothing new under the sun, only new ways to put old items together. Nowhere do we find any self-reflexive consciousness of ongoing history, of the possibility that there could be fundamentally new conditions requiring new forms of politics and new forms of writing.

The social revolution of the twenty-first century can't take its poetry from the past.

Still, if Frank prefers to argue by historical analogy, let me offer one of my own. In a *Dissent* essay chronicling Andrew Ross's evolution from hip cultural theorist to activist labor journalist, Kevin Mattson suggests that the passage from the 1990s to the 2000s parallels that from the 1920s to the 1930s. With the onset of Depression, "'the people' – those whom writers like Sinclair Lewis and H. L. Mencken loved to bash as morons during the twenties – invaded the work of writers and intellectuals and pressed to be taken seriously. Economic insecurity changed the work of the mind." The *Baffler*'s tone was routinely compared to Mencken's, an association the magazine affirmed and promoted themselves.

It does not diminish the *Baffler*'s importance if we now locate it as a morbid symptom of the Clinton interregnum, when the current system seemed hopelessly corrupted but fresh alternatives had yet to appear. Today, the old may still be dying, but the new is already being born. Our task is to help it grow. ■

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STRIKE FOR AMERICA

by Micah Uetricht

THE CHICAGO TEACHERS UNION AND THE DEMOCRATS.

For the better part of the last century, the relationship between the Democratic Party and the labor movement has changed little. It appears set in stone, with no amount of neglect or disrespect or, increasingly, outright hostility from Democrats able to affect much more than private grumbling from labor.

And for nearly that long, labor's left observers and participants have described it as a relationship gone sour, often in hopes that labor would call the whole thing off. Historian Mike Davis called it a "barren marriage;" a more common characterization is that of an "abusive relationship."

Perhaps such observers should work on some new metaphors. But overblown analogies are understandable: with the rise of a strong neoliberal wing over the last several decades and an increasing number of Democrats no longer even feigning to be troubled with placating unions – once seen as a central constituency for the party – or a broader agenda of equality and social justice, unionists and their partisans have grown increasingly exasperated at party policies that look more and more like those of Republicans.

This is particularly true in the case of education reform, where Democrats have swallowed the Right's free market orthodoxy whole. Much of the party appears to have given up on education as a public project.

This is a shift that necessarily entails an attack on teachers and their unions. But like the rest of labor, American teachers unions have been unable to articulate a cogent critique of that shift within the Democratic Party and the policy proposals it has produced. The broader agenda has been occasionally challenged, but the sectors of the party pushing it have remained beyond reproach.

The Chicago Teachers Union has made a decisive break with this approach.

The union has been unafraid to identify the education reform agenda pushed by Mayor Rahm Emanuel and his party nationally as an attempt to exacerbate inequalities within the education system, strip teachers of power and erode their standards of living, and chip away at public education as an institution, and to call such Democrats enemies. Rather than continuing an insider strategy that has netted so little for the rest of labor over the years, the CTU has entered into open opposition with the neoliberal wing of the party.

At the same time, the union has put forth its own vision of reform, both at the bargaining table and in the streets through their engagement in mass action, their September strike, and their formal policy recommendations. It is a vision that explicitly rejects the Democratic Party's education agenda and offers a strong program to shore up public schools as a public good – stronger than any reform proposals by the two major national teachers unions.

Hostility to labor has become common in certain circles of a party that once depended on it. The CTU offers some ideas for how to reverse such antagonism.

The relationship between American unions and the Democratic Party has not changed significantly since the CIO endorsed Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1936 and formed the first Political Action Committee (PAC) in 1943 in preparation for his reelection. The former nonpartisan strategy of the AFL, of rewarding friends and punishing enemies regardless of their party affiliation, was discarded in favor of a long-term alliance with the Democrats.

That alliance was unable to enact many of labor's significant legislative priorities in the 1940s and 1950s like expansion of the welfare state, with the task essentially being left to unions themselves to negotiate with industry in private, unavoidably piecemeal efforts. The benefits of the relationship perhaps weren't tangible to union members and the wider working class, but it allowed labor leaders pursuing an insider political strategy to surround themselves with Democrats of stature and feel like they, too, were Men of Stature.

Labor leaders, even from ostensibly progressive wings, would continually beat back attempts from the left to end such an uncritical insider strategy with the party whenever they sprang up, despite the seemingly diminishing returns from unions' investment in the relationship after the 1970s.

Unions are still major funders of Democrats and their principal foot soldiers during elections, engaging in massive mobilizations on the party's behalf. Labor has given over $700 million to Democrats since 1990. In 2012, that number was over $53 million, with the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) actually taking out a $5 million loan to support Democratic Senate races. The party, meanwhile, continues its drift rightward, unmoved by the sight of the defenders of the working class half-heartedly beckoning them back with one hand while tossing them endless cash and members' energy with the other.

There are few clearer indications of this shift – and of unions' inability to halt it – than in education policy.

High-stakes standardized testing, merit pay for teachers, school closures, privatization and union-busting through charter school expansion, blaming teachers and unions for the dismal state of poor urban schools, an unshakable faith in the free market as the Great Liberator of the wretched, over-regulated student masses – all proposals and ideas embraced and promoted by the Democratic Party, including President Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. Teachers unions' leadership has offered repeated concessions on reform proposals while timidly demurring on the particularly odious ones; their protests have fallen on deaf ears.

That agenda is one the city of Chicago is familiar with. Chicago has long been one of the principal testing grounds for neoliberal education reform. Mayor Richard M. Daley, a Democrat from a Democratic political family in that most Democratic of big cities, and Duncan, then CEO of CPS, crafted Renaissance 2010, a program begun in 2004 which pushed closures and "turnarounds" of neighborhood schools and replacing them with nonunion, publicly funded charters, and is largely the basis for the Race to the Top program Duncan currently oversees as Secretary of Education.

Rahm Emanuel and the Board of Education, which includes billionaire hotel heiress and Democratic Party power player Penny Pritzker, have continued this push, particularly around school closures. Currently on the table is a proposal to close one hundred unionized neighborhood public schools around the city and replace them with 60 nonunion charters – a move that would simultaneously decimate the union's membership, redirect public money to privately-run charters that lack basic mechanisms for public accountability, slash teachers' salaries and benefits, and cause massive disruption in the poor black and brown neighborhoods where the majority of closures would take place.

Such blows have rained down upon the union from the Democrats for years, but the CTU, much like teachers union leadership nationally, was unsure of how to respond. But neighborhood-level fights had long been underway, led by parents whose children bore the brunt of disruptive school closures and corporate reform schemes. In 2004, a group of teachers organizing with parents around these struggles formed the Congress of Rank-and-File Educators (CORE), a dissident group of teachers attempting to push the union left that eventually became the reform leadership slate that wrested control of the union in 2010.

Years before CORE even considered pursuing control of the union, then, its roots were in fights against local and national Democrats' education agenda.

It was outrage at that agenda and its concomitant anti-teacherism that propelled CORE into leadership in 2010. Membership was angry, but lacked a clear political target for that anger, or a strong program for turning that anger into effective political power.

I asked Jesse Sharkey, the union's vice president and a founding member of CORE, if union leadership had difficulties in convincing members to become openly critical of the Democrats; if one of the union's tasks was to push a shift in teachers' consciousness about the party. He said it "wasn't as dramatic as all of that."

"No one in the union had been happy about the Democrats on education, locally or nationally," Sharkey said. "So rather than being a big shift, we essentially just acknowledge what most of our members already thought."

The shift towards the destruction of public education through the embrace of the free market was well-known among Chicago teachers, as it is among many union workers in industries devastated by, say, NAFTA, the free trade agreement pushed and passed by Bill Clinton.

But where other unions have hoped that the party's "Third Way"

tendencies might be convinced to sway back towards supporting unions through continued massive expenditure of resources on the party, the CTU has taken a more confrontational stance.

"We know that we don't have real friends in high places," said Sharkey. "So we should stop depending on them."

Contrast this with the national teachers unions' response to such attacks by Democrats. The National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the two major educators' unions in the country (the CTU is a member of the AFT), have continued giving generously to Democrats – around $30 million in publicly-disclosed donations and outside spending in the 2012 election cycle – while the party's consensus continued to include attacking unions and weakening public education.

There have been rumblings of a potential rupture in the teachers union-Democratic coalition for years, as teachers have grown increasingly agitated at the attacks on their profession by Democrats. Numerous such stories cropped up most recently after "Won't Back Down," a Hollywood feature film starring Maggie Gyllenhaal widely panned as little more than a teacher-slandering propaganda piece (and a god-awful one, at that), was screened at the Democratic National Convention last year – technically an unofficial event, but one that required approval by the Obama White House. A particularly noxious piece of anti-union and anti-educator agitprop, given the green light to be screened at the party's grand quadrennial event straight from the top.

Such attacks are escalating, yet neither union appears capable of fighting back. The NEA's response has actually to begun funding Republicans, like a State House candidate in Indiana who hadn't spent much time on charter expansion or merit pay because he has been busy with bills to ban gay marriage and hunt down undocumented immigrants, or the Pennsylvania state representative who bragged that the voter ID law he helped craft would deliver his state to Mitt Romney in the election.

The AFT, the more progressive of the unions, has not started handing out cash to conservatives, but has gradually ceded ground to the reformers' agenda. Education reporter Dana Goldstein has called the union's president Randi Weingarten the "marker of the moving center." Corporate reform groups like Democrats for Education Reform, a lobbying organization backed by Bill Gates and other ultra-wealthy donors that ran ads against the CTU during their strike, approve of her willingness to shift on issues like merit pay and teacher tenure, and have given her tepid praise as the kind of labor leader they can work with.

"You may look heroic when you yell at people," Weingarten told Goldstein, "but if you actually find ways to really work together and reach across the aisle, that's what I want."

Handing funds over to not-quite-as-viciously-anti-teacher Republicans might temporarily light a fire under a few Democratic politicians, but it isn't a real strategy for effective unionism – much less a way to build a broader social movement, when those recipients of teachers union funding are pursuing deeply reactionary causes like banning gay marriage.

And the the kind of labor-management cooperation scheme Weingarten is hinting at might work for her, or might have worked for any number of leaders throughout labor history seduced by the promise of more effective and less confrontational unionism through partnership with management, if it were not always a ploy to convince leaders to identify more with the bosses they're negotiating against rather than the workers they're negotiating on behalf of. American labor history shows that such arrangements inevitably presage new attacks and demands for concessions from bosses – made much easier to accomplish by a union leadership enthralled with the attacks' perpetrators.

One national teachers union has gone looking for support from opponents of modernity; the other seems to think it can be found in cozying up to those who'd like to see them destroyed. The center, meanwhile, shifts further and further towards the wholesale destruction of public education.

The CTU had built its vision for what CPS reform that shored up education as a public good could actually look like. In February 2012, the union released "The Schools Chicago's Students Deserve: Research-based Proposals to Strengthen Elementary and Secondary Education in the Chicago Public Schools," a forty-six-page white paper that rebukes the Democratic education reform as it has been carried out in CPS. It details the miserable state of city schools, but argues it is the city's starving schools of resources, at the same time they have diverted massive funds to charters, that is responsible for these conditions.

It demands smaller class sizes, stronger and better-staffed "wrap-around services" like nurses and social workers, an enriching curriculum rather than one centered on standardized testing's dictates, and provision of basic facilities like libraries in all schools, while proposing to fund these things through progressive tax policies including an end to regressive school funding based on property taxes and a financial transactions tax.

The paper (which opens with the sentence "Every student in CPS deserves to have the same quality education as the children of the wealthy") is the union's public response to both the corporate reform agenda and the

teachers unions grudgingly capitulating to it. It is a proposal which cedes no ground to the neoliberals – contrasting sharply with other teachers union locals who have allowed significant concessions in contract negotiations over issues like merit pay, with minor caveats. It rejects the logic of austerity that excuses underfunding of public schools based on budget shortfalls, arguing that tax increases for the rich should make up the deficit.

The September strike was the vehicle through which the union could fight for that vision, both in the public eye and at the bargaining table. Under state law, the union could only strike over wages, benefits, and parts of teacher evaluations. While these were the issues on the table, publicly, the union made its case as the defenders of public education.

They spoke publicly of schools lacking libraries and arts teachers and air conditioning, of classroom overcrowding and a chronic lack of resources, of a general condition of "educational apartheid." A widely circulated flier featured the faces of Mitt Romney and Rahm Emanuel, saying the two differed little on education. The strike was timed to cause a crisis for President Obama, less than two months before elections – despite pressure from local Democrats and national AFT leadership to back off.

The contract negotiated at the end of the strike included textbooks for all students on the first day of school, 600 new teachers in the arts and physical education, and mandatory recall of laid-off veteran teachers (rather than replacing them with young, inexperienced, cheaper teachers) when positions become available. Teacher evaluation based on standardized testing was negotiated to its legal minimum, 30 percent – contrasting with the Obama administration's push under Race to the Top to increase the proportion of teacher evaluations based on standardized tests.

Both during the strike and in its lead-up, the CTU crafted and partially implemented the kind of coherent vision for education that had long been under attack by neoliberal Democrats in Chicago and nationally – and had not been articulated by teachers unions anywhere.

It was a vision that could not have come to (partial) fruition without the union's practical ability to take mass action against those Democrats.

LITTLE TO NONE of the CTU's political program could be pegged as "radical," in the ideological sense of the word. They still do much of the traditional work of electoral politics – lobbying, endorsing candidates, almost entirely with Democrats. The fact that the union's engagement with the Democrats is at all noteworthy perhaps speaks less to the CTU's uniqueness and more to how pitiful the larger labor movement's interactions with the party have become.

Possibilities for labor to part with the Democrats feel almost impossible today, or at least in the near future. The relationship between the two is too well-cemented, the tradition of dead generations of labor weighing so heavily on the living. The political formations to the left of the Democrats are in too great of disarray. And the stakes at the national and local legislative levels are far too high for unions to bow out of.

"Unions can't afford to just say that we're not going to play electoral politics because all of these choices are bad choices," Sharkey said. "There's a whole culture on the Left of people abstaining from the political realm. But we can't simply take our ball and go home. That's not realistic."

Radicals often fetishize a clean break with the party, as if the ideological purity of such a stance could somehow make up for the loss of power it would entail. That kind of break is impossible. Knowing their leadership refused to engage with Democrats out of a principled stance against the party's true class interests would do little to console union members watching their pensions gutted or their workplaces shuttered – those members want to see lobbying, horse-trading, backroom dealmaking, traditional bourgeois politicking, and would likely revolt against any leadership that refused to do so.

What is possible, and what is necessary, if labor and the broader Left ever stand a chance of reversing the rightward shift of the Democrats and mounting an effective pushback against neoliberalism more broadly, is a shift in what that political engagement looks like, towards an increasingly confrontational stance with the sections of the Democratic Party now on the attack against unions and the public sphere.

That stance must be centered around labor's ability and willingness to engage in mass action like strikes, rather the perpetual hope that the Democrats will someday return to labor's corner through a continual moving of the goalposts rightward as national teachers unions and the broader labor movement have done.

The Chicago Teachers Union accomplished this in their 2012 strike. They identified who their allies and who their enemies were within the party; they forced the hand of those enemies in the streets with 30,000 striking teachers, and they approached their allies from a new posture of power, with the threat of mass mobilization against those allies an unspoken but ever-present possibility.

It is the possibility of a labor movement that views its interactions with the Democratic Party with clear eyes and from a position of mass action-based power that stands a chance to beat back the party's openly neoliberal wing, on education reform and elsewhere. Such a position can open up the space for unions to not simply respond to attacks, but to push its own positive agenda, on its own terms. ■

ONE, TWO, MANY CHICAGO TEACHERS' STRIKES

by Matthew Cunningham-Cook

HOW AN UNCOMPROMISING SPIRIT LEAD THE CTU TO VICTORY.

Chicago occupies a central place in the history of labor struggles. Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* was set in the Windy City, the Haymarket affair is widely considered to be one of the most significant labor events of the nineteenth century, and countless unions were born in the city's seemingly endless industrial struggles. And in 2012, Chicago hosted the most dynamic and successful strike to occur in the United States in at least fifteen years, and the largest teachers' strike in nearly a quarter-century, all while fundamentally challenging a global movement to privatize and standardize public education.

Mass public education was brought about by a combination of progressive reformers' concerns about the morality of working-class youth, and the agitation of the labor movement for an end to child labor. It became officially universal around the turn of the century, but the widespread abolition of child labor did not take full force until the end of World War II. The fact that farm labor was (and continues to be!) exempted from this regulation meant that large cities historically had (and have) lower truancy rates. But as education journalist Dana Goldstein has pointed out, Chicago also featured a vibrant teachers' union movement from more or less the historical moment that universal public education became part of the national elite consensus, and the city hosted the nation's first ever teacher's strike in 1902.

But although this background sets a precedent, it is the struggles of the the latter half of the twentieth century that more accurately presage the contemporary struggle. The 1902 strike, for example, occurred prior to the great migration of Black Americans from the south, and the teacher's federation founded by Margaret Haley, like most trade unions prior to the founding of the Congress of Industrial Organizations in 1935, was imbued with the logic of white supremacy. It is the period from 1968 until 1987, when the children of the revolutionary unionism of the 1930s entered the teaching profession, that enables us to assess the present situation in Chicago public education and to situate the 2012 strike in the context of public education and the labor movement as whole in the United States.

Much of the historical memory of the Chicago Teachers Union is to be found in the longtime opposition newsletter, *Substance News*, founded and edited by longtime radical teacher George Schmidt.

Over Labor Day weekend in 2012, *Substance News* partnered with Chicago's labor broadcasting service, Labor Beat, to produce a video on the nine Chicago teacher's strikes that took place between 1968 and 1987. These strikes led to a dramatic improvement in the diversity of the teaching profession, and won considerably expanded tenure protection. What is crucial to remember is that the first strike of the two decades of industrial action in the Chicago public schools was an unsanctioned wildcat strike led by the mostly-black Full-Time Basis Substitutes, another term for teachers who were refused access to the teaching profession largely as a result of their racial background or political commitments. Over one hundred schools, largely in Chicago's nearly exclusively-black South Side, were struck, and although no concrete resulting gains were made, a broad network of solidarity in the city's black schools began to be built. Contrast this with New York, which has not had a teacher's strike since the infamous 1968 strike against community control, led by noted racist Al Shanker.

The teachers' strikes in Chicago occurred in the context of the civil rights movement in the city, as described in the documentary epic *Eyes on the Prize*. Ranging from Martin Luther King's attempt to organize in the city in 1966–67 (after one march, King reportedly said

"I have seen many demonstrations in the South but I have never seen anything so hostile and so hateful as I've seen here today") to the successful campaign to elect Harold Washington as the city's first black mayor in 1983, Chicago was central to the civil rights movement in the north. That the movement to reform the CTU and to expand democracy in the Chicago Public Schools would initially come out of the black community is thus unsurprising. And that the movement for civil rights in Chicago was able to successfully infiltrate the city's teachers union explains the greater historical connection between the CTU and the city's troublemakers, compared to the still-frosty relationship between New York's United Federation of Teachers and rabblerousers in Gotham.

The '68 strike was followed by eight more strikes by 1987, making education in Chicago vastly more equitable and almost exclusively a black-run affair. By the time the 1987 strike rolled around, the city's mayor, school board chief, superintendent, and teacher's union head were all African American. For most of the 2000s until Arne Duncan's appointment as education secretary, all but the teacher's union head were white, and by this year, the amount of black teachers had gone from a majority in the 1980s to 19% – even as the population of public school children in the city has become almost monochromatically black and brown.

The fact that Chicago teachers saw themselves as part of the labor and black freedom movement enabled them to win real and widespread gains during their two decades of labor unrest. It is no surprise, then, that it was a city that was an early target for aggressive neoliberal pushback, arguably the first one in the country.

Noted gambling addict and biopolitician William Bennett, then Ronald Reagan's Secretary of Education, in 1987 called Chicago's public schools "the worst in the country." Bourgeois pushback at that time was essential. That same year, Chicago teachers won an excellent contract after a nineteen-day strike, Harold Washington easily won reelection as mayor, and the "Eddies" (old-guard Daley white supremacist Chicago aldermen Ed Vrdolyak and Ed Burke) lost their majority on the city council. Future Senator Carol Moseley-Braun, at the time a fixture of the pro-labor black political establishment (widely identified at the time as the "conscience" of the Illinois legislature) had just been easily elected Cook County Recorder of Deeds, removing a key patronage post from the Daley machine. With the liberal-left ascendent nationally (due to the then-raging Iran-Contra scandal and the rejection of Robert Bork's Supreme Court nomination), it seemed that the time was ripe for significant institutional reforms to the manner in which power was distributed in Chicago.

Bennett's statement was a way to preempt that. With the death of Harold Washington later that year and the impetus provided by Bennett, Chicago's school reform project was inaugurated. Bill Ayers, among others, notably provided "left" cover for the initiatives. Ample spoonfuls of sugar supplemented the school reform pills initially, and many of the processes to begin with seemed fairly benign. The first goal was the creation of Local School Councils to devolve power from the school board and teachers unions to councils composed mostly of parents and community members. Non-citizens were allowed to vote, increasing Latino support for the initiatives. Of course, the Local School Councils could do little to address the continued funding inequities in public education, at that time the most significant problem facing the vast majority of the city's education institutions. And with foundation funding quadrupling in the interim, the school councils had little choice but to comply with the demands of the wealthy do-gooders.

The experience quickly turned sour. Foundation funding focused on the creation of "small schools," which in the pre-KIPP days, served as a rallying cry for the reformers. Turnout for the Local School Council elections in 1991 decreased by 30% from the previous round. The CTU began to enter a long period of decline. The 1995 contract failed to challenge many of the new "reform" initiatives in favor of expanded pension benefits, now on the verge of significant cutbacks by the Illinois legislature. In 1995, the Illinois legislature gave Mayor Daley control over the school board, vastly increasing his power beyond anything his father ever achieved. Eight years after the elections that had seemed to portend its demise, the Daley machine was back in full force. (The Junior Daley's power was indicated quite well when his brother was appointed as Secretary of Commerce in Bill Clinton's second term. Despite his father's being instrumental in getting JFK elected in 1960, the Illinoisans in Kennedy's cabinet were only peripherally related to the Daley machine.)

Daley was reelected that year with 60% of the vote. Paul Vallas, who has subsequently traversed the land implementing education reform policies, was appointed the new "CEO" of the Chicago Public Schools.

Vallas successfully inaugurated the modern era of education reform in Chicago: top-down decision making, blaming teachers for the faults of the education system, ignoring poverty or broader systemic issues. Democratic systems of accountability that allow a space for dissent, such as an elected school board, or the preservation of teacher tenure, are viewed as fundamentally dangerous to the education of children. After decades of systematic disinvestment in Chicago Public Schools, alongside increasingly-aggressive criminalization of communities that bore the brunt of said disinvestment, the new approach of Chicago's (and the nation's) ruling class was clear: we're hating the players, and keeping the game.

The first elements of this project involved limiting the amount of students allowed to advance to the next grade, and holding back many students on the basis of high-stakes tests instead of the professional discretion of teachers. It was black and brown students that were disproportionately affected by this policy, but serious challenges to the testing regime on the basis of disparate impact have thus far been unsuccessful either in Illinois or nationwide.

The Vallas administration further distanced the school reform project from the model Local School Councils. With 109 schools placed under probation in 1996, the powers of the LSCs were limited to speeding up the implementation of turnaround policies. That same year, the legislature approved the state's first charter schools, with 15 designated for Chicago. This history is routinely ignored when pundits discuss the implications of the Chicago teacher's strike. Nearly all of the commentariat, including many at liberal-left publications, have argued that the fight should not be about administrators or teachers, but about parents and students. But the systematic disinvestment in and sidelining of Local School Councils by the "reform" administrations should give pause to those who argue that there was some sort of reasonable middle ground during the strike.

The reform project continued apace until the end of the decade, when a more militant caucus ousted the old guard of the union leadership in 2001. The new group, led by longtime rank-and-filer Debbie Lynch, came into office on a pledge to fight back against the destabilizing effects of the reform policies. Her inability to negotiate a contract acceptable to the membership (her first proposal was voted down handily by the membership in 2003) quickly led to the return of the accommodationist old guard in June 2004. That same month, buoyed by the defeat of their leading opponents, the Daley administration (now with Arne Duncan as CEO) announced their most ambitious privatization scheme to date. The Renaissance 2010 plan proposed mass closures of schools labeled "failing," which were to be replaced by charter schools.

It was out of this project that the Caucus of Rank and File Educators (the caucus that now controls the CTU) emerged. Despite (or perhaps because of) the incapacity of the union leadership to fight back, a group of activists emerged to fight against the closures. One of the cofounders of the caucus, Al Ramirez, made a film about the dangers of the Renaissance 2010 project that was instrumental in creating networks of opposition to the closures. Further acceleration of Renaissance 2010 led to the creation of reading groups, most notably around *The Shock Doctrine*. The seeds for the creation of an official caucus were created in a potluck group, meeting Sundays at Karen Lewis's house.

THE NEW APPROACH OF CHICAGO'S (AND THE NATION'S) RULING CLASS WAS CLEAR: WE'RE HATING THE PLAYERS, AND KEEPING THE GAME.

Most unions in the United States rarely if ever have legitimate, grassroots oriented leadership contests. The Unity Caucus at the United Federation of Teachers in New York has controlled the union for the duration of its existence – and every AFT President since 1960 has came out of that same old-guard leadership. The current AFT President, Randi Weingarten, only served a couple of years in the classroom before she was tapped for union elective office by her patron, then AFT president Sandy Feldman. The precedent set by the defeat of the accommodationist old guard in Chicago in 2001 provided an example for the new caucus to follow, but the chances for success initially were still low. The failure of the Marilyn Stewart leadership to aggressively challenge what effectively amounted to a first volley of the wholesale privatization of Chicago's public education system meant that morale was low and discontent was high as CORE advanced its slate for elections for a three-year term in 2010.

CORE, ultimately supported by Debbie Lynch's caucus in the runoff, ended up winning handily. The union was almost immediately faced with a crisis, largely because the astroturf group Stand for Children had targeted

Illinois for the passage of model legislation curtailing teacher collective bargaining rights. Stand, originally a mostly grassroots organization based out of Portland and founded by the son of civil rights activists Marian Wright and Peter Edelman, had rapidly turned into a front for the privatization of education. Stand advocates the elimination of teacher tenure and collective bargaining, giving administrators considerably more power to run roughshod over the interests of those who are actually performing work in schools. In addition to the influence of Stand, the CTU's decision to endorse Democrat Pat Quinn in the governor's race in 2010 also arguably made it more difficult to create a strong critique of the new anti-collective bargaining bill.

Signed into law in June 2011, the bill's key provisions required the inclusion of test scores during tenure decision making and layoffs and instituted a 75% majority for strike approval votes. The CTU reversed its support for the bill during the final round of negotiations, but the state's two largest teacher unions, the Illinois Education Association and the Illinois Federation of Teachers, both supported the legislation. The CTU was caught off guard, and there was consternation among the membership at the way that the new leadership had gone about confronting the legislation. That summer, a video of Jonah Edelman speaking at the Aspen Ideas Festival showed how Stand effectively cornered the unions into passing the legislation. Coming in on an ocean of money, Stand and its allies paid the right lobbyists and outflanked the unions with a highly-effective PR campaign.

The CTU had, however, refused to endorse Rahm Emanuel when the Chicago elite coalesced around his candidacy at the end of 2010, avoiding ties between the union and a politician who had views dramatically counter to the interests of the membership. Emanuel almost immediately adopted a combative stance with the union, taking away contractually-mandated raises and arbitrarily instituting a longer school day without any added resources for education in Chicago. Both of those initiatives violated the CTU contract, and as a result the law. Yet the same old tune continued to be sung, with teachers being the be-all and end-all of the success of students.

Instituting a longer school day and seeing teacher compensation as peripheral to the quality of education are foundational tenets of education reform. Despite the so-called data driven approach of the "reformers," however, they bear little relation to outcomes. The two policies, (both instituted during the 2011–2012 school year) combined with an aggressive internal organizing drive by the CTU, led to a fightback spirit at the CTU, culminating in the strike vote in June 2012.

One of the points that Jonah Edelman bragged about in passing the 2011 legislation was that the 75% threshold for authorizing a strike would effectively prevent any strike from occurring. The teachers blew past that number, winning yes votes from 90% of the unit, and 98% of those voting. A rally in June brought more than 5000 teachers to protest against the Board of Education, demanding a fair contract.

The union attempted to reframe the debate in their direction in February 2012, when they published "The Schools Chicago's Students Deserve," a forty-six-page report proposing a version of public education based on the preservation of the tenure system, smaller class sizes, greater racial diversity in the teaching profession, and universal access to art, music, physical education, foreign languages, air conditioning, and in-school clinics. (The air conditioning was especially important: a teacher on the picket line told me that four of her kindergartners had thrown up due to the heat in the week prior to the strike in September.) The one-page summary was distributed across the city, especially in the informational picketing prior to the strike and on the picket line while it was occurring. The corporate media entirely neglected to inform the public as to the existence of the report, but the alternate vision it provided is credited by many in the union as helping to create 66% support for the teachers during the strike by public school parents.

The vote in June was likely instrumental in getting a key concession during the summer time during negotiations, the only real progress made prior to the strike. In August, the school board reluctantly agreed to maintain the current workload of teachers and paraprofessionals in Chicago, and would hire 500 more teachers to cover the longer school day. This also considerably lessened the urgency of the union's demand for greater compensation. Over questions such as evaluations and the preservation of tenure, however, the Board refused to budge. For policies so central to the education reform process, the Board – wholly controlled by Emanuel, headed by a banker, and counting as one of its members the billionaire Hyatt heiress Penny Pritzker – would only be dragged into compromise kicking and screaming.

The strike ended up a disaster for the Emanuel administration, and yet it is surprising that they ever believed it could end in any other way. The membership was obviously highly engaged, with the Labor Day rally gathering some 10,000 teachers and the union had taken great pains to organize and inform the community about their position. The fact that the strike even occurred – this was a trade union strike, after all, not a revolutionary Soviet demanding full communism, with relatively modest demands – is a testament to the insularity of the Chicago bourgeoisie and their mayoral client.

When the strike hit, it certainly brought to mind the experiences of

Wisconsin and Occupy in 2011, but at the same time with significant differences. These were clear demands, with clear possibilities for resolution. And in many ways, the strike bore little resemblance to many public sector strikes of the past. Scabbing was an issue at every single Chicago teacher's strike from 1968–1987, but during the seven days in September, not a single member of the CTU was reported was reported crossing the picket line. Each of the first five days was electric, ending in rallies with some 20,000 to 30,000 members. Strike captains and delegates (the union had greatly expanded its official steward structure since CORE took power) reported 100% participation at picket lines. The general consensus was that Emanuel was in trouble and that the momentum was with the union.

The union took strides to identify where the problem lay: the fact that the 1% owns the city of Chicago, and they want it just for themselves. One of the most exciting actions was on Day 4 of the strike, when tens of thousands of teachers joined in a picket line in solidarity with workers at Hyatt hotels, attempting to bridge the connection between the Pritzker family's fervent desire to both privatize public education and pay their employees poverty wages. Secondary boycotts are illegal under federal labor law, but because teachers are covered by Illinois public-sector labor law that restriction failed to apply to them. One of the most popular chants was simple, but reflected the general disillusionment with the Democratic Party: "Hey hey, ho ho, Rahm Emanuel's got to go." The CTU declined to make a Presidential endorsement in 2012. The disdain was mutual, and only eight of Chicago's fifty aldermen publicly supported the CTU during the strike, despite the fact that a plurality of Chicago's registered voters did.

When the contract was proposed to the members on Sunday, the House of Delegates decided to extend the strike two more days to allow for analysis of the proposed contract by the membership. The biggest disappointments in the new contract are that no deals were made on class size or school closures – largely because bargaining over those issues is technically illegal under the collective bargaining law. On other fronts, however, the CTU won an excellent contract that goes against the trend of concessionary contracts around the country (especially in Newark, where the union has just ratified a contract establishing merit pay by test scores).

The seniority system was preserved, and test scores as a percentage of the evaluation formula were kept at the minimum set by state law. Teachers can now grieve evaluation ratings and the contract contains provisions against bullying from administrators, creating hundreds of potential new in-school organizing opportunities. (Arguably the most valuable result of the strike was that it refostered a sense of oppositional solidarity among Chicago teachers – that one can stand up and win.) The board also made a commitment to hire more social workers, school nurses, and in-school clinicians upon the receipt of more tax money – something that the CTU is aggressively lobbying city hall and the statehouse for in the coming months. A sprinkling of other goodies – unseen, for the most part, in other cities – were included as well.

On October 2, the union overwhelming approved the contract with 79% of the vote. The No votes came mostly out of a sense of frustration that a deal had not been struck on class size and school closures. Defenders of the proposed contract, such as George Schmidt, argued that the school closure was a fight for another day, and the Caucus of Rank and File Educators encouraged its members to see the contract as one battle won, but with many future ones to come. After the contract was ratified, the CTU turned its focus towards defeating a ballot initiative that would have restricted future pension increases, and were successful.

Today, new movements have began to spring up around the country, attempting to model themselves after the work done by CORE in Chicago, and seeing accommodation as an untenable response to the assault on public education. In New York, the Movement of Rank and File Educators (CORE) in New York has forged a united front of the leading opposition caucuses. Their presidential candidate is Julie Cavanagh, a teacher who has long been active in protesting the direction of education in the city. Pro-public education bloggers and writers hailed the strike as well, seeing it as the first time that teachers in a big city have been able to fight back and win. Nearly half-a-dozen suburban Chicago school districts have gone on strike in the aftermath. And the 65,000 workers at Illinois' AFSCME Council 31, having been pushed around by Governor Quinn, are discussing a statewide strike.

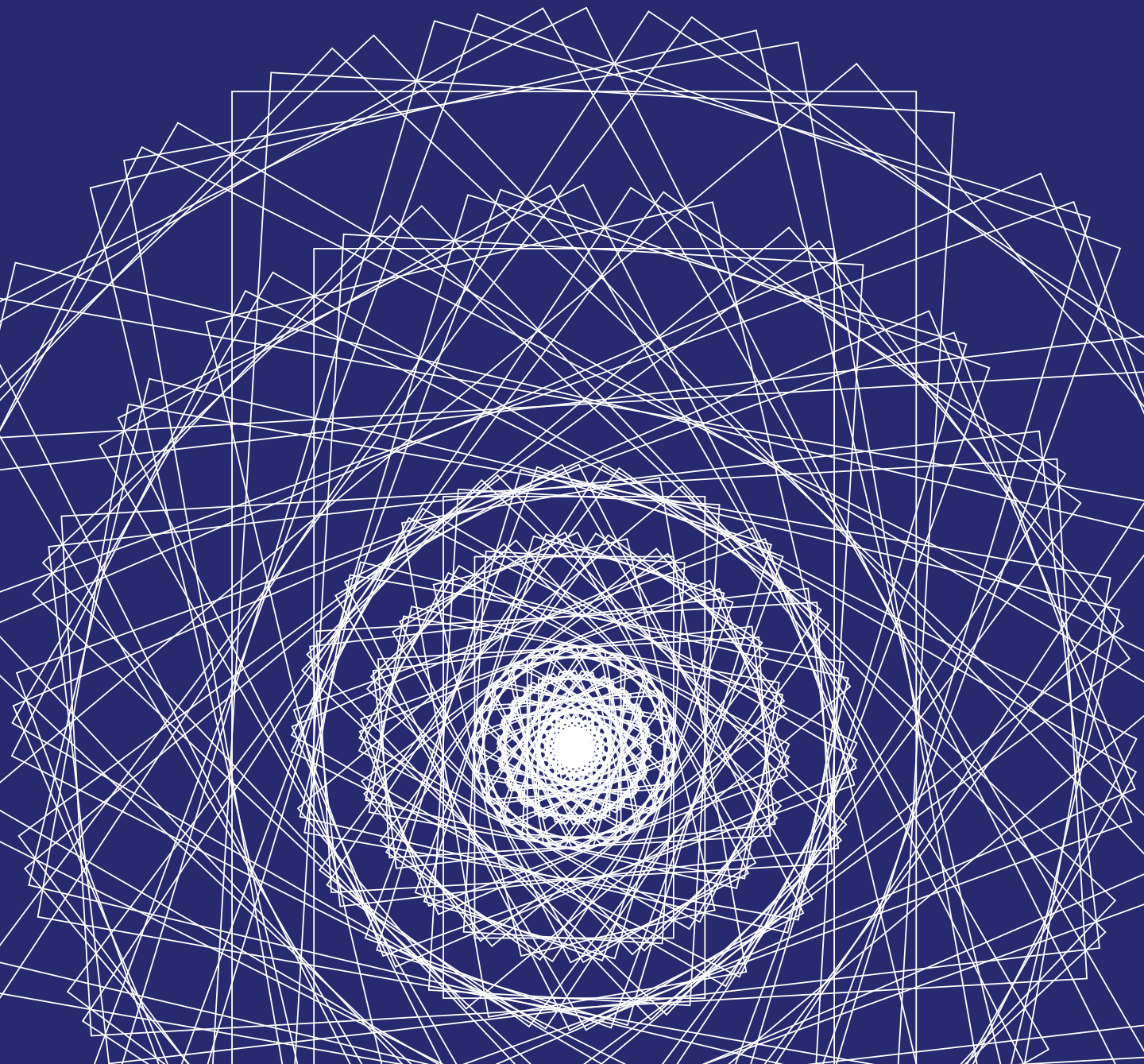
There are major fights on the horizon, and the assault continues. Emanuel has proposed shuttering up to 100 public schools, and the Illinois legislature is proposing dramatic pension cutbacks. It is highly likely that when this contract expires three years down the road, teachers will find it necessary to strike again.

But wins, or even draws, in the labor movement these days are rare. The last big strike prior to the CTU strike was the 2011 Verizon strike, which ended with a highly concessionary contract. If one is looking for models for defending the United States' public sector with militant worker activity, only the Chicago teacher's strike provides a reasonable twenty-first-century example. The lessons are clear: stand up, organize, have demands that point to a clear vision, call upon the experience of prior struggles, mobilize, and don't sell out. ■

THE FLOOD NEXT TIME

by Alyssa Battistoni

LIFE AFTER EMERGENCY.



As Hurricane Sandy bore down on the East Coast in late October, everyone from Bill McKibben to Andrew Cuomo declared the storm our wake-up call on climate change. Now we would finally have that serious conversation we'd been meaning to get around to; faced with apocalyptic images of flooded subways and decimated houses, we would be shocked out of complacency and into action. Damian Carrington's column in the *Guardian* was typical:

> If Sandy – and this summer's record US heat wave – end up blowing Obama back into the White House with enough wind in his sails to persuade him to make climate change a winning issue, it really could have positive global consequences. If not, I shudder to think what scale of apocalyptic disaster will be needed to destroy the political cowardice among world leaders that is stoking the ever greater climate change storms of the future.

Climate change, as the jargon has it, is "super wicked": it presents notorious obstacles to action. Unlike air pollution, you can't see carbon in the atmosphere or feel it in your lungs. The people responsible for the vast majority of emissions are relatively insulated from their impacts. The costs of taking action are immediate, the benefits distant and uncertain – though not as distant as recently thought. Understanding climate change's causes and possible effects demands a great deal of abstract reasoning, both scientific and ethical. Which is why, despairing that well-cushioned Americans would ever voluntarily reduce carbon emissions at the sight of the steep slope of a line graph or out of concern for the millions displaced in the Global South, many disillusioned activists have darkly predicted that only the immediacy of disaster at home could generate the political will to address climate change.

After a summer of drought and wildfires, and in the aftermath of Sandy, it would seem that we're at a vital juncture for climate politics, a moment when a critical mass of concern can build. With time to prevent catastrophic climate change running short, it's now or never – right?

Industrial disasters have frequently galvanized the environmental movement, from the Santa Barbara oil spill of 1969 to the Cuyahoga River fire. While, as "acts of God," natural disasters have long been considered outside the realm of the political, no matter their proximate cause they can reveal social processes and vulnerabilities: the geography of poverty and race within a neighborhood; the negligence of government in maintaining essential services and infrastructure; possibly even the gradual accumulation of carbon molecules within the atmosphere.

But do disasters act as turning points, or wake-up calls, or teachable moments? Do those oft-discussed silver linings really materialize? It seems easy to conjure examples in the affirmative. The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire led to stricter factory safety standards, the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 to the Mississippi River levee system. But those are the exception, not the rule. The BP spill was supposed to wake us up to the costs of our reliance on fossil fuels – as were the Exxon Valdez spill and the 1970s oil shocks. Aurora followed Virginia Tech and Virginia Tech followed Columbine, and gun control laws remain unchanged. When disasters throw a kink into frenzied everyday life, we talk about the things we're now forced to talk about – but what happens to all those conversations when urgency diminishes and regular life returns?

The idea that events create moments of opportunity for drastic change is a recurring one, from the rhetorical *kairos* to the revolutionary moment of rupture. Hannah Arendt argued that political upheavals are critical to energizing democratic publics, and that new political spaces are forged out of radical breaks with what came before. While not exclusively the domain of the Left (too widely useful), nor universally endorsed among leftists (too contingent for many stucturalist accounts), the theory of the event is perhaps best developed by the *soixante-huitards*. Alain Badiou thinks that occasions of thinking through politics are rare, but argues that events, in rupturing the flow of the everyday, could suggest new approaches to political thought and action. Jacques Rancière likewise argues that political moments, while fleeting and emerging only in times of tension, break the concept of *who rules* and expose previously unseen political actors. They are the foundation of democracy.

Crises and disasters are of particular interest to politics that seek to transform embedded institutions and practices, whether radical or reformist. They bring underlying processes and patterns to the surface and shake the foundations of the status quo, offering a view of how things might be reconstructed differently – and the chance to do so. Lenin's exhortation to revolution in "The Crisis Has Matured," Rahm Emanuel's admonition never to let a crisis go to waste, and Milton Friedman's observation that only crisis creates change may have been in service of wildly different aims, but their strategies have much in common. These crises are typically seen as human-instigated – financial collapses and wars and so on – but the always-dubious distinction between "natural" and "manmade" disasters (is a bread riot a natural disaster?) is increasingly obsolete. *Kairos* means "weather" as well as "opportunity." And at a time when catastrophe is predicted for one socioecological system after another, when transformative change seems necessary for human survival, a theory of rapid change has obvious appeal.

The nature of that change, however, depends on who wakes up and what they see. Naomi Klein's dark picture of "disaster capitalism" depicts rapacious investors waiting in the wings, ready to seize public assets while communities are distracted by disaster's aftermath. Crises can provide grounds on which emergency action and powers are justified and frequently entrenched, as we well know. Yet while disasters are nearly always most damaging to those who have little political power, they can also be a force for more inclusive, democratic models of decision-making. They create breaks that can allow alternative forms of social and political organization to emerge. They exacerbate internal tensions that can spur political unrest and force authorities to confront public questioning. They can result in new rights claims as citizens demand that their governments meet their needs, and they can build solidarity as communities come together purposefully in their wake. They can even spur transformations in political thought: the Lisbon Earthquake of 1755 is often described as a "birthday of the modern age," causing Enlightenment thinkers to question God's role in human affairs. But can they compel new urgencies around issues usually consigned to the back burner, and problems that develop on time scales not aligned with the campaign cycle?

Sandy has inevitably sparked comparison to Katrina, and while imperfect, it's more apt than many realize. The climate change that makes hurricanes like Sandy more frequent is analogous to land loss in southeastern Louisiana. It's a process that threatens to wreak havoc slowly, rooted in the history of economic and social development in the region. Examining the aftermath of the two major disasters that Louisiana has recently experienced can help us understand the potential and limitations of disasters as political events.

THE MISSISSIPPI River Delta is a system in crisis. Since the 1930s, an area of coastal Louisiana roughly the size of Delaware has disappeared into the Gulf, largely as a result of the very processes that made much of the region habitable and prosperous. The levees that protect homes from flooding also block the buildup of sediment necessary to rebuild ever-shifting delta land. Wetlands have been drained for housing development built on concrete slabs that sink into the soft ground. Perhaps most significantly, thousands of miles of oil and gas canals crisscross coastal wetlands, and past oil and gas extraction caused interior wetlands to subside. On top of all that is sea-level rise. At the current rate, it's estimated that one-third of existing coastal land will be gone by 2050, the consequences of which will be staggering: thousands of miles of wetland ecosystems subsumed into Gulf waters, close to a million people living in coastal communities forced to migrate, and New Orleans made even more vulnerable to hurricanes and flooding.

In *The Ravaging Tide*, Mike Tidwell wrote that those who were concerned about coastal land loss had long thought "maybe it'll take a catastrophic hurricane wiping out New Orleans before we get the national attention and federal funding" needed for the state's neglected coastal restoration plan. Then the catastrophic hurricane happened, made considerably worse by the lack of wetlands to absorb storm surge, and Louisiana got plenty of national attention and money for rebuilding, but relatively little for coastal restoration. Then a few years later, one of BP's deepwater drilling rigs blew, and while it wasn't remotely natural, the coast was once again in crisis. It seemed destined to be a moment of reckoning, a time when all the intertwined social and ecological problems plaguing the Gulf, now laid bare, could at last be tackled.

Many noted the shock that resulted from recognizing scenes of destruction once thought the province of other, poorer countries, and the way that long-ignored issues – racial and economic inequality after Katrina, fossil fuel dependence after BP – were suddenly on the political agenda. In other elements of the post-Katrina landscape, disaster capitalism appeared to be in full force: New Orleans's public hospital, healthcare, and schools had been privatized, diminished, or destroyed, with officials citing the opportunity for reform in each case.

But could disasters also focus public attention on the creeping crisis that threatened the region's future one foot of marshland at a time? In that respect, Katrina and BP seemed like potential moments for transformation, when people would be energized around issues they'd once dismissed as the province of environmentalists.

The reality has been more complicated. Awareness and understanding of the coastal crisis jumped, and civic participation boomed – at least among those who'd come back – as people tried to figure out what the future of New Orleans and coastal Louisiana would be. Sustainability is on the tip of every tongue – though there's little consensus on what it means.

The fate of the first post-Katrina rebuilding plan – the "Green Dot" plan – is one that comes up often in discussions about the city's efforts to confront its precarity. Designed by a commission of experts, it was technically sustainable, proposing to shrink the city's footprint by buying out hard-hit neighborhoods – many of them poor and black – and turning them to green space. But the city backtracked in favor of a more participatory approach to planning when outrage grew among citizens whose homes were slated for abandonment.

The "Master Plan" that came out of this false start includes proposals for everything from climate planning to food

security – albeit with little funding for implementation – and has widespread support. But in the meantime the city grew unevenly and arguably less sustainably than before, with fewer people settled less densely, straining community and city services alike. Many urban planners rued the outcome – yet it's hard to imagine how things could have turned out otherwise.

Trust in public institutions, never high in a city that had long neglected its poorest and most vulnerable residents, was lower than ever following the breach of the levees – indeed, some in the Lower Ninth still suspected the government had blown them intentionally, as it had in the 1927 flood – and disappeared almost entirely when the city seemed poised to bulldoze people's homes without even including them in the discussion. The years of neglect that contributed to the deaths and abandonment of hundreds undermined the city's ability to collectively choose transformation in the period immediately following the storm.

But there were many other, smaller changes. After years of organizing against the environmentally destructive and economically useless MR-GO shipping channel – communities in the Lower Ninth Ward and St Bernard Parish finally succeeded in securing its closure when its role in channeling storm surge into New Orleans became widely known. The Vietnamese-American community in New Orleans East organized a successful campaign against the illegal dumping of housing debris and waste in their neighborhood – though the dumping itself was a post-Katrina phenomenon. Louisiana adopted a building code – the state's first – in large part because the insurance industry threatened to withdraw from swathes of the region otherwise. Farmer's markets and bike lanes proliferated as New Orleans caught up with the green lifestyle trend, prompted in part by the influx of young, eco-minded professionals who came to the city to participate in its recovery – and frequently gentrified areas of the city vacated by the displaced.

Important issues all, but episodic and largely unconnected either to each other or to underlying, structural causes. With immediate needs intensified by disaster, the issues most people mobilized around were those whose connection to their lives were immediately perceptible: the headaches and nausea that they suspect result from exposure to oil and dispersant, the need for a grocery store in their neighborhood, the illegal dumping of toxic debris in the lot down the street. Until they had the security to take a step back, they couldn't think longer term. Yet it's the inclination to return to normality as quickly as possible that often precludes significant political action. The disasters had somehow changed everything and nothing at the same time, destroying thousands of homes and ways of life but leaving power structures intact.

While disaster may expose underlying mechanisms, it doesn't untangle them on its own. The linkages connecting not just Katrina and the levees and the Lower Ninth, or the BP spill and the wetlands and the oil industry, but tying all of them together, are neither immediately obvious nor easily explained. So while New Orleans's levees were repaired and upgraded, the levees' role in making the city more vulnerable went largely unexamined; rather, other communities clamored for levees of their own, wanting to build an ever-higher wall against the sea. The focus on the federal government's failure to adequately prepare for and respond to Katrina, while justified, often came at the expense of examining local patterns of development within the context of regional geography. After BP, offshore drilling regulations and disaster response procedures were subjected to a cursory process of technical review and recommendation, but stricter regulations were never really considered, to say nothing of the state's cozy relationship with the oil industry – not least because most people had no interest in reconsidering it. Indeed, the temporary moratorium on drilling in the Gulf sparked protests far larger than those aimed against the industry.

Organizers have worked to make those mechanisms clear: to connect fishing communities put out of work by the oil spill in Louisiana to those in Alabama; to connect the health effects suffered by oil clean-up workers to those suffered by refinery employees along Cancer Alley; to link the land that people in coastal communities like Houma see disappearing daily to the storm surge that crashed into homes in the Lower Ninth. They've built coalitions amongst coastal towns and urban neighborhood associations; Vietnamese-American shrimpers and African-American oystermen; birdwatchers and environmental justice activists. These coalitions are admittedly precarious. Fishermen working with environmentalists to hold the oil and gas industry accountable for accidents, for example, find themselves at cross purposes when discussing where to divert the river to build wetlands; debates over funding and levee-building priorities pit coastal towns in Plaquemines Parish against low-lying neighborhoods in New Orleans. But it's impressive that they exist at all. That said, while organizers recognize a vaguely defined but intensely felt frustration and widespread dissatisfaction with the status quo in the wake of two major disasters, they have struggled to translate more diffuse forms of new energy and leadership into effective political practice.

Efforts to save the coast are also running up against the limits of local agency. The clamor for energy independence puts pressure on the Gulf to keep producing oil in the name of the national welfare – a charge which many bear proudly. The notoriously

inflexible and opaque Army Corps of Engineers controls the levees and river diversions. Around 80 percent of the coast is privately owned, in many cases by the very oil companies whose past explorations are helping to destroy it. Funding is perhaps the greatest challenge. The state's "Master Plan" calls for a minimum of $20 billion over fifty years, and dreams of up to $100 billion, but Congress refused to pay for coastal restoration even in the booming nineties. Raising those kinds of sums in a time of austerity is essentially impossible. As public sympathy for the coast drops as the disasters grow more distant with time, advocates argue for restoration in terms of the continued survival of the oil and gas industry. Paradoxically, the oil spill offers the best shot the coast has: Clean Water Act fines could direct between $5 billion and $21 billion in its direction. Partially as a result of concerted local organizing, 80 percent of that would go towards coastal restoration under the recently passed RESTORE Act. Even split between the five affected states, that's enough to at least begin work on long-planned projects – but which ones?

Because while almost everyone is now happy to support coastal restoration in vaguely outlined theory, the devil is, as usual, in the details: identifying root causes, devising effective solutions, allocating financial responsibility. After years of conversation, people want something to happen, but the most effective changes will take years to implement and may never be reassuringly visible. Oil industry-backed politicians want to get behind short-term projects that create the appearance of action regardless of the outcome – like barrier islands, which look reassuringly sturdy but erode quickly. And when every politician claims to be doing something about the coast, the issue loses much of its hold on the public as a political issue that requires continued discussion.

The window of opportunity is closing, and the more time that elapses, as the urgent solidarity that crisis arouses subsides, the more durable the status quo appears. The long-term future of the city and the coast remain in doubt, particularly with climate change looming over all efforts. Some people have given up hope. On the other hand, recognizing long odds can be empowering, in a nothing-to-lose kind of way; many of the alliances currently being forged are emerging because the task is simultaneously both urgent and impossible. In a state dominated by private interests, challenging politics as usual requires that communities connect across and beyond existing arrangements and locations. And while the region's politics may not have been transformed overnight, many individuals have been politicized and invigorated.

While narratives of doom and renaissance compete to define the legacy of Katrina and BP, the disasters aren't over yet. Destruction lingers, and so does anger. Some of the most significant effects may not reveal themselves for months, years, or decades afterwards; in retrospect, we may see Katrina as the starting point of a new, broader environmental consciousness and movement in the Gulf Coast and beyond. But time is of the essence, and for now, the major question is whether the momentum can be maintained and the publics that have emerged can be sustained long enough to halt the coast's slow collapse – or long enough to incite action after the next disaster. Whether even that will be enough isn't clear. We can build a paradise in hell even as the sulfur smolders.

THE CONVERSATIONS going on right now in Louisiana are the ones that we'll have to face everywhere soon. Where do we rebuild and where do we retreat? What jobs, homes, ways of life will be lost, and what will replace them? How do we evolve catastrophic models of production and consumption? How do we seek alternative futures when faced with hegemonic political foes?

The work disasters are currently expected to do for climate, though, isn't so much political as pedagogical. Disaster is supposed to demonstrate what the science tells us we can expect from a warmer world. But the problem with disaster as education is that not everyone learns the same thing. Those lessons are strongly shaped by pre-disaster conditions: the narratives they use to interpret the way the world works and why disasters happen, the self-identity and social context that shape those narratives, their expectations for how change might occur and whether it's desirable, and how they've weathered past crises. In general, quick-onset events, like hurricanes and tornadoes, are particularly unlikely to have political impacts; they get more attention but are seen as exceptional, and tend to result in technical reforms. Slower disasters – drought and heat waves, depressions and epidemics – are more frequently perceived as political spaces as they become the norm. Either way, it's only exceptionally large disasters that have any lasting political influence at all.

So when George Marshall, a British climate activist, interviewed people in Bastrop, Texas, a conservative community ravaged by fires as a result of 2011's disastrous drought, he found that only one person – the mayor – connected the fires to anthropogenic climate change. Rather, most people spoke of their pride in their community's ability to overcome adversity and recover quickly. There, and in places like it, a push for climate action would more likely be perceived as callous, exploitative, and pejoratively political than a moment of truth and awakening. How people understand disaster is of considerable significance in a world where they happen more frequently. Many – perhaps most – still view natural disasters as apolitical tragedies: a time

when talking about politics is crass and opportunistic, and campaigns are suspended.

Still, there are no perfect opportunities, and climate organizations certainly see this as a key time, aiming to counter disaster capitalism with disaster activism. The geographical area affected by even severe disasters tends to be limited, so post-disaster change usually happens at the subnational level, but with so many parts of the country affected by disaster of one kind or another, climate organizations have been working to connect affected communities and construct a narrative around extreme weather. The broader conversation about climate might not happen right away, but as patterns begin to emerge, and individual fires and floods are seen as more than freak occurrences, the slow-disaster space for politics may emerge. The conversation may not be here, but it's coming. We need to be prepared before the terms of the debate are set and the boundaries solidified: what kind of conversation will it be? Who will be allowed to speak and about what? Who will be organized and around what?

For most American progressives, climate is another item on a list of things to worry about; liberals and leftists alike make green lifestyle choices but tend to talk vaguely about how we need to "do something about climate change" when it comes to a collective political project. The formulation may just be a turn of phrase, one meant partially as a jab at the fact that we've done so very little, and also as an expression of understandable bewilderment at the complexity of it all, but it betrays the kind of anything-is-better-than-nothing mentality that makes it easy to avoid contentious decisions. Because while there are lot of ways to "do something" about climate around the edges, the scope of the change that meaningful emissions reductions require is mindboggling. It's not the kind of thing that can be snuck in by way of an obscure clause in a transportation bill or shoehorned in under the guise of energy independence. We can't slap on a carbon tax and call it a day. We have to remake the world, and we have to talk about it.

The week Sandy hit, *Bloomberg Businessweek* posted the headline "It's Global Warming, Stupid" over a picture of flooded New York streets, as if winking at smug progressives who snark about the obstacles posed by people who "don't believe in science" whenever climate comes up. Simply believing that climate change is occurring has amounted to climate politics, but the limits of that are coming into view as the climate conversation lurches into the mainstream. Deniers aren't really the problem, and treating climate change as an issue of scientific knowledge rather than a political one has allowed the Left to claim it without thinking it through.

It's also led some to claim heroes perhaps better held at arm's length. The idea that serious environmentalism is anti-democratic is frequently associated with deep green types, but while there are a few eco-authoritarians out there, it's laughable to think they have the power to force a return to some prelapsarian era. The subtler but more serious threat is the perspective epitomized by Michael Bloomberg, who, in endorsing Obama post-Sandy, spoke of the need for a president who would "place scientific evidence and risk management above electoral politics." Calls to put science above politics are an easy sell to progressives, and that feeling that we have to do something led to fawning over Bloomberg's political courage, but it's clear that he doesn't consider what that something is up for discussion. It's a textbook example of the way science is used to shut down democratic politics, and of the environmentalism predicted by David Harvey, which "becomes sanitized of radical content and reshaped as expert neutral knowledge until it can be wedded to the dominating world view."

But not all expert knowledge is neutral, if "neutral" means aligned with centrist American political imperatives. Climate change fundamentally challenges the hyper-individualist, growth-obsessed tenets of modern American liberalism, to say nothing of conservatism. And with a little probing, Bloomberg's commitment to just the facts looks less dispassionate than he makes it out to be. How does, say, his dismissal of Obama's "divisive populist agenda focused more on redistributing income than creating it" square with the staid, scientific Royal Society's suggestion that climate change calls for wealth redistribution on a global scale? That kind of climate conversation may not be the one he's looking for, but it's the one we need to have, and we're going to have to fight for it.

It's an old worry about the viability of democracy that lies at the heart of our fixation on disaster: that people are too irrational and unruly to cope with complex issues or distant futures; that they're neither timely nor decisive enough to act prudently in good times or resolutely in bad. Only educated, farsighted actors are capable of such things, the story goes, whether in service of aristocracy, monarchy, or technocracy. We fervently hope that disasters can compel a moment of truth, because otherwise we fear those emergency measures will come to pass – and, in darker moments, we think we need them.

The way things are now, disasters aren't opening a political space for the people affected by them; they're belatedly alerting the removed elite to the disproportionate devastation of poor and working-class communities. Sandy is said to matter for climate in a way other disasters haven't – when Manhattan is flooded, we get it. The implicit, and sometimes explicit, argument is that we expect, and can ignore, flooding that hurts the poor in

Pakistan, or even New Orleans, but when New York can't hold back the tide, it's serious.

Where Americans were shocked at the powerlessness of the poor when Katrina hit, we now seem to take for granted that only the richest wield power. Those kinds of critical assessments aren't enough if they conclude that political change can only ever trickle down. For disasters to matter politically, the people they affect have to be able to make them matter. If we're to have a vision to counter the billionaire mayors of the world, and the power to back it up, there's work to do.

Because no matter how extreme or earth-shattering the event, powerful, actively engaged publics don't emerge from them ready-made. Spontaneous moments of clarity are a fiction, and collective action doesn't happen because things get bad enough. The disruptiveness of disaster may help create an opening, but the challenge of pushing through it is a combination of ordinary political work – organizing, creating and strengthening communities, building trust and vision – and recognizing where an obstructed opening is big enough to slip in a lever. The die for what comes after disaster is cast in quiet times. Of course, disasters, particularly "natural" ones, don't wait till we're ready; nor do they oblige the timing of elections or UNFCCC meetings or tipping points.

The protests against the Keystone XL pipeline were the climate movement's attempt to provoke a conversation by anticipating disaster with disruption, but the larger points were quickly derailed by arguments over technicalities of the pipeline's construction – just as post-disaster discussions tend to be – and perhaps by the overwhelming politeness of the mainstream climate movement. Still, that process of forcing conversations into normal life – not to mention of preparing people to mobilize – is critical in laying the groundwork for action to come out of contingent events.

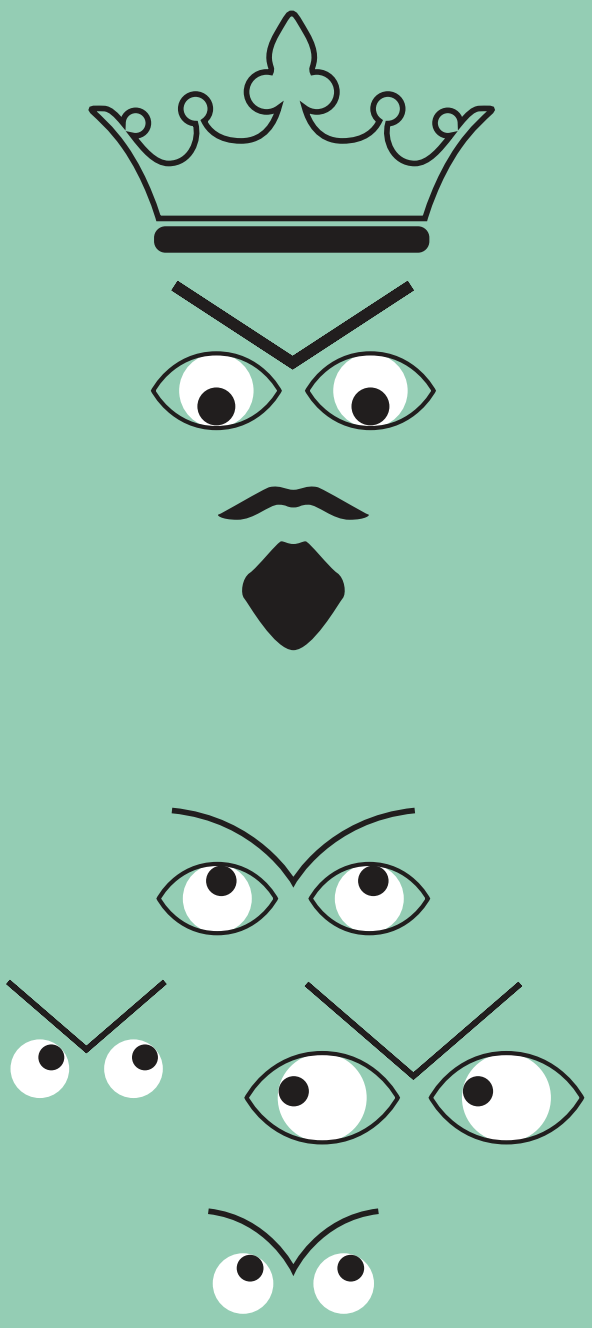
The Dust Bowl and the Depression offer the most obvious example of successful left politics in response to dual environmental and economic crises. Driven by radical organizing, the country essentially instituted basic income schemes that paid farmers not to farm and others to do public works. It was the obvious referent for the wave of enthusiasm for green jobs and a New New Deal in the early days of the Obama administration – perhaps too obvious, failing to take into account the differences of the current situation. But those hopes have faded in the face of austerity, and with it much of whatever tentative blue-green alliance there was, to say nothing of a red-green one. Both labor and environmentalists are becoming more confrontational in their tactics, but they've largely retreated to their own camps. In the vacuum that's resulted, it's not hard to imagine newfound bipartisan attention to climate change being used to advance proposals for blunt austerity measures instead of radical redistribution, capitalizing on the popular perception of environmentalism as asceticism to justify – or deflect blame for – a familiar neoliberal agenda.

Particularly in conjunction with the financial crisis, climate has planted the seeds of doubt in mainstream circles about the promise of prosperity for all through ceaseless growth. Yet for all its radicalizing potential, climate can be a tough issue for the Left to talk about without seeming opportunistic – a gradually accumulating invisible entity that rich people make and poor people get hurt by certainly sounds like a left-wing conspiracy. Making the connection between a hurricane and a car is hard enough; making the connection to the factory that made it is even harder. It doesn't help that many leftists' environmental analysis doesn't extend very far beyond climate as the ultimate anticapitalist trump card. The instincts to declare nature a depoliticizing force, consider limits anathema, and locate the real problems in human systems aren't wrong, but they can, and frequently do, result in a dismissiveness about physical materialities and ecological processes that leads to shallow analysis and glib solutions. We need to drop the environmental qualifier and consider not just climate but desertification and groundwater depletion and deforestation as a fundamental to our broader political projects. We need better ideas and proposals, and we need to start now.

Projections of what the world will look like in coming decades are bleak; they can induce despair. But disasters can counter the fatalist tendency to say it's too late: it's never too late, because it can keep getting worse. We have to keep living through this; as the *Onion* put it after Sandy, "Nation Suddenly Realizes This Is Just a Thing That's Going to Happen From Now On." Disasters have always been happening, of course, but the extreme now seems poised to become the norm, and that they're not actually natural doesn't mean we can stop them. If politics comes out in moments of flux, there's a lot of politics ahead; which way things turn out depends on what we do now. The Left has long been attuned to the social dangers of the chaos unleashed when we harness natural forces through human systems we can no longer contain. We need to use this glimpse of a not-so-distant future to think through how the old struggle looks when the very earth is changing in ways we can't control.

Last summer, before this year of apocalyptic visions real and imagined, Gary Greenberg wrote in *Harper's*, "the climate revolution is being televised – not only in fantasy disaster flicks like *The Day After Tomorrow* but on the morning weather report. The future is here, and it needs an ethics." It's here all right, but what it really needs is a politics. It's up to us to make it. ■

YOURS, MINE, BUT NOT OURS



This article is an adapted version of "The Language of Fear: Security and Modern Politics," in *Fear: Across the Disciplines*, eds. Jan Plamper and Benjamin Lazier.

by Corey Robin

WHY THE POLITICS OF NATIONAL SECURITY INEVITABLY MEANS THAT WE'RE ALL LIVING IN FAILED HOBBESIAN STATES.

POLITICAL FEAR is universal, but its language is particular. Racism is one language of fear; risk assessment is another. There is little doubt, however, that security – whether national or domestic – is the most potent and pervasive language of all.

Security is the one good, political theorists like John Dunn and Bernard Williams agree, that the state must provide. It has the ability, like no other argument, to mobilize the resources and attention of the state and its citizens. It has arguably inspired – and, in the case of nuclear deterrence, certainly threatened – more devastation and destruction than any other ideology of the modern era.

It has also provided the single most effective and enduring justification for the suppression of rights. Why that is so – why security has furnished what appears to be the strongest reason for eliminating or otherwise limiting rights – is the question I'd like to address here.

At first glance, this may seem like a question that answers itself. When people are afraid for their lives, they will do anything to protect themselves and their families. And when the safety of the nation or the state is threatened, it too will do whatever it takes to defend itself. Limiting the rights of its citizens is the least of it.

That is the theory, at any rate, and it is commonly associated with Thomas Hobbes, whose name is often invoked as the guiding intelligence of our times. But if we look closely at what Hobbes said we find a more interesting and revealing argument about how fear works to abridge rights and limit freedom.

Contrary to popular understanding and scholarly accounts, Hobbes does not argue that the state of nature is a condition where people are naturally driven by their instinct for self-preservation to submit to an all-powerful sovereign. What he does argue is that the state of nature is a condition where people cannot agree upon the basics of morality – about what is just and unjust, good and evil, and so on – and that this disagreement about morality is a leading source of conflict.

The one thing – the only thing – people can agree upon is that each person has the right to preserve his own life and to do whatever he believes is necessary to preserve it. No one, whatever his beliefs, can condemn another person for fearing for his life and trying to preserve it. Acts of self-preservation are blameless and thus are acts we have a right to do.

But as soon as we acknowledge this right, we confront a problem: not only do we have the right to preserve ourselves, but we also have the right to do whatever we think is necessary to preserve ourselves. In the state of nature, each individual is the judge of his own situation, the judge of whether or not he is in danger and of what he must do to protect himself from danger. "Every man by right of nature," Hobbes writes in *Elements of Law*, "is judge himself of the means, and of the greatness of the danger."

But when each of us is the judge of whether we are in danger and of what we must do to protect ourselves, we inevitably find ourselves, for reasons unnecessary to explore here, in a state of war. What seemed initially to offer the basis for agreement and the resolution of conflict – the right of each person to seek his own preservation – turns out in the state of nature to generate more conflict, more instability, and less self-preservation.

Though this is by no means what Hobbes had in mind, think of the public controversy in this country over "Stand Your Ground" laws in the wake of the Trayvon Martin case. Though these laws presume to draw upon an intuitive appeal to the notion of self-defense, that notion, in practice, can rest upon a highly specific, and by no means universally shared, understanding of a threat: for some, an unarmed black teenager in a hoodie is a self-evident danger; for others, he's an unarmed black teenager in a hoodie.

Whatever side one takes in that controversy, the mere fact that it is a controversy suggests – with Hobbes – that the right of each person to seek his own preservation does not settle a conflict; it is the source of conflict.

The only solution to this problem, Hobbes concludes, is to create an all-powerful sovereign to whom we cede this basic right – not the right to defend ourselves from certain and immediate danger (a right no one can rationally cede) but the right to be the judge of what might threaten us and of what actions we will take to protect ourselves from what might threaten us. When we submit to sovereign power, Hobbes says in *Elements of Law*, we are forbidden "to be our own judges" of our security, for the sovereign, Hobbes adds in *Leviathan*, is he "to whom in all doubtfull cases, wee have submitted our private judgments."

Returning to the language of fear, we can say that in the state of nature, the fear of death or bodily destruction entitles us to do anything we think might protect us from real or sincerely perceived dangers (as the defenders of George Zimmerman, who killed Trayvon Martin, essentially claim). Under the sovereign, however, that fear does not so entitle us – unless, again, we, as individuals, are immediately and incontrovertibly threatened. Once we agree to submit to the sovereign, he becomes the decider of our fears: he determines whether or not we have reason to be afraid, and he determines what must be done to protect us from the objects of our fear.

Hobbes's argument has three implications that are relevant to contemporary politics. The first is that it is not necessarily a widespread fear of foreign or domestic threats – real or imagined – that compels the state to abridge civil liberties. When the government takes measures for the sake of security, it is not simply translating the people's fear of danger into a repressive act of state. Instead, the government makes a choice: to focus on some threats and not others, and to take certain actions (but not others) to counter those threats. Merely think of the attention – and money, staff, countermeasures, and air time – the US government has lavished upon terrorism as opposed to automobile accidents or climate change, even in the wake of Katrina, Sandy, and a host of other life-threatening weather events.

Even though this power to define the objects of public fear suggests that danger or harm is whatever the state says it is, Hobbes did believe that there were real dangers that threatened a people. The sovereign had every reason to make the proper determination of what truly threatened the people and to act only upon those determinations. The sovereign's interest in his own security dovetailed with the people's interest in theirs. So long as the people were, or at least felt, secure, they would obey the sovereign; so long as they obeyed the sovereign, he would be secure.

Hobbes also assumed that the sovereign would be so removed from powerful constituencies in society – in his time, the church and the aristocracy – that the sovereign would be able to act on behalf of an impartial, disinterested, and neutral calculation of what truly threatened the people as a whole and of what measures would protect them. Because the sovereign's power depended upon getting these calculations right, he had every incentive not to get them wrong.

The reality of modern state power, however, is that we have inherited some of the worst aspects of Hobbesian politics with none of its saving graces. Governments today have a great deal of freedom to define what threatens a people and how they will respond to those threats. But far from being removed from the interests of and ideologies of the powerful, they are often constrained, even defined and constituted, by those interests and ideologies.

To cite just one example: it is a well known fact that African Americans have suffered as much from the American state's unwillingness to protect them from basic threats to their lives and liberties as they have from the willingness of white Americans to threaten those lives and liberties. Throughout much of US history, as legal scholar Randall Kennedy has shown, the state has deemed the threat to the physical safety of African Americans to be an unremarkable danger and the protection of African Americans an unworthy focus of its attentions.

In the Hobbesian account, this constitutes a grievous failure; in America, it has been a semi-permanent boundary of state action. At the most fateful moment of white-on-black violence in US history, in fact, the national government deemed the threat to African Americans a relatively minor item of public safety, unworthy of federal military protection; by contrast, it deemed the threat to employers from striking workers a public emergency, worthy of federal military intervention.

Or consider the US government response to the threat of terrorism. According to the two official commissions appointed to examine what led to the terrorist attacks of 9/11, one of the major reasons US intelligence agencies did not anticipate 9/11 was that turf wars and government infighting prevented them from sharing information. The "obstacles to information sharing were more bureaucratic than legal," write David Cole and James Dempsey in *Terrorism and the Constitution*, and had little to do "with the constitutional principles of due process, accountability, or checks and balances."

But while the government has run roughshod over constitutional principles since 9/11, it has been slow to remove these bureaucratic obstacles. Even the Department of Homeland

Security, which was supposed to unite competing agencies under one aegis, "is bogged down by bureaucracy" and a "lack of strategic planning," according to a 2006 wire report.

Thus, it is not just threats to the well being of citizens – or even the citizenry's fears of those threats – that compel governments to take action against those threats and certainly not the rights-abridging actions government officials so often do take. It is threats that the government deems worthy of public attention that will be acted upon. Louisiana Senator Mary Landrieu gave us a sense of this when, in the course of condemning the Bush Administration's slow response to Hurricane Katrina, she said, "I often think we would have been better off if the terrorists had blown up our levees. Maybe we'd have gotten more attention." In acting upon threats, government officials will be inspired by a range of considerations – ideological, political, economic, and so on – that have much less to do with the threats themselves than with the specific constituencies and interests for which the government speaks.

The problem is not that we live in a world of Hobbesian states; it is that we live in a world of failed Hobbesian states.

THE SECOND implication of the Hobbesian argument is that if security is the foundation of political legitimacy, people will only believe themselves obliged to obey if they think that their security is imperiled or potentially at risk. Once people stop worrying about their security, they may forget the reasons why they should obey. "The end of obedience is protection," Hobbes writes in *Leviathan*, but if people don't feel themselves in need of protection, they won't sense the need for obedience.

That is why, late in life, Hobbes decided to write an account of the English Civil War. It had been nearly three decades since the conclusion of the war, but Hobbes thought it critical to record and recall its evils, he explained in *Behemoth*, there being "nothing more instructive towards loyalty and justice than … the memory, while it lasts, of that war."

Relying upon a simple fear of danger to underwrite obedience, in other words, is not enough. Dangers can slip from view, and when they do, obligation is thrown into question. Hobbes was quite attuned to this problem, and hoped that it could be solved by the sovereign supplying the people with "prospective glasses" by which they could "see a farre off the miseries that hang over" them but which they did not immediately perceive.

But how does a state make a particular danger or disaster that lies far off appear up close? How does it turn hypothetical dangers into immediate threats? By developing an intellectual apparatus that dispenses with the ordinary requirements of evidence and proof, by articulating a set of arguments, and pithy slogans, that enables the state to take extraordinary measures against postulated perils: fight them there so we don't have to fight them here; the Domino Theory; MAD and other theories of nuclear deterrence.

It was Cardinal Richelieu, of all people, who declared, "In normal affairs, the administration of justice requires authentic proofs; but it is not the same in affairs of state.… There urgent conjecture must sometimes take the place of proof; the loss of the particular is not comparable with the salvation of the state." The more severe the threat, the less proof we require that it is real in order to take action against it; the less severe the threat, the more proof we require of its reality in order to take action against it. If we underestimate serious threats, the consequences will be great – so great, suggests Richelieu, that we may have no choice but to overestimate them.

In 1950, Learned Hand invoked a similar rule in his decision in *United States* v. *Dennis*: in order to decide whether or not to suppress the rights of the leadership of the Communist Party, Hand wrote, government officials must first weigh "the gravity of the 'evil'" – and then make sure that that gravity is "discounted by its improbability." The graver the evil they (or any other threat) pose, the higher degree of improbability we demand in order not to worry about it. Or, to put it another way, if an evil is truly terrible but not very likely to occur, we may still take preemptive action against it.

As I have argued in the *London Review of Books* and elsewhere, the run-up to the Second Iraq War – and the statements of Bush and Richard Perle in particular – shows that these are not ancient or academic formulations. And the support many liberal Democrats gave to the arguments of the Bush administration demonstrates that this is by no means an exclusively conservative phenomenon.

The language of security, and the discourse of imminence, is a bipartisan idiom, providing the state with the means to exaggerate threats, and to take preemptive action, including the abridgment of vital rights, to avert those threats.

It is not the people's simple, unmediated fear of danger – or their conservative leaders' interpretation of that danger – that compels this exaggeration and the turn away from evidence and proof. It is a highly elaborated political argument, which is based on the principle, in the words of Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, that it is "better to be despised for too anxious apprehensions than ruined by too confident a security."

THE THIRD and final implication of Hobbes's argument is that the sovereign can be the judge of our fears and of how we

are to respond to those fears only if it possesses a unity of will and judgment. If the sovereign is to be the decider, it must be able to decide; if it is to decide, it must come to a determinative judgment and a single, unified will. There can be no division or conflict; the sovereign must think and act as one.

As much as people try to resist this authoritarian dimension of Hobbes's argument, many politicians and scholars, across the political spectrum, accept some version of it. It's often said that a people hoping to protect themselves from fundamental threats must agree that they are in fact threatened and agree as to how they will meet that threat. According to liberal scholar and former Obama administration official Cass Sunstein, citizens must "have a degree of solidarity and … believe that everyone is involved in a common endeavor" in order to convince "the enemy that it faces a unified adversary."

Throughout the first five years of the Second Iraq War, to cite another example, Connecticut Senator Joseph Lieberman argued that any disagreement – not only about whether the war should be fought but also about how it should be fought – emboldens the enemy and should be avoided. In 2005 he declared, "It's time for Democrats who distrust President Bush to acknowledge that he will be the commander in chief for three more critical years and that in matters of war we undermine presidential credibility at our nation's peril."

Invoking the language of treason, Lieberman wondered aloud during a congressional hearing whether a non-binding Senate resolution opposing Bush's proposed escalation of American troops in Iraq "would give the enemy some comfort." On Fox News Sunday, Lieberman declared again that the resolution would "encourage the enemy" and that "war is a test of wills, and you don't want your enemy to be given any hope."

When it comes to matters of security, then, we are good Hobbesians, at least rhetorically. I say "at least rhetorically" because the fact remains that all states, even the most authoritarian, suffer from a fundamental lack of unity regarding their assessments of danger and of how to respond to danger; they also lack sufficient coercive power to enforce those assessments.

Many states, particularly liberal democracies, are divided at the center – with different elements of their war-making powers parceled out to a legislature and an executive, and sometimes even a judiciary – and federalist states are divided between the center and the periphery. It is not likely that such states will reach a consensus about what threatens them, and even if they do, it's not likely that the state's various and often fractious officials will agree on how to respond to threats.

Even regimes that come closest to the storied vision of unified state power – Hitler's Germany, say, or Stalin's Russia – seldom exhibit that unity. Think only of the bitter arguments that divided the SS from other sectors of the Nazi regime about whether Germany's interests during World War II were better served by using the Jews as slave labor or by exterminating them.

Nor do fundamental threats to the survival or integrity of the state necessarily furnish that unity. Consider the War of 1812, when British troops threatened the American state with the greatest challenge to its existential survival it had ever faced – and arguably has ever faced – from abroad. As of September 1814, the British had taken control of Washington, DC, burned the Capitol and the White House to the ground, and sent the federal government into exile. They also had massed a terrifying army on Lake Champlain, blocked ports up and down the North Atlantic seaboard, seized a good chunk of Maine, and seemed ready for an invasion of Boston. Desertions from the army were spreading, and many states were left to defend themselves.

At that very moment, leading citizens in New England, who had opposed the war, proposed to meet in Hartford, Connecticut, to discuss measures the region might take to extricate itself from the war. That fall, antiwar candidates were elected to Congress; secession was favored by at least half of the population of Massachusetts; and influential citizens and newspapers throughout New England argued for non-payment of federal taxes, declarations of regional neutrality, and refusals to cooperate with any federal conscription bill should one be passed. The governor of Massachusetts even sent an emissary to the British to secretly negotiate a separate peace, in which the British would promise to help the New Englanders defend themselves against any federal effort to suppress the rebellion.

Even when there is agreement that the nation is threatened and that it must resist rather than surrender to the threat, there will still be disagreement about how best to defend the nation, and these disagreements can be as divisive and threatening as disagreements about whether the nation is threatened or should resist. As John C. Calhoun wrote of the divisive effects of war, which he ascribed to struggles over the distribution of material resources that accompanies any national mobilization: "The whole united must necessarily place under the control of government an amount of honors and emoluments, sufficient to excite profoundly the ambition of the aspiring and the cupidity of the avaricious; and to lead to the formation of hostile parties, and violent party conflicts and struggles to obtain the control of the government."

America's involvement in the First World War offers an instructive example of just how divisive these disagreements about means rather than ends can be. Just after the United States

entered the war in April 1917, an official from the War Department testified before Congress about what the military would need to fight the war. When he announced, almost as an afterthought, that "we may have to have an army in France," the chair of the Senate Finance Committee declared, "Good Lord! You're not going to send soldiers over there, are you?" Many in Congress and the public had believed that America's participation in the war would require little more than sending arms to Europe. But what began as an almost charming display of naiveté rapidly became the subject of bitter dispute.

When President Wilson finally proposed a draft, the Speaker of the House declared that "there is precious little difference between a conscript and a convict." Though the conscription bill eventually passed, opposition to military service remained widespread. Roughly three million men evaded the draft, and as many as 60 percent of the men who registered may have requested exemptions from fighting.

In addition to conscription, Americans argued about the mobilization of public resources. Conflicts within the military were particularly intense. Despite pressure from Wilson and other officials, the army resisted changes to its outmoded procurement systems, making for inefficiencies, redundancies, and obsolescent weaponry. So chaotic were the army's procedures that its top administrator wound up hoarding twelve thousand typewriters in various government basements. "There is going to be the greatest competition for typewriters around here," he explained, "and I have them all." Businessmen consistently opposed wartime regulations of the economy, arguing that private initiative and the free market were sufficient to fight and win the war.

Financing the war was also contentious. While progressives persuaded Wilson of the need to tax wealthy interests in order to fund the war, their efforts were thwarted by industrialists and corporations, leading California Senator Hiram Johnson to complain, "Our endeavors to impose heavy war profit taxes have brought into sharp relief the skin-deep dollar patriotism of some of those who have been loudest in declamations on war and in their demands for blood."

Forced to fall back on war bonds, the Wilson Administration tried to turn the war into a genuine "people's war." But the government's "Liberty Loan" drives met with lethargy and opposition, leading the Treasury Secretary to declare, "A man who can't lend his government $1.25 per week at the rate of 4 percent interest is not entitled to be an American citizen." Hoping to overcome this popular resistance, Congress inserted a provision into the 1918 Sedition Act that made it illegal to "say or do anything" with intent to impede the sale of war bonds – though the legislature exempted from prosecution investment advisers who urged their clients not to buy war bonds for "bona fide and not disloyal" reasons, i.e., because war bonds were a bad investment.

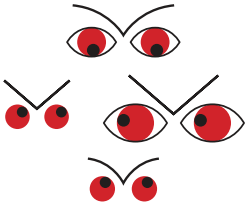
On the one hand, then, we have an ideological imperative toward unity and solidarity. On the other hand, the modern state lacks that unity and solidarity. It seldom agrees upon the threats it faces, and even when it does, it can get mired in arguments about how to meet those threats.

What do these three implications – states have a great deal of freedom to determine what threatens a people and how to respond to those threats, and in making those determinations, they are influenced by the interests and ideologies of their primary constituencies; states have strong incentives and have been given strong justifications for exaggerating threats; and while states aspire, rhetorically, to a unity of will and judgment, they seldom achieve it in practice – tell us about the relationship between security and freedom? What light do they shed on the question of why security is such a potent argument for the suppression of rights and liberties?

Security is an ideal language for suppressing rights because it combines a universality and neutrality in rhetoric with a particularity and partiality in practice. Security is a good that everyone needs, and, we assume, that everyone needs in the same way and to the same degree. It is "the most vital of all interests," John Stuart Mill wrote, which no one can "possibly do without." Though Mill was referring here to the security of persons rather than of nations or states, his argument about personal security is often extended to nations and states, which are conceived to be persons writ large.

Unlike other values – say justice or equality – the need for and definition of security is not supposed to be dependent upon our beliefs or other interests and it is not supposed to favor any one set of beliefs or interests. It is the necessary condition for the pursuit of any belief or interest, regardless of who holds that belief or has that interest. It is a good, as I've said, that is universal and neutral. That's the theory.

The reality, as we have seen, is altogether different. The practice of security involves a state that is rife with diverse and competing ideologies and interests, and these ideologies and interests fundamentally help determine whether threats become a focus of attention, and how they are perceived and mobilized against. The provision of security requires resources, which are not limitless. They must be distributed according to some calculus, which, like the distribution calculus of any other resource (say income or education), will reflect controversial and contested assumption about justice and will be the subject of debate. National security is as political as



Social Security, and just as we argue about the latter, so do we argue about the former.

Even when it comes to the existential survival of the state, diverse constituencies will respond to that threat in diverse ways, depending upon their proximity to physical danger, their identification with the state, the level of sacrifice that might be expected of them, and so on. And while we might think that a threat to the existential survival of a people – say, from a genocidal regime – would provide an instance of a neutral, universal definition of security around which a people could unify, such threats seldom inspire that unity of will and judgment. Instead, genocidal threats can prompt a return to the Hobbesian state of nature, wherein individuals and families act upon their own definitions of danger and take whatever actions they deem necessary to secure their own survival.

Because the rhetoric of security is one of universality and neutrality while the reality is one of conflict and division, state officials and elites have every motivation, and justification, to suppress heterodox and dissenting definitions of security. And so they have, as Hobbes predicted they could and would. But because a neutral, universal definition of security is impossible to achieve in practice, repression for the sake of security must be necessarily selective: only certain groups or certain kinds of dissent will be targeted. The question then becomes: which groups, which dissent?

Because government officials are themselves connected with particular constituencies in society – often the most powerful – they will seldom suppress challenges to security that come from the powerful; instead they will target the powerless and the marginal, particularly if the powerless are mobilizing to threaten the powerful. So the US government during WWI made it illegal to urge people, like the Socialists, not to buy war bonds – but it did allow a Wall Street adviser to counsel his client not to make a bad investment.

Or, when Congress passed the Sedition Act in 1918, which made it illegal to "willfully utter, print, write, or publish any disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language" about the United States government or the military or to bring these institutions "into contempt, scorn, contumely, or disrepute," the Republicans attempted to insert an amendment that would have protected themselves and their constituencies, who were aggressively criticizing Woodrow Wilson and the Democratic leadership of the US government. "Nothing in this act shall be construed," the amendment read, "as limiting the liberty or impairing the right of an individual to publish or speak what is true, with good motives and for justifiable ends." Suppressing dissident socialists or activists against the draft was fine; suppressing dissenting Republicans was not.

But there is a second reason why security has proven the most potent justification for the suppression of rights. And that has to do with the liberal tradition, which historically has offered the greatest *theoretical* resource for opposition to the suppression of rights. While liberalism as a theory has given us excellent reasons to oppose the use of coercive state power on behalf of religious or moral orthodoxy, it has given us far fewer reasons to oppose the use of that power on behalf of security. In fact, if we look at three touchstones of liberal discourse – Locke, Mill, and Oliver Wendell Holmes – we find that each of them actually provides excellent justifications for the use of coercive and repressive state power in the name of security.

Each of these writers tried, in his way, to prevent the state from using its coercive power on behalf of some controversial question of ideology or belief: for Locke, it was religion; for Mill, it was morality; for Holmes, it was politics. And each of them formulated a test or condition for when the use of such power was legitimate: for Locke, it was to protect "the security and safety of the commonwealth"; for Mill, it was to prevent harm; for Holmes, it was to thwart a "clear and present danger."

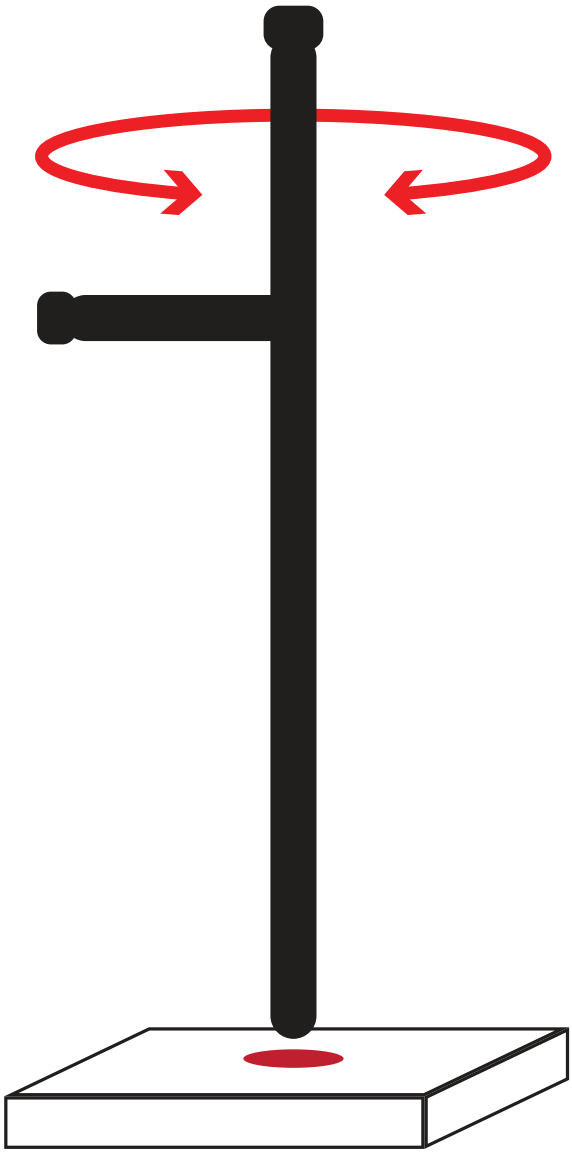
The assumption behind the proscription against using coercive power in the first set of cases – religion, morality, and politics – and the endorsement of it in the second set of cases – the security and safety of the commonwealth, harm, or a clear and present danger – was not only that the first set was a source of controversy and division while the second set was not. It was that the first was by its very nature a source of controversy while the second was by its very nature a source of unity. Unlike religion, morality, and politics, in other words, security offered the basis for an uncontroversial exercise of coercive state power.

As we have seen, this assumption has not been borne out by reality. But that failure has not stopped liberals from arguing, as the saying goes, that politics stops at the water's edge. And so when they have tried to chastise conservatives for using security for political ends (even though they do the same thing themselves), they have often found themselves, particularly since the Reagan years, hopelessly outgunned. Having endorsed – indeed, invented – the idea that security is not, properly speaking, a subject of and for the political arena, liberals cannot possibly hope to beat their opponents at a game which their chief theoreticians claim does not even exist. ■

RADICALIZING REPRESSION

by Amanda Armstrong & Nina Power

HOW STATE REPRESSION SETS OFF RADIATING OUTRAGE TOWARDS POLICE, PROSECUTORS, AND THE SOCIAL ORDER THEY REPRODUCE.



AMONGST THOSE who've recently been organizing against state austerity measures and social oppression in Northern California, an expression has emerged: "Revolution in the fall, counter-revolution in the spring." The phrase attempts to plot the rhythms of protest and its repression in the Bay, where building reclamations, street actions, and brief strikes have

taken shape in the months of October and November, while, by March, our energies have tended to be consumed with court support and campaigns against prosecutions. In the UK, the student protests of late 2010 and the subsequent rounds of criminalization followed a similar pattern, although some of the prosecutions have dragged on for almost two years as the Crown Prosecution Services tries again and again to run cases that have previously ended in hung juries (no overall agreement) or have stalled for technical reasons. However, the riots of August 2011 that took place in several cities across the country exploded in the middle of various protest trials: as tough as it was to get people in court to support those charged from the earlier demonstrations and trade union protest, as well as other direct actions, it was and is almost impossible to track the riot cases – more than 3000 arrests and 2000 charges so far – with twenty-four-hour courts running for several days and immediate custody (i.e. no bail) for most, leading to overcrowding and prison riots.

The expression obscures the less predictable tempos and sequences of recent protest, and this year its inadequacy has become particularly evident, as activists have been dealing in recent months with intensifying forms of state repression. In San Francisco, an October demonstration against war and colonial violence was rushed by the police, who struck with batons and arrested those at the front of the march. A few days later, after the arrestees' supporters had raised thousands of dollars for bail payments, the mug shots of twenty of those who'd been released from custody were published by the *San Francisco Weekly*. The *Examiner* described the protesters as members of a "vicious criminal street gang." The police evidently have decided to invite local newspapers and their readers into the everyday work of punishment and social regulation; the newspaper editors, at least, seem more than willing to oblige. The SFPD has brought in their "Gang Taskforce" to aid in the prosecution of those arrested, who are facing conspiracy charges and have had phone and twitter records subpoenaed. The utterly widespread usage of CCTV cameras in the UK, as well as a complicit and compliant press and a right-wing blog-culture that sees no problem with reposting photos of people and adding their own insinuations, regardless of the presumption of innocence, have done their best to abet the prosecutions of anyone involved in alleged "unrest" of any kind. Train stations were plastered with photos of those wanted for questioning, and police even dropped off printouts of suspected rioters on university campuses, where they were quickly removed and shredded (off-campus) by student activists.

Back in the US, a grand jury investigation of Seattle anarchist and ultra-left communities has been ongoing; two people who've refused to testify before the jury remain incarcerated. There's a sense that similar investigations could soon be launched in other cities. A spirit of generalized anxiety has thus taken hold amongst those who, just last fall, in the midst of expanding encampments, street confrontations, and rolling strikes, seemed to have forced a series of political openings, and to have put police forces, city governments, and university administrations on the defensive.

Neither the student protests that attacked Conservative Party HQ, the energy of early 2011 Trade Union protests nor the uprisings in the summer have been repeated on any scale in 2012, despite a worsening economic situation and brutal cuts all round. It is hard to know exactly why not: the police tactics on the ground during protest – kettling (police form an impermeable barrier around protesters often for extremely long periods of time – nine to ten hours in the student protests and in sub-zero temperatures – preventing anyone from exiting, eating, drinking or going to the toilet, a shaming mission, essentially), use of horse-charges and the violent police use of shields and batons are clearly designed to put off people from attending future protests, and certainly discriminate against those with children or with disabilities: footage of one activist, Jody McIntyre, twice being dragged from his wheelchair in one protest is absolutely shocking and caused – brief – national outrage (not that the incident has prevented police from turning violent against other people with disabilities at a recent event against cuts in disability allowance). The extreme prison sentences for protesters and rioters, not to mention for people on social media (one person who made a joke about the riots coming to his hometown was sent to prison for four years) have no doubt contributed to a climate of fear and extreme anxiety about monitoring – online and off. Eleven people – ten women and one man – who were tricked into having sexual relationships, and, in some cases, children, with undercover police officers who had infiltrated protest groups, have recently launched their case against the police chiefs who authorized it (the most famous undercover police officer at the heart of this scandal – Mark Kennedy – is also attempting to sue the police for not preventing him from falling in love). There is also the on-going prosecution of Alfie Meadows, a student protester hit by a police baton so hard he needed life-saving brain surgery, who continues to be hassled through the courts on a charge of "violent disorder" (which carries a maximum five year prison sentence – the favoured charge of the prosecution services of late): a parody of justice so grotesque it can hardly be believed.

If the phrase, "Revolution in the fall, counter-revolution in the spring" seems to propose a recurring period of relative freedom from effective state

repression, recent grinding prosecutions, and increasingly aggressive policing techniques, across both the US and the UK, give another picture of the temporality of protest these days – a picture in which repression forms something of a constant, underlying current, conditioning oppositional practices that nevertheless have the potential to spin off in unexpected directions or to block, if only for a moment, the effective motions of prosecutors and the police.

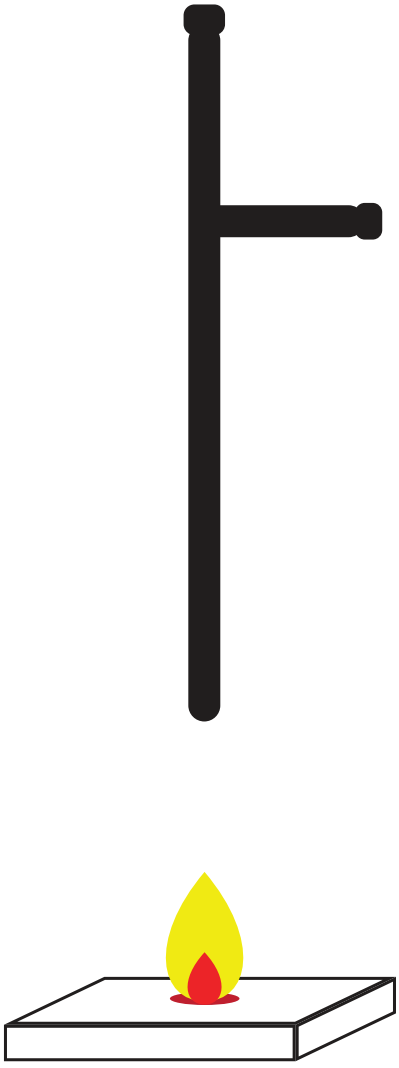
If this picture of our political moment appears shaded by pessimism, it also perhaps usefully casts into relief a series of urgent practical and theoretical problems for oppositional formations, from the need to adequately map the complex dynamics, historical layers, geographic variations, and effects on oppositional practice of state repression; to the imperative that we find ways to face, and tear away at, the layers of sanctioned violence that underlie and unsettle the present. By engaging directly such histories of state violence, new alliances, rhythms, and terrains of struggle could perhaps emerge.

Alongside the repression, the last few months have also opened up important real counterstrategies against the police, their violence, lies and ties to a repressive media and an increasingly exposed ruling class. Revelations about the death of nearly one hundred people at a football march in 1989 (The Hillsborough Disaster) have confirmed what families already knew twenty-three years earlier – that the police and other services were directly responsible for the crush and the aftermath, and that many of the people who died could have been saved. The same police force – South Yorkshire police – are also to be investigated for possible assault, perjury, perverting the course of justice and misconduct in a public office in relation to the "Battle of Orgreave," where ninety-five miners were arrested during the 1984–85 miners' strike. All were eventually acquitted after defence lawyers argued the police had fabricated evidence. The News International scandal which revealed the extent of joint police, government, and press corruption in relation to illegal phone-tapping, as well as growing anger over deaths in police custody and asylum centres and numerous police racism scandals, as well as the relentless stop and search tactics used in poorer parts of cities, have contributed to widespread mistrust of the police and those they serve.

In California as well, police forces and prosecutors have been particularly discredited in recent years (and, in the case of the Oakland Police Department, faced with possible Federal Receivership) as a result of a series of corruption scandals; the presumptive criminalization of working-class communities of color through gang injunctions and stop and frisk practices; the enforcement of stay-away orders for whole regions of cities against protesters charged with as little as blocking a sidewalk (a statute initially promulgated to criminalize street preaching by members of the Nation of Islam); and cover-ups following police shootings of unarmed people, including Oscar Grant, a young black man who was shot and killed by OPD officer Johannes Mehserle on New Years Day, 2009, while lying handcuffed on the ground.

The 2009 Oakland uprisings in response to Oscar Grant's murder forced the state to actually prosecute and incarcerate for a number of years Johannes Mehserle; these risings also brought people together who would later help build the Occupy Oakland encampment and the city-wide strike (called in response to a police raid on the encampment and subsequent tear-gassing of assembled protesters), which successfully shut down the port of Oakland on 2 November 2011.

If recent rounds of state repression have both chilled oppositional activity and at the same time set off radiating, increasingly generalized pain and outrage towards police, prosecutors, and the social order they daily reproduce, a question of the moment is whether as-yet unrealized forms of refusal and mutual support might take shape that could activate this radiating outrage, actively politicize and counteract oppressed populations' uneven exposure to sanctioned violence, and at the same time give those who resist the sense that they can count on massive support if ever they face police violence and prosecution. ■



LEAN PRODUCTION

by Will Johnson

WHAT'S REALLY HURTING PUBLIC EDUCATION.

On September 10, nearly 30,000 Chicago teachers went on strike for the first time in twenty-five years. This was no mere breakdown in negotiations over wages or healthcare contributions. At issue, as many have noted, was the fundamental direction of public education. The Chicago teachers asserted themselves as the first institutional force to combat what's often called the "business model" of education reform.

Meanwhile, in Detroit, students and teachers returned to dramatically altered schools. Over the summer, Roy Roberts, the schools' "emergency financial manager," had unilaterally imposed a contract on the city's teacher union allowing elementary school class sizes to jump from twenty-five to forty students and high school classes to sixty-one students. These class size reforms were coupled with a 10 percent pay cut for Detroit teachers.

While Detroit's example is extreme, increased workloads for decreased pay are what teachers around the country – including in Chicago – are experiencing to varying degrees as the business model of education reform gains traction with policy-makers. But stretching workers past their breaking point and increasing hours while gutting compensation is nothing new. The business model of education reform is an extension of a process called lean production that transformed the US private sector in the 1980s and 90s. In education, just as in heavy manufacturing, the greatest damage done by lean production is not done at the bargaining table, but in the destruction of teachers' working (and students' learning) conditions.

THE TEAM CONCEPT

My first two years teaching in New York City, I worked at an exemplary "lean" high school. This school twice received "A" ratings on its progress reports from the Department of Education, and it was rated "well developed" (the highest possible rating) in a 2011 quality review. Curiously, my former school's stellar ratings were awarded despite its poor academic record, itself a matter of public record.

When the Department of Education wrote its "quality review" of my former school, the first set of commendations focused on the administration's use of teams. "The principal," the report reads, "promotes organizational decisions … through a distributive team leadership model that consistently improve instruction and student outcomes." Basically, my principal was being lauded for putting teachers on lots of different teams and giving those teams lots of responsibilities.

At first, being on teams sounds like fun. Teachers at my old school worked on grade teams, department teams, inquiry teams, "case-conferencing teacher teams" and "'Teachers as Critical Friends' groups." All teachers attended three staff meetings per week, often breaking into small teams – per the administration's instructions. But based on this school's academic failures, these teams clearly weren't leading to "improved student outcomes." So why was the Department of Education so happy about them?

The team concept is a critical component of lean production. In lean workplaces, labor journalist Jane Slaughter writes, worker teams are designed to enlist workers "in speeding up their own jobs.… It is no longer enough for workers to come to work and do their jobs; they need to become 'partners in production.'"

School managers promote teams as empowering for teachers; according to management, they give teachers a say in how their schools are run. In reality, these meetings highlight how little control teachers have over their time and workload at lean schools. Morning meetings can be particularly miserable, as teachers desperate for preparation time are forced to sit through an agenda focused on management concerns. In fact, the apparent purpose of teacher teams is to shift administrative workload onto teachers.

At my former school, for example, faculty teams were tasked with designing the rubric our principal would use to evaluate our teaching; case-conferencing teams were tasked

with establishing flexible disciplinary systems so that our administration would not have to discipline difficult students; and grade teams were tasked with organizing school events, like field trips and parties. These tasks were piled on top of teaching workloads that were constantly increasing due to growing class sizes and cuts to support staff. Teachers at lean schools are stretched to their limits. This is not an accident.

The team concept both increases stress on the workforce and creates the illusion that workers themselves are responsible for this stress. After all, the teacher teams assign themselves the work. Of course, in a lean school, teachers are never given the option to reject the team model, which generates the work; they have to choose between being a "team player" and volunteering for new tasks and responsibilities or letting down their coworkers.

The cumulative result is, predictably, frustration and exhaustion: frustration because teachers constantly find themselves having to shortchange their pedagogical responsibilities (planning lessons, developing curricula) and focus on team (administrative) responsibilities; and exhaustion because teacher workloads were barely manageable before this additional work was assigned.

MANAGEMENT BY STRESS

The name "lean production" suggests that the practice emphasizes ruthless efficiency and eliminating waste. True, but those tactics have been around since the Industrial Revolution. What makes lean production unique from other forms of capitalist production is its "Management by Stress" approach: to achieve maximum efficiency, management deliberately stresses workplace systems to the point of breakdown.

In Choosing Sides: Unions and the Team Concept, Jane Slaughter and Mike Parker note that production in US factories was traditionally supposed to keep moving twenty-four seven. Breakdowns were considered crises. In a lean factory, however, supervisors speed up the production process until a worker drops a widget, loses a finger, or has a nervous breakdown. Such breakdowns are viewed as a positive because they allow management to identify weak links in the chain of production. As Slaughter and Parker write, "If the system is stressed … the weakest points become evident.… Once the problems have been corrected, the system can then be further stressed (perhaps by reducing the number of workers) and then rebalanced." The line can then be sped up again until the next breakdown occurs.

Occupational stress and its attendant physical and mental breakdowns have always been risks for teachers, but in lean schools, such breakdowns are a management goal. The consequences for teachers and students are catastrophic. Not surprisingly, teacher turnover rates have increased dramatically as schools have gotten leaner and leaner. USA Today recently reported that the average classroom teacher now has one year of experience. Research indicates that turnover is 50 percent higher in high-poverty schools – which happen to be the laboratories for lean production in education – than affluent ones.

Day to day, high turnover hurts staff cohesion and the shared sense of community in schools. A recent study conducted by researchers from the University of Michigan, Stanford, and the University of Virginia found that teacher turnover even takes an academic toll on students. The researchers found that an increase in teacher turnover "by 1 standard deviation corresponded with a decrease in math achievement of 2 percent of a standard deviation."

The predictable increase in teacher turnover reflects another hallmark of lean production: replacing skilled workers with an unskilled, contingent workforce. Despite a wealth of research showing that students fare better with experienced teachers, advocates of lean education from New York City Mayor Mike Bloomberg to Teach for America CEO Wendy Kopp advocate programs (like TFA) that place inexperienced, poorly trained teachers in classrooms for one to two years, burn them out, and replace them with a new batch. In lean education, teaching becomes a low-skilled, temporary job, regardless of how turnover affects students and schools.

VALUE ADDED ASSESSMENT

Another hallmark of lean production that's made its way into public schools is value added assessment. The concept emerged from the lean technique of value mapping, wherein managers track the flow of value through each stage of the production process. In a lean workplace, the ideal is an unobstructed flow of value from raw material to finished product.

PERFECTING THE LABOR PROCESS BY MAXIMIZING EFFICIENCY, REGARDLESS OF THE COLLATERAL DAMAGE TO WORKER OR PRODUCT, IS THE GOAL. IN LEAN SCHOOLS, TEACHING, LEARNING, AND STUDENT GROWTH BECOME SECONDARY.

Before tracking the flow of value, however, managers must, as lean production experts James Womack and Daniel Jones write, "specify value." In lean schools, value is "specified" as test scores. In a lean school, teachers are managers who supervise the flow of value through their students, whose job is to produce test scores as efficiently as possible. Unless they contribute to the production or flow of value, abstract values like emotional and social development, safety, comfort, and joy are all considered waste.

Value added assessments are then used to impose rankings upon teachers. Rankings are another key element of the lean production philosophy. As lean management guru Bob Emiliani puts it, "The final element of … evolving human resource practice was … an annual forced ranking of all associates." Forced rankings will certainly sound familiar to anyone who's been following the recent attacks on teachers from New York to California, where politicians and media outlets used test-based teacher rankings to publicly humiliate teachers – even when those rankings are statistically meaningless.

Public humiliation is certainly useful for lean managers who seek to place constant pressure on their employees so that, as Womack and Jones write, they can "do more and more with less and less." The primary goal of forced rankings is, however, to shrink the workforce and see how far remaining workers can be stretched before they crack. Emiliani advises managers to "develop an action plan" for the "bottom ten percent" of workers, and if there's no measurable improvement in performance, "the associate would be subject to involuntary separation." For the best of the workers – more work! As Bill Gates proposed last year in the *Washington Post*, policymakers should "get more students in front of top teachers by identifying the top 25 percent of teachers and asking them to take on four or five more students."

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT?

My former school's quality review lauded, among other things, the school's commitment to "continuous refinements and revisions to curriculum." Like teams, continuous improvement is a key component of lean production – and it too sounds great in theory. Who doesn't want to improve continuously? In lean production, however, the goal isn't to continuously develop workers' skills or even improve the quality of their products. What's continuously improved is the production process itself, and the metric for measuring improvement is efficiency.

Of course, as labor educator Charley Richardson has pointed out, efficiency is not an absolute concept, but is socially defined. Richardson notes, "Coffee breaks, production limits and staffing levels are all designed to improve the production process from a worker perspective and are all inefficiencies from a management perspective." In a lean workplace, continuous improvement means the elimination of whatever makes the work process humane and tolerable in order to increase production numbers.

Ultimately, both the worker and the product are of minimal importance. Perfecting the labor process by maximizing efficiency, regardless of the collateral damage to worker or product, is the goal. In lean schools, teaching, learning, and student growth become secondary.

In 2011, the *New York Times* cited my former school as an example of a troubling new trend: schools with high graduation rates whose students are overwhelmingly unprepared for college. That same year, the City University of New York reported that this school's graduates disproportionately required remedial services in college. While this school failed as an academic institution, it had excelled as a laboratory for lean education, implementing all aspects of business-minded reform as aggressively as possible.

The goal of lean education isn't teaching or learning; it's creating lean workplaces where teachers are stretched to their limits so that students can receive the minimum support necessary to produce satisfactory test scores. It is critical for teachers to see this clearly because lean production is indeed "continuous": in other words, it's insatiable. The harder teachers work to satisfy the demands of lean managers, the harder we will be pushed, until we break down. There is no end to this process.

It is equally critical for parents to understand that their children are being subjected to school reforms that are in fact experiments in educational deprivation. The goal of business-minded reformers is not to create "better" schools for children. It's to create leaner schools for administrators to manage with greater ease. Parents and teachers must fight this process together, or student learning in public schools will continue to suffer. ■

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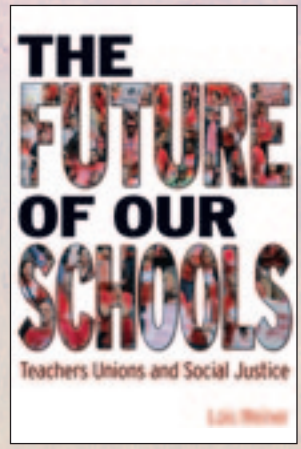

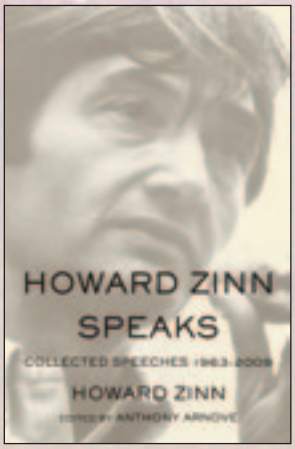

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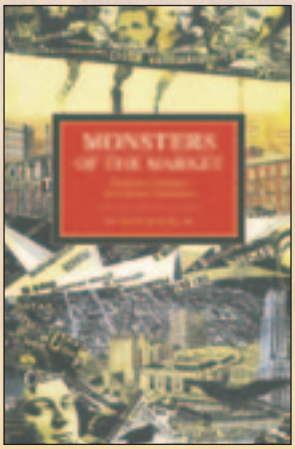

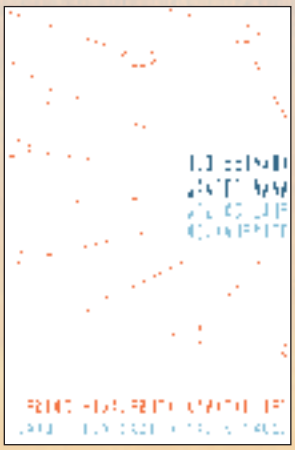

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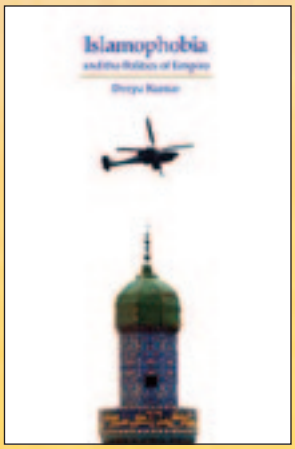

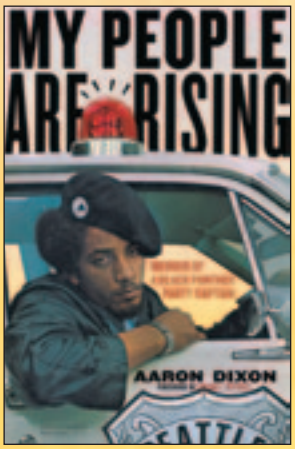

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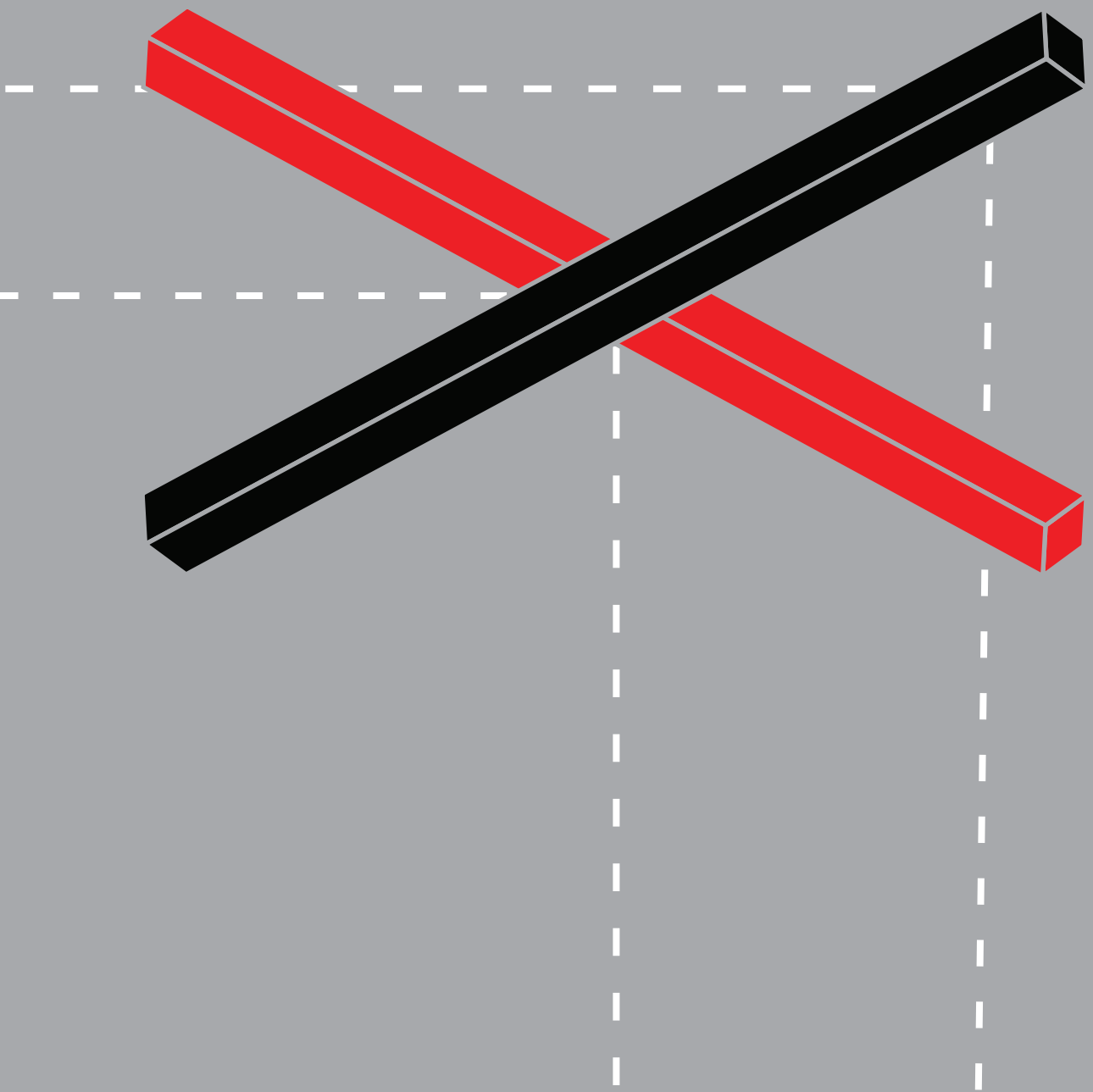


by Seth Ackerman

PROFIT IS THE MOTOR OF CAPITALISM. WHAT WOULD IT BE UNDER SOCIALISM?

Radicals have a habit of speaking in the conditional. Underlying all their talk about the changes they'd like to see in the world is the uneasy knowledge that our social system places rigid limits on how much change can be accomplished now. "After the revolution …" is the wistful, ironic preface to many a fondly expressed wish on the left.

Why, then, are radicals so hesitant to talk about what a different system might look like? One of the oldest and most influential objections to such talk comes from Marx, with his oft-quoted scorn toward utopian "recipes" for the "cookshops of the future." The moral of the quote, supposedly, is that a future society must emerge from the spontaneous dynamics of history, not from the isolated imaginings of some scribbler. This isn't without some irony, since two years later Marx the scribbler wrote his own little cookshop recipe in his *Critique of the Gotha Program* – it involved labor tokens, storehouses of goods, and an accounting system to determine how much workers would get paid.

As it happens, Marx's comment was a riposte to a negative review he'd received in a Paris newspaper run by devotees of the philosopher Auguste Comte, criticizing Marx for offering no concrete alternative to the social system he condemned. (That's why, in the original quote, he asks wryly if the recipes the reviewers had hoped to see happened to be "Comtist" ones.) To grasp the context, you have to understand that like many utopian writers of the era, Comte proffered scenarios for a future society that were marked by an almost deranged grandiosity, featuring precise and fantastically detailed instructions on practically every facet of daily life. It was this obsessive kind of future-painting that Marx was really taking aim at.

A related cause for reticence is the feeling that to spell out ideas for future social institutions amounts to a sort of technocratic elitism that stifles the utopian élan of the people-in-motion. Great social change never happens without multitudes becoming inspired to heroic acts of enthusiasm, and patient attempts to grapple realistically with the material problems of a functioning society are rarely so inspiring. This is by no means a trivial objection; one of the oldest fallacies on the left is the illusion that change happens when someone comes along with a brilliant ten-point plan and manages to convince everyone of its genius.

Still, a successful radical project has to appeal to every emotional register: not just those ecstatic moments when history opens up and everything seems possible, but also those pensive and critical moods when even inveterate optimists-of-the-will find doubt and reflection taking over. Even a struggle as epic and impassioned as the movement for the eight-hour day – which "seemed one of the most striking utopias of revolutionary socialism" at the time, as Elie Halévy remembered – was, in the end, about a bureaucratic measure, enforced by legal directives and factory inspectors.

Maybe the most fundamental reason the Left has been suspicious of such visions is that they have so often been presented as historical *endpoints* – and endpoints will always be disappointing. The notion that history will reach some final destination where social conflict will disappear and politics come to a close has been a misguided fantasy on the left since its genesis. Scenarios for the future must never be thought of as final, or even irreversible; rather than regard them as blueprints for some future destination, it would be better to see them simply as maps sketching possible routes out of a maze. Once we exit the labyrinth, it's up to us to decide what to do next.

In this essay, I start from the common socialist assumption that capitalism's central defects arise from the conflict between the pursuit of private profit and the satisfaction of human needs, and I sketch some of the considerations that would have to be taken into account in any attempt to remedy those defects. What I'm not concerned with here is achieving some final and total harmony between the interests of each and the interests of all, or with cleansing humanity of conflict or egotism. I try to imagine the *shortest* possible step from the society we have now to a society where most productive property is owned in common – not in order to rule out more radical change, but precisely in order to rule it in.

There is nothing wrong with thinking concretely and practically about how we can free ourselves from social institutions that place such confining limits on the kind of society we are able to have. Because of one thing we can be certain: the present system will either be replaced or it will go on forever.

Radicals responded to the end of "really existing socialism" mainly in two ways. Most stopped talking about a world after capitalism at all, retreating to a modest politics of piecemeal reform, or localism, or personal growth.

The other response was exactly the opposite – an escape forward into the purest and most uncompromising visions of social reconstruction. In certain radical circles, this impulse has lately heightened the appeal of a leap toward a world with no states or markets, and thus no money, wages, or prices: a system in which goods would be freely produced and freely taken, where the economy would be governed entirely by the maxim "from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs."

Whenever such ideas are considered, debate seems to focus immediately on big philosophical questions about human nature. Skeptics scoff that people are too selfish for such a system to work. Optimists argue that humans are a naturally cooperative species. Evidence is adduced for both sides of the argument. But it's best to leave that debate to the side. It's safe to assume that humans display a mixture of cooperation and selfishness, in proportions that change according to circumstances.

The lofty vision of a stateless, marketless world faces obstacles that are not moral but technical, and it's important to grasp exactly what they are.

We have to assume that we would not want to regress to some sharply lower stage of economic development in the future; we would want to experience at least the same material comforts that we have under capitalism. On a *qualitative* level, of course, all sorts of things ought to change so that production better satisfies real human and ecological needs. But we would not want to see an overall decline in our productive powers.

But the kind of production of which we are now capable requires a vast and complex division of labor. This presents a tricky problem. To get a concrete sense of what it means, think of the way Americans lived at the time of the American Revolution, when the typical citizen worked on a small, relatively isolated family farm. Such households largely produced what they consumed and consumed what they produced. If they found themselves with a modest surplus of farm produce, they might sell it to others nearby, and with the money they earned they could buy a few luxuries. For the most part, though, they did not rely on other people to provide them with the things they needed to live.

Compare that situation with our own. Not only do we rely on others for our goods, but the sheer *number* of people we rely on has increased to staggering proportions.

Look around the room you're sitting in and think of your possessions. Now try to think of how many people were directly involved in their production. The laptop I'm typing on, for example, has a monitor, a case, a DVD player, and a microprocessor. Each was likely made in a separate factory, possibly in different countries, by various companies employing hundreds or thousands of workers. Then think of the raw plastic, metal, and rubber that went into those component parts, and all the people involved in producing them. Add the makers of the fuel that fired the factories and the ship crews and trucking fleets that got the computer to its destination. It's not hard to imagine millions of people participating in the production of just those items now sitting on my desk. And out of the millions of tasks involved, each individual performed only a tiny set of discrete steps.

How did they each know what to do? Of course, most of these people were employees, and their bosses told them what to do. But how did their bosses know how much plastic to produce? And how did they know to send the weaker, softer kind of plastic to the computer company, even though it probably would have been happy to take the sturdier, high-quality plastic reserved for the hospital equipment makers? And how did these manufacturers judge whether it was worth the extra resources to make laptops with nice LCD monitors, rather than being frugal and making old, simpler cathode ray models?

The total number of such dilemmas is practically infinite for a modern economy with millions of different products and billions of workers and consumers. And they must all be resolved in a way that is globally consistent, because at any given moment there are only so many workers and machines to go around, so making more of one thing means making less of another. Resources can be combined in an almost infinite number of possible permutations; some might satisfy society's material needs and desires fairly well, while others would be disastrous, involving huge quantities of unwanted production and lots of desirable things going unmade. In theory, any degree of success is possible.

This is the problem of economic calculation. In a market economy, prices perform this function. And the reason prices can work is that they convey systematic information concerning how much of one thing people are willing to give up to get another thing, under a given set of circumstances. Only by requiring people to give up one thing to get another, in some ratio, can quantitative information be generated about how much, in relative terms, people value those things. And only by knowing how much relative value people place on millions of different things can producers embedded in this vast network make rational decisions about what their minute contribution to the overall system ought to be.

None of this means that calculation can be accomplished through prices alone, or that the prices generated in a market are somehow ideal or optimal. But there is no way a decentralized system could continually generate and broadcast so much quantitative information without the use of prices in some form. Of course, we don't have to have a decentralized system. We could have a centrally planned economy, in which all or most of society's production decisions are delegated to professional planners with computers. Their task would be extremely complex and their performance uncertain. But at least such a system would provide some method for economic calculation: the planners would try to gather all the necessary information into their central department and then figure out what everyone needs to do.

So *something* needs to perform the economic calculation function that prices do for a market system and planners do for a centrally planned system. As it happens, an attempt has been made to spell out exactly what would be required for economic calculation in a world with no states or markets. The anarchist activist Michael Albert and the economist Robin Hahnel have devised a system they call Participatory Economics in which every individual's freely made decisions about production and consumption would be coordinated by means of a vast society-wide plan formulated through a "participatory" process with no central bureaucracy.

Parecon, as it's called, is an interesting exercise for our purposes, because it rigorously works out exactly what would be needed to run such an "anarchist" economy. And the answer is roughly as follows: At the beginning of each year, everyone must write out a list of every item he or she plans to consume over the course of the year, along with the quantity of each item. In writing these lists, everyone consults a tentative list of prices for every product in the economy (keep in mind there are more than two million products in Amazon.com's "kitchen and dining" category alone), and the total value of a person's requests may not exceed his or her personal "budget," which is determined by how much he or she promises to work that year.

Since the initial prices are only tentative estimates, a network of direct-democratic councils must feed everyone's consumption lists and work pledges into computers, in order to generate an improved set of prices that will bring planned levels of production and consumption (supply and demand) closer to balance. This improved price list is then published, which kicks off a second "iteration" of the process: now everyone has to rewrite their consumption requests and work pledges all over again, so that they balance out when using the new prices. The whole procedure is repeated several times until supply and demand are finally balanced. Eventually, everyone votes to choose between several possible plans.

In their speaking and writing, Albert and Hahnel narrate this remarkable process to show how attractive and feasible their system would be. But for many people – I would include myself in this group – the effect is exactly the opposite. It comes off instead as a precise demonstration of why economic calculation in the absence of markets or state planning would be, if perhaps not impossible in theory, at least impossible in practice to imagine working in a way that most people could live with. And Parecon is itself a compromise from the purist's point of view, since it violates the principle "from each according to ability, to each according to need" – individuals' consumption requests are not allowed to exceed their work pledges. But of course without that stipulation, the plans wouldn't add up at all.

The point is not that a large-scale stateless, marketless economy "wouldn't work." It's that, in the absence of some coordinating mechanism like Albert and Hahnel's, it simply wouldn't exist in the first place. The problem of economic calculation, therefore, is something we have to take

seriously if we want to contemplate something better than the status quo.

But what about the other alternative? Why not a centrally planned economy where the job of economic calculation is handed over to information-gathering experts – democratically accountable ones, hopefully. We actually have historical examples of this kind of system, though of course they were far from democratic. Centrally planned economies registered some accomplishments: when Communism came to poor, rural countries like Bulgaria or Romania they were able to industrialize quickly, wipe out illiteracy, raise education levels, modernize gender roles, and eventually ensure that most people had basic housing and health care. The system could also raise per capita production pretty quickly from, say, the level of today's Laos to that of today's Bosnia; or from the level of Yemen to that of Egypt.

But beyond that, the system ran into trouble. Here a prefatory note is in order: Because the neoliberal right has a habit of measuring a society's success by the abundance of its consumer goods, the radical left is prone to slip into a posture of denying this sort of thing is politically relevant at all. This is a mistake. The problem with full supermarket shelves is that they're not *enough* – not that they're trivial or unwelcome. The citizens of Communist countries experienced the paucity, shoddiness and uniformity of their goods not merely as inconveniences; they experienced them as violations of their basic rights. As an anthropologist* of Communist Hungary writes, "goods of state-socialist production … came to be seen as evidence of the failure of a state-socialist-generated modernity, but more importantly, of the regime's negligent and even 'inhumane' treatment of its subjects."

In fact, the shabbiness of consumer supply was popularly felt as a betrayal of the humanistic mission of socialism itself. A historian† of East Germany quotes the petitions that ordinary consumers addressed to the state: "It really is not in the spirit of the human being as the center of socialist society when I have to save up for years for a Trabant and then cannot use my car for more than a year because of a shortage of spare parts!" said one. Another wrote: "When you read in the socialist press 'maximal satisfaction of the needs of the people and so on' and … 'everything for the benefit of the people,' it makes me feel sick."

Items that became unavailable in Hungary at various times due to planning failures included "the kitchen tool used to make Hungarian noodles"; "bath plugs that fit tubs in stock; cosmetics shelves; and the metal box necessary for electrical wiring in new apartment buildings." As a local newspaper editorial complained in the 1960s, these things "don't seem important until the moment one needs them, and suddenly they are very important!" In different countries and languages across Eastern Europe, citizens used almost identical expressions to evoke the image of substandard goods being "thrown at" them.

And at an aggregate level, the best estimates show the Communist countries steadily falling behind Western Europe: East German per capita income, which had been slightly higher than that of West German regions before World War II, never recovered in relative terms from the postwar occupation years and continually lost ground from 1960 onwards. By the late 1980s it stood at less than 40% of the West German level.

Unlike an imaginary economy with no states or markets, the Communist economies *did* have an economic calculation mechanism. It just didn't work as advertised. What was the problem?

According to many Western economists, the answer was simple: the mechanism was too clumsy. In this telling, the problem had to do with the "invisible hand," the phrase Adam Smith had used only in passing, but which later writers commandeered to reinterpret his insights about the role of prices, supply, and demand in allocating goods. Smith had originally invoked the price system to explain why market economies display a semblance of order at all, rather than chaos – why, for example, any desired commodity can usually be found conveniently for sale, even though there is no central authority seeing to it that it be produced.

But in the late nineteenth century, Smith's ideas were formalized by the founders of neoclassical economics, a tradition whose explanatory ambitions were far grander. They wrote equations representing buyers and sellers as vectors of supply and demand. When supply exceeded demand in a particular market, the price dropped; when demand exceeded supply, it rose. And when supply and demand were equal, the market in question was said to be in equilibrium and the price was the equilibrium price.

As for the economy as a whole, with its numberless, *interlocking* markets, it was not until 1954 that the future Nobel laureates Kenneth Arrow and Gérard Debreu made what was hailed as a momentous discovery in the theory of "general equilibrium" – a finding that, in the words of James Tobin, "lies at the very core of the scientific basis of economic theory." They proved mathematically that under specified

* *Krisztina Fehervary*

† *Jonathan Zatlin*

assumptions, free markets were guaranteed to generate a set of potential equilibrium prices that could balance supply and demand in all markets simultaneously – and the resulting allocation of goods would be, in one important sense, "optimal": no one could be made better off without making someone else worse off.

The moral that could be extracted from this theoretical finding was that prices were not just a tool market economies used to create a degree of order and rationality. Rather, the prices that markets generated – *if* those markets were free and untrammeled – were optimal, and resulted in a maximally efficient allocation of resources. If the Communist system wasn't working, then, it was because the clumsy and fallible mechanism of planning couldn't arrive at this optimal solution.

This narrative resonated with the deepest instincts of the economics profession. The little just-so stories of economics textbooks explaining why minimum wages or rent controls ultimately make everyone worse off are meant to show that supply and demand dictate prices by a higher logic that mortals defy at their peril. These stories are "partial equilibrium" analyses – they only show what happens in an individual market artificially cut off from all the markets surrounding it. What Arrow and Debreu had supplied, the profession believed, was proof that this logic extends to the economy as a whole, with all its interlocking markets: a *general* equilibrium theory. In other words, it showed that in the end, free-market prices will guide the economy as a whole to its optimum.

Thus, when Western economists descended on the former Soviet bloc after 1989 to help direct the transition out of socialism, their central mantra, endlessly repeated, was "Get Prices Right."

But a great deal of contrary evidence had accumulated in the meantime. Around the time of the Soviet collapse, the economist Peter Murrell published an article in the *Journal of Economic Perspectives* reviewing empirical studies of efficiency in the socialist planned economies. These studies consistently failed to support the neoclassical analysis: virtually all of them found that by standard neoclassical measures of efficiency, the planned economies performed as well or better than market economies.

Murrell pleaded with readers to suspend their prejudices:

> The consistency and tenor of the results will surprise many readers. I was, and am, surprised at the nature of these results. And given their inconsistency with received doctrines, there is a tendency to dismiss them on methodological grounds. However, such dismissal becomes increasingly hard when faced with a cumulation of consistent results from a variety of sources.

First he reviewed eighteen studies of technical efficiency: the degree to which a firm produces at its own maximum technological level. Matching studies of centrally planned firms with studies that examined capitalist firms using the same methodologies, he compared the results. One paper, for example, found a 90% level of technical efficiency in capitalist firms; another using the same method found a 93% level in Soviet firms. The results continued in the same way: 84% versus 86%, 87% versus 95%, and so on.

Then Murrell examined studies of allocative efficiency: the degree to which inputs are allocated among firms in a way that maximizes total output. One paper found that a fully optimal reallocation of inputs would increase total Soviet output by only 3%–4%. Another found that raising Soviet efficiency to US standards would increase its GNP by all of 2%. A third produced a range of estimates as low as 1.5%. The highest number found in any of the Soviet studies was 10%. As Murrell noted, these were hardly amounts "likely to encourage the overthrow of a whole socio-economic system." (He wasn't the only economist to notice this anomaly: an article titled "Why Is the Soviet Economy Allocatively Efficient?" appeared in *Soviet Studies* around the same time.)

Two German microeconomists‡ tested the "widely accepted" hypothesis that "prices in a planned economy are arbitrarily set exchange ratios without any relation to relative scarcities or economic valuations [whereas] capitalist market prices are close to equilibrium levels." They employed a technique that analyzes the distribution of an economy's inputs among industries to measure how far the pattern diverges from that which would be expected to prevail under perfectly optimal neoclassical prices. Examining East German and West German data from 1987, they arrived at an "astonishing result": the divergence was 16.1% in the West and 16.5% in the East – essentially identical. The gap in the West's favor, they noted, was greatest in the manufacturing sectors, where something like competitive conditions may have existed. But in the bulk of West Germany's industries – at a time when the country's economy was being hailed globally as *Modell Deutschland* – the structure of prices and allocation was actually *further* from the "efficient" optimum than in the moribund Communist system behind the Berlin Wall.

The neoclassical model also seemed belied by the largely failed experiments with more marketized versions of socialism in Eastern Europe. Beginning

‡ *Erik Dietzenbacher and Hans-Jürgen Wagner*

in the mid 1950s, reformist economists and intellectuals in the region had been pushing for the introduction of market mechanisms to rationalize production. Reforms were attempted in a number of countries with varying degrees of seriousness, including in the abortive Prague Spring. But the country that went furthest in this direction was Hungary, which inaugurated its "new economic mechanism" in 1968. Firms were still owned by the state, but now they were expected to buy and sell on the open market and maximize profits. The results were a disappointment. Although in the 1970s Hungary's looser consumer economy earned it the foreign correspondent's cliché "the happiest barracks in the Soviet bloc," its dismal productivity growth did not improve and shortages were still common.

If all these facts and findings represented one reason to doubt the neoclassical narrative, there was a more fundamental reason: economists had discovered gaping holes in the theory itself. In the years since Arrow and Debreu had drafted their famous proof that free markets under the right conditions could generate optimal prices, theorists (including Debreu himself) had uncovered some disturbing features of the model. It turned out that such hypothetical economies could generate *multiple* sets of possible equilibrium prices, and there was no mechanism to ensure that the economy would settle on any one of them without long or possibly endless cycles of chaotic trial-and-error. Even worse, the model's results couldn't withstand much relaxation of its patently unrealistic initial assumptions; for example, without perfectly competitive markets – which are virtually nonexistent in the real world – there was no reason to expect any equilibrium at all.

Even the liberal trope that government interventions are justified by "market failures" – specific anomalies that depart from the Arrow-Debreu model's perfect-market assumptions – was contradicted by another finding of the 1950s: the "general theory of the second best." Introduced by Richard Lipsey and Kelvin Lancaster (and widely ignored since), the theorem proves that even if the idealized free-market assumptions of the standard model are accepted, attempts to correct any "market failures" and "distortions" (like tariffs, price controls, monopolies or externalities) are as likely to make things worse as to make them better, as long as any other market failures remain uncorrected – which will always be the case in a world of endemic imperfect competition and limited information.

In a wide-ranging review of "the failure of general equilibrium theory," the economist Frank Ackerman* concluded:

> A story about Adam Smith, the invisible hand, and the merits of markets pervades introductory textbooks, classroom teaching, and contemporary political discourse. The intellectual foundation of this story rests on general equilibrium.… If the foundation of everyone's favorite economics story is now known to be unsound … then the profession owes the world a bit of an explanation.

The point is this: If a deterministic story about free markets yielding maximum output through optimal prices was no longer viable, then you could hardly attribute the failure of planned economies to the absence of those features.

As Communist systems were collapsing in Eastern Europe, economists who had lost faith in the neoclassical narrative began to argue that alternative explanations were needed. The most prominent theorist in this group was Joseph Stiglitz, who had become famous for his work on the economics of information. His arguments dovetailed with those of other dissenters from the neoclassical approach, like the eminent Hungarian scholar of planned economies, János Kornai, and evolutionary economists like Peter Murrell. They all pointed to a number of characteristics, largely neglected by the neoclassical school, that better accounted for the ability of market economies to avoid the problems plaguing centrally planned systems.

The aspects they emphasized were disparate, but they all tended to arise from a single, rather simple fact: in market systems *firms are autonomous*.

That means that within the limits of the law, a firm may enter a market; choose its products and production methods; interact with other firms and individuals; and must close down if it cannot get by on its own resources. As a textbook on central planning put it, in market systems the presumption is "that an activity may be undertaken unless it is expressly prohibited," whereas in planned systems "the prevailing presumption in most areas of economic life is that an activity *may not* be undertaken unless permission has been obtained from the appropriate authority." The neoclassical fixation with ensuring that firms exercised their autonomy in a laissez-faire environment – that restrictions on voluntary exchange be minimized or eliminated – was essentially beside the point.

* *no relation*

Thus, free entry and multiple autonomous sources of capital mean that anyone with novel production ideas can seek resources to implement their ideas and don't face a single veto point within a planning apparatus. As a result, they stand a much greater chance of obtaining the resources to test out their ideas. This probably leads to more of the waste inherent in failed experiments – but also far greater scope for improved products and processes, and a constantly higher rate of technological improvement and productivity growth.

Firms' autonomy to choose their products and production methods means they can communicate directly with customers and tailor their output to their needs – and with free entry customers can choose between the output of different producers: no agency needs to spell out what needs to be produced. To illustrate the informational efficiency of this kind of system, Stiglitz cited a Defense Department contract for the production of plain white t-shirts: in the tender for bidding, the physical description of the t-shirt desired ran to thirty small-print pages. In other words, a centralized agency could never learn and then specify every desired characteristic of every product.

Meanwhile, East European economists realized that an essential precondition for firms to be truly autonomous was the existence of a *capital market* – and this helped explain the failure of Hungary's market-oriented reforms. In seeking an explanation for the persistence of shortages under the new market system, the Hungarian economist János Kornai had identified a phenomenon that he called the "soft budget constraint" – a situation where the state continually transfers resources to loss-making firms to prevent them from failing. This phenomenon, he argued, was what lay behind the shortage problem in Hungary: expecting that they would always be prevented from going bankrupt, firms operated in practice without a budget constraint, and thus exerted limitless demand for materials and capital goods, causing chronic production bottlenecks.

But why did the state keep bailing out the troubled firms? It's not as if the Hungarian authorities were opposed to firm failures on principle. In fact, when bankruptcies did happen, the Communist leadership treated them as public relations events, to demonstrate their commitment to a rational economic system.

The ultimate answer was the absence of a capital market. In a market economy, a troubled firm can sell part or all of its operations to another firm. Or it can seek capital from lenders or investors, if it can convince them it has the potential to improve its performance. But in the absence of a capital market, the only practical options are bankruptcy or bailouts. Constant bailouts were the price the Hungarian leadership was forced to pay to avoid extremely high and wasteful rates of firm failures. In other words, capital markets provide a rational way to deal with the turbulence caused by the hard budget constraints of market systems: when a firm needs to spend more than its income, it can turn to lenders or investors. Without a capital market, that option is foreclosed.

As resistance against Communism rose, those in Eastern Europe who wanted to avoid a turn to capitalism drew the appropriate lessons. In 1989, the dissident Polish reform economists Włodzimierz Brus and Kazimierz Łaski – both convinced socialists and disciples of the distinguished Marxist-Keynesian Michał Kalecki – published a book examining the prospects for East European reform. Both had been influential proponents of democratic reforms and socialist market mechanisms since the 1950s.

Their conclusion now was that in order to have a rational market socialism, publicly-owned firms would have to be made autonomous – and this would require a *socialized capital market*. The authors made it clear that this would entail a fundamental reordering of the political economy of East European systems, and indeed of traditional notions of socialism. Writing on the eve of the upheavals that would bring down Communism, they set out their vision: "the role of the owner-state should be separated from the state as an authority in charge of administration.… [E]nterprises … have to become separated not only from the state in its wider role but also from each other."

The vision Brus and Łaski sketched was novel: a constellation of autonomous firms, financed by a multiplicity of autonomous banks or investment funds, all competing and interacting in a market – yet all nevertheless socially owned.

All of this lays the groundwork for raising the critical question of *profit*. There are two ways to think about the function of profits under capitalism. In the Marxist conception, capitalists' restless search for profit drives the pace and shape of economic growth, making it the ultimate "motor of the system" – but it's judged to be an erratic and arbitrary motor that ought to be replaced by something more rational and humane. In mainstream economics, on the other hand, profits are understood simply as a benign coordinating signal, broadcasting information to firms and entrepreneurs about how to satisfy society's needs most efficiently.

Each of these versions contains some truth. Look at the mainstream account. Its logic is straightforward: a firm's profit is the market value of the output it sells minus the market value of the inputs it buys. So the pursuit of profit leads firms to maximize their production of socially desired outputs while economizing on their use of scarce inputs. On this logic, profits are an ideal coordinating device.

But the logic only holds to the extent that that an item's market value is actually a good measure of its social value. Does that assumption hold? Leftists know enough to scoff at that idea. The history of capitalism is a compendium of mis-valued goods. Not only do capitalists draw from a treasury of tricks and maneuvers to inflate the market value of the outputs they sell (e.g., through advertising) and drive down the value of the inputs they have to buy (e.g., by deskilling labor). But capitalism itself systematically produces prices for crucial goods that bear little rational relation to their marginal social value: just think of health insurance, natural resources, interest rates, wages.

So if profit is a signal, it invariably comes mixed with a lot of noise. Still, there's an important signal there. Most of the millions of goods in the economy aren't like health insurance or natural resources; they're more banal – like rubber bands, sheet metal, or flat-screen TVs. The relative prices of these goods do seem to function as decent guides to their relative marginal social values. At least when it comes to *this* portion of firms' inputs and outputs – say, a steel company that buys iron and sells it manufactured as steel – profit-seeking really does make capitalists want to produce things people desire in the most efficient way possible. The irrationality of profit arises from those crucial mis-valued goods – labor, nature, information, finance, risk, and so on.

In other words, under capitalism firms *can* increase their profits by efficiently producing things people want. But they can also increase them by immiserating their workers, despoiling the environment, defrauding consumers, or indebting the populace. How do you obtain one without getting the other?

The traditional answer to this dilemma is what you might call the social democratic solution: let firms pursue their private profits, but have the state intervene case by case to forbid them from doing so in socially harmful ways. Ban pollution, give rights to workers, forbid consumer fraud, repress speculation. This agenda is nothing to sneeze at. The social theorist Karl Polanyi saw it as part of what he called the long "double movement" that had been underway ever since the industrial revolution. Polanyi argued that liberal capitalism had always been pushed forward by a drive to turn everything into a commodity. Because it required that production be "organized through a self-regulating mechanism of barter and exchange," it demanded that "man and nature must be brought into its orbit; they must be subject to supply and demand, that is, be dealt with as commodities, as goods produced for sale."

But that commodifying drive had always produced its dialectical opposite, a countermovement from society below, seeking decommodification. Thus, Polanyi's double movement was "the action of two organizing principles in society, each of them setting itself specific institutional aims, having the support of definite social forces and using its own distinctive methods":

> The one was the principle of economic liberalism, aiming at the establishment of a self-regulating market, relying on the support of the trading classes, and using largely laissez-faire and free trade as its methods; the other was the principle of social protection aiming at the conservation of man and nature as well as productive organization, relying on the varying support of those most immediately affected by the deleterious action of the market – primarily, but not exclusively, the working and the landed classes – and using protective legislation, restrictive associations, and other instruments of intervention as its methods.

After the Second World War, the pressure of the countermovement made decommodification the unacknowledged motor of domestic politics throughout the industrialized world. Parties of the working class, acutely vulnerable to pressure from below, were in government more than 40% of the time in the postwar decades (compared to about 10% in the interwar years, and almost never before that) and "contagion from the left" forced parties of the right into defensive acquiescence.

Schooling, medical treatment, housing, retirement, leisure, child care, subsistence itself, but most importantly, wage-labor: these were to be gradually removed from the sphere of market pressure, transformed from goods requiring money, or articles bought and sold on the basis of supply and demand, into social rights and objects of democratic decision.

This, at least, was the maximal social-democratic program – and in certain times and places its achievements have been dramatic.

But the social democratic solution is unstable – and this is where the Marxist conception comes in, with its stress on the quest for profit as the motor of the capitalist system. There's a fundamental contradiction between accepting that capitalists' pursuit of profit will be the *motor* of the system, and believing you can systematically tame and repress that pursuit through policies and regulations. In the orthodox Marxist account, the contradiction is straightforwardly economic: policies that reduce profit rates too much will lead to underinvestment and economic crisis. But the contradiction can also be political: profit-hungry capitalists will use their social power to obstruct the necessary policies. How can you have a system *driven* by individuals maximizing their profit cash-flows and still expect to maintain the profit-repressing norms, rules, laws, and regulations necessary to uphold the common welfare?

What is needed is a structure that allows autonomous firms to produce and trade goods for the market, aiming to generate a surplus of output over input – while keeping those firms public and preventing their surplus from being appropriated by a narrow class of capitalists. Under this type of system, workers can assume any degree of control they like over the management of their firms, and any "profits" can be socialized – that is, they can truly function as a signal, rather than as a motive force. But the precondition of such a system is the socialization of the means of production – structured in a way that preserves the existence of a capital market. How can all this be done?

Start with the basics. Private control over society's productive infrastructure is ultimately a financial phenomenon. It is by financing the means of production that capitalists exercise control, as a class or as individuals. What's needed, then, is a *socialization of finance* – that is, a system of common, collective financing of the means of production and credit. But what does that mean in practice?

It might be said that people own two kinds of assets. "Personal" assets include houses, cars, or computers. But financial assets – claims on money flows, like stocks, bonds, and mutual funds – are what finance the productive infrastructure. Suppose a public common fund were established, to undertake what might be euphemistically called the "compulsory purchase" of all privately-owned financial assets. It would, for example, "buy" a person's mutual fund shares at their market price, depositing payment in the person's bank account. By the end of this process, the common fund would own all formerly privately-owned financial assets, while all the financial wealth of individuals would be converted into bank deposits – but with the banks in question now owned in common, since the common fund now owns all the shares.

No one has lost any wealth; they've simply cashed out their stocks and bonds. But there are far-reaching consequences. Society's means of production and credit now constitute the assets of a public fund, while individuals' financial wealth balances are now its liabilities. In other words, the job of intermediating between individuals' money savings and society's productive physical assets that used to be performed by capitalist banks, mutual funds, and so on, has been socialized. The common fund can now reestablish a "tamed" capital market on a socialized basis, with a multiplicity of socialized banks and investment funds owning and allocating capital among the means of production.

The first lesson here is that the transformation to a different system does not have to be catastrophic. Of course, the situation I'm describing would be a revolutionary one – but it wouldn't have to involve the total collapse of the old society and the Promethean conjuring of something entirely unrecognizable in its place.

At the end of the process, firms no longer have individual owners who seek to maximize profits. Instead, they are owned by society as a whole, along with any surplus ("profits") they might generate. Since firms still buy and sell in the market, they can still generate a surplus (or deficit) that can be used to judge their efficacy. But no individual owner actually pockets these surpluses, meaning that no one has any particular interest in perpetuating or exploiting the profit-driven mis-valuation of goods that is endemic under capitalism. The "social democratic solution," involving collective institutions and norms, that was once a contradiction – selectively frustrating the profit motive to uphold the common good, while systematically relying on it as the engine of the system – can now be reconciled.

To the same end, the accrual of interest to individuals' bank deposits can be capped at a certain threshold of wealth, and beyond that level it could be limited to simply compensate for inflation. (Or the social surplus could just be divided up equally among everyone and paid out as a social dividend.) This would yield not exactly the euthanasia of the rentier, but the abolition of the "rentier interest" in society. And while individuals could still be free to start businesses, once their firms reached a certain size, age and importance, they would have to "go public": to be sold by their owners into the socialized capital market.

What I'm describing is, in one sense, the culmination of a trend that has been proceeding under capitalism for centuries: the growing separation of ownership from control. Already in the mid-nineteenth century, Marx marveled at the proliferation of what we now call corporations: "Stock companies in general – developed with the credit system – have an increasing tendency to separate this work of management as a function from the ownership of capital, be it self-owned or borrowed. Just as the development of bourgeois society witnessed a separation of the functions of judges and administrators from land-ownership, whose attributes they were in feudal times." Marx thought this development highly significant: "It is the abolition of capital as private property within the framework of capitalist production itself."

By the 1930s this "socialized private property" had become the dominant productive form in American capitalism, as Adolf Berle and Gardiner Means signaled in *The Modern Corporation and Private Property*. The managerial-corporate model seemed to face a challenge in the 1980s when capitalist owners, dissatisfied with languishing profit rates, launched an offensive against what they saw as lax and complacent corporate managers. This set off a titanic intra-class brawl for control of the corporation that lasted more than a decade. But by the late 1990s, the result was a self-serving compromise on both sides: CEOs retained their autonomy from the capital markets, but embraced the ideology of "shareholder value"; their stock packages were made more sensitive to the firm's profit and stock-market performance, but also massively inflated. In reality, none of this technically resolved the problem of the separation of ownership and control, since the new pay schemes never came close to really aligning the pecuniary interests of the managers with the owners'. A comprehensive study of executive pay from 1936 to 2005 by MIT and Federal Reserve economists* found that the correlation between firms' performance and their executives' total pay was negligible – not only in the era of mid-century managerialism, but throughout the whole period.

In other words, the laboratory of capitalism has been pursuing a centuries-long experiment to test whether an economic system can function when it severs the one-to-one link between the profits of an enterprise and the rewards that accrue to its controllers. The experiment has been a success. Contemporary capitalism, with its quite radical separation of ownership and control, has no shortage of defects and pathologies, but an inattention to profit has not been one of them.

How, then, should our new socialized firms actually be governed? A complete answer to that question lies far beyond the scope of an essay like this – minutely describing the charters and bylaws of imaginary enterprises is exactly the kind of Comtist cookshop recipe that Marx rightly ridiculed. But the basic point is clear enough: since these firms buy and sell in the market, their performance can be rationally judged. A firm could be controlled entirely by its workers, in which case they could simply collect its entire net income, after paying for the use of the capital. Or it could be "owned" by an entity in the socialized capital market – with a management selected by that entity, and counterbalanced by a strong system of worker co-determination within the firm. Those managers and "owners" could be evaluated on the *relative* returns the firm generates, but they would have no private property rights over the *absolute* mass of profits. If expectations of future performance needed to be "objectively" judged in some way, that is something the socialized capital markets could do.

The details could be arranged in an infinite variety of ways, but what's important is the principle: Profit should be a signal, not a motive force.

Such a program does not amount to a utopia; it does not proclaim Year Zero or treat society as a blank slate. What it tries to do is sketch a rational economic mechanism that denies the pursuit of profit priority over the fulfillment of human needs. Nor does it rule out further, more basic changes in the way humans interact with each other and their environment – on the contrary, it lowers the barriers to further change.

In a tribute to Isaac Deutscher, the historian Ellen Meiksins-Wood praised his "measured vision of socialism, which recognized its promise for human emancipation without harboring romantic illusions that it would cure all human ills, miraculously making people 'free,' in Shelley's words, 'from guilt or pain.'" Socialism, Deutscher had written, was not "evolution's last and perfect product or the end of history, but in a sense only the beginning of history." As long as the Left can retain this elemental basis of hope, it will keep a horizon beyond capitalism in its sights. ■

* *Carola Frydman and Raven Saks*

SEX HOUSE AND THE REFUSAL TO FUCK

by Gavin Mueller

REAL LIFE IS TOO DULL TO MAKE COMPELLING TV, BUT COMPELLING TV IS OBVIOUSLY CONTRIVED.

The *Onion* gave itself a simple task: make fun of reality television, a drama already reviled and full of self-parody.

Satirical treatments of reality often strike for the grim and moralistic. In *Series 7: The Contenders* and *Dead Set*, contestants end up killing each other, and the viewers are implicitly indicted as accomplices to inhuman carnage

(explicitly, in the alternate ending for Series 7, where enraged audiences beat contestants to death for their reluctance to murder one another).

This is pure hypocrisy, of course, a bad-faith criticism of people for enjoying and participating in entertainment, by people who make their living from creating just such entertainment. Fortunately, The *Onion* took a less conventional path, and a more radical one: their story takes the side of the workers, the reality show contestants themselves, in their battle against their oppressive working conditions.

A reality show nicely encapsulates Mario Tronti's argument from the 1960s: that the productive relations of the factory had expanded to all of society. On a reality show, the entire environment is a workplace, a space devoted to producing value for producers – factory and society are perfectly integrated. Producers hire television workers, casts, and crews to create a show, through the work of merely living while on camera.

The major problem for reality TV is that real life is too dull to make for compelling television, but compelling television is obviously contrived. The most reliable way to smooth over this contradiction, to hold the spectre of phoniness at bay, is sex. We're supposed to understand sex as the most authentic expression of our inner selves, where our drives and desires overwhelm our conscious, rational minds, where we drop the presentation of self in everyday life and get real. Just like football needs cheerleaders to distract from the obvious homoeroticism, reality TV needs sex to prop up its central myths. According to reality TV scholar Mark Andrejevic, the origins of reality TV are in the soft-porn world of 1990s webcams.

Sex House's fictionalized show foreground this, much like its real-life model, *Big Brother*, foregrounds intrusive surveillance with its allusion to 1984. But as we're introduced to the plucky cast, already a few things are awry. First of all, there's a middle-aged accountant Frank, who "won a Tombstone pizza contest" to get on the show. The strapping Derek discovers he's the only gay man, and thus has nobody to hook up with. In spite of these hangups, the cast gets down to the staple activity underpinning almost all reality television: getting drunk.

Sex House's first satirical target is the conventional ideology of the casual fun of hooking up. In a vodka-soaked haze, token naif Erin loses her virginity to Frank, old enough to be her father, who awkwardly blurts out "I love you" during sex. Much like sex in real life, the "3½ months of consequence-free sex" on *Sex House* is full of consequences. Wracked with shame, all Frank can say to Erin the next day is, "It's important that you go to the bathroom." Erin is visibly traumatized, withdrawing from the show socially and emotionally, sleeping under a pool table. Later, she finds out she's pregnant.

COUNT HOW MANY TIMES A TELEVISION APPEARANCE IS LIKENED TO THAT "STEPPING-STONE" CRAP JOB YOU HATE: AND SO SELF-MANAGEMENT BECOMES CAPITALIST MANAGEMENT BY OTHER MEANS. WE ARE LEARNING HOW THIS LIMITS RADICAL MOVEMENTS WITH LARGE, VOCAL CONTINGENTS OF CULTURAL WORKERS.

But *Sex House* doesn't just get mileage from puncturing ideologies of sexuality. Its plot hinges on the deteriorating conditions of the house itself. Vents inexplicably shoot out hot air, scalding the cast. The only provided food, pumpernickel bread, turns into a toxic mold infestation, and the garbage is never taken away. The bosses have neglected to give their workers the basics to sustain life, let alone libido, and the cast turns confrontational, with Derek at the vanguard.

Derek is the first to note the lack of food, and discovers the house clocks are out of whack, which mimics the way reality TV always obscures the progression of time for its viewers. The producers bring in the Host to manage these ineffective workers, offering retraining in proper gender behavior with some low-level entertainment professionals (women are taught striptease, men "bro down" with a profane comic). Derek leads the charge against the dead-eyed host: "Nobody have sex, it's a trick!" By refusing to fuck, refusing to work, they cease producing any value for the show.

The next few episodes depict the cast coalescing around the strategy of refusal. Mainstreamer stereotypes Tara (the blonde ditz) and Jay (the bro) decide not to have sex, instead forging a deeper intimacy through the strike. Even oversexed Alex cools her jets after the Host rudely rebuffs her, earning sympathy and solidarity from the other cast members. The cast has a "house meeting to make a list of demands" from management, who, in a shadow of the bargains made with labor unions under Keynesianism, want increased productivity in exchange for improvements. But once again, it's a trick – instead of real improvement, management only offers a patch (frogs

to eat the plague of flies) and a quack therapist, whose solution to everything is to have sex – in other words, suck it up and get back to work.

Late capitalism, where not only is work necessary for bodily survival, but is good for the soul too!

When the cast resists a sexy oily game of Twister ("We avoided touching as much as possible during Twister. We tried to make sure it wasn't a sexy thing.") the producers desperately resort to drugging them, a plot thwarted by Tara's foray into proletarian science: "Cloudy drink kills frog!" A hostage crisis force the bosses to pull the plug, abandoning even their camera crew to the victorious cast.

If you look at the view counts, you'll notice most people bowed out after the first episode; while Episode 1 has over 3.5 million views, the last episode has barely 300,000. Something in the show failed to satisfy, perhaps failed to live up to the expectations we already have for a satire of reality TV. We're predisposed to hate the "attention whore" contestants, here literalized as people who are paid to fuck on TV. Plenty of reality TV is designed as a feast of ressentiment. But the "love-to-hate" quality of reality TV relies on bourgeois ideology, where the production of the show is only questioned on the level of the morality of an individual choice. According to this line of thinking, the bad parts of reality TV are the prurience of the viewers and the exhibitionism of the contestants. The miseries of being on TV (poor working conditions) are the result of the distasteful competition and squabbling among the cast. This is the fetishism Marx talks about, where capitalism's appearance of free contractual association is mistaken for the motor of history. In castigating the viewers and the cast, the two categories of people who actually produce value, the actual workers, it tends to let the owners and managers off the hook.

Sex House, by correctly representing the class struggle as one between cast and producers, refuses this ideology. Instead, it argues that free contracts are a myth, a source of exploitation and misery that can only be properly countered by rejecting the whole state of affairs. More radically, it shows this rejection as a victory – of sorts. The show transforms into a documentary of the failure of the show to be produced. By the end, it's not clear that *Sex House* will ever be aired. The investment in the production of the show, as inadequate as it is for the maintenance of the lives of the cast, will not be returned. Profits will not be realized. Due to worker intransigence the commodity isn't completed and production is shut down.

In the wake of the strike, the bosses give up and leave their workforce to their fate. Capital takes flight and *Sex House* becomes part of the Rust Belt. The housemates resort to creating an autonomous society, with highly structured routines of barley harvesting and amphibian husbandry. Here the *Onion* turns on the cast a bit, portraying them as isolation-addled primitivists. When the cast discovers that all along the "real world" was just outside, they reject that too, walling themselves up again to preserve their commune from capitalist-saturated everyday life.

The workplace struggles of post-Fordist entertainment are already visible. As management pits cast members against each other in contests, sometimes they resist. Fabio, the freegan of Season 10 of *Project Runway* pointedly refuses to snitch on his teammates, weaseling out of the demoralizing requirement to "throw someone under the bus." It seems that he confers with his colleagues about doing the same. Some contestants, like Andrea and Kooan, simply refuse the work altogether, abruptly fleeing the set or resigning. Others, like Nathan, glumly carry on, with the knowledge that they too will eventually be cut, while considering rejecting the hostile environment of the show.

But Nathan stays until the bitter end. Here is the difficulty for our reality stars, and the class of cultural workers of which they are a part, and why we should pay attention to their plight. The cast members of reality shows manage themselves, not for their own liberty, but for increased wages, privileges, and benefits. They think about the benefit a couple more appearances on the show, as miserable as they are, will do for their career. Count how many times a television appearance is likened to that "stepping-stone" crap job you hate: "It's such an amazing opportunity…." And so self-management becomes capitalist management by other means. We are learning how this limits radical movements with large, vocal contingents of cultural workers.

Carrying the parody to its end, *Sex House*'s final reunion show is, as such shows always are, an exercise in revisionism, and the show's darkest moment. The tortures and hardships of *Sex House* have been reformulated as a difficult and transformative experience. "Now I'm more comfortable with who I am," says a made-over Erin, who has given her baby up for adoption to focus on self-promotion.

All the cast members have been sucked into the hypercompetitive production of their own celebrity. The radical leader Derek has gone straight, and now works for Coolio, who is, he reassures us, "very real." The solidarity from the show's filming has dissipated – everyone has turned entrepreneur of the self, and so they must turn to exploiting that self, aligning with the producers they fought just a short time before.

In the wake of the refusal to work, the social factory of everyday life once again rears its head – all of the castmates have become professional bloggers. ■

VAGUE STRATEGY AND STRATEGIC VAGUENESS

by Colin McSwiggen

THERE'S A REASON DESIGNERS DESCRIBE THEIR FIELD IN ABSTRACT TERMS.

The most uncomfortable task I have to undertake at a party is explaining to strangers what I do. When asked, I say that I'm studying industrial design, which usually elicits the self-consciously stiff look of an interlocutor staring down impending boredom: "Oh, so … you make, like, packaging?"

Yes, that's part of it, and now I'm screwed.

The smart thing for me to do in this situation would be to explain the specifics of my day-to-day in concrete terms: drawing up plans, building models and prototypes, opaque brainstorming rituals involving ecologically unconscionable quantities of post-it notes, and so forth. But anyone who has attended design school experiences a compulsive urge to describe "design" as designers typically see it, which is as an abstract strategic process completely independent from any specific subfield or practice.

This process is believed to be a unifying feature of all design disciplines – products, graphics, web, fashion, architecture, interiors, branding, landscaping, whatever. It's bizarrely difficult, however, to articulate what the process actually involves without sounding like you're just dodging the question, not least when you're drunk, in which case there's the added risk of embarrassing yourself with non sequitur usage of terms like "visual language," "product-service system," and "innovate." This will reliably eliminate your potential friend's fear of boredom and replace it with a suspicion that you are not only out of touch with reality, but a self-promoting sleaze.

My usual response, then, is to panic and mumble nonsense sounds that I pray will be mistaken for speech. By the time of the inevitable "So what do you actually do?" I have stopped listening, my concentration entirely devoted to figuring out whether I'm close enough to discretely pull the fire alarm.

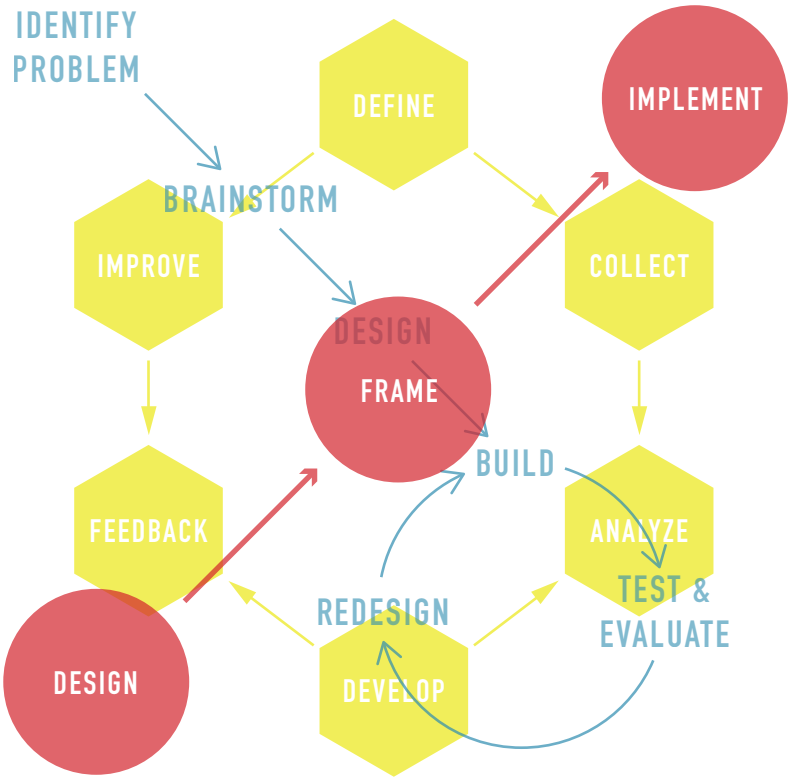
Since word got around about my fire alarm habit people have stopped inviting me to parties, so I've had lots of time to reflect on why it's so hard to answer that basic question. The conclusion I've reached: the development of "design" as a concept has been defined in part by efforts to avoid defining it.

Belief and interest in an amorphous design-in-the-abstract – a set of general methods that can be applied to any planning problem, methods that can be taught independently from specific applications – has developed over the past century for particular reasons. Some of those have to do with changes in the modes of production, such as the ongoing rarefaction of divisions of labor and the growth of evermore layers of productive abstraction.

But the trend has also been driven by much more mundane, less recognized causes, including the fact that making your job sound as grandiose and expansive as possible is a good way to stoke your ego and milk clients for cash. Deliberate or not, there's a tactical benefit to the lofty vagueness with which designers describe their occupation.

This is not to say that design-in-the-abstract is some kind of fraud, a fiction invented by a bunch of unrelated professions as part of a conspiracy to promote their work. On the contrary, designers in many fields today need to be generalists rather than specialists. They need to be skilled in abstract problem solving and integrating knowledge from disparate areas (though the casualty can often be the very craft skills the layperson associates with the word "design").

In his preface to the influential 1988 anthology *Design After Modernism*, John Thackara wrote, "Traditional notions of 'design' are, both practically and theoretically, defunct.… If our new understanding of 'design' is too broad to be subsumed into a single word, then that is a separate problem." Changes in "our" understanding of design are only



part of the story however, as the objects of design themselves have also undergone a shift toward the immaterial and conceptual.

As critic Ralph Caplan commented, "What a designer designs today may not be even a symbolic product but a system or part of a system, or a marketing program, or an exhibition on 'ingenuity,' or a feasibility study, or an identity program in which the subject identified is so nebulous that all form is arbitrary."

Indeed, it's not uncommon for students to spend most of their undergrad years making furniture, then graduate into a job doing "user experience design" or "information architecture."

But trends in the nature of design work are not always tightly tied to trends in how designers talk publicly about design; the long tradition of designers evangelizing their trade in vague, conceptual language far predates the postmodern epidemic of accelerated abstraction.

From the start, it has been driven by factors that are considerably less grand. Designers and architects, like philosophers and physicists, are prone to egocentric fantasies in which all other disciplines are boring subfields of their own. And frankly it's no secret that in client work, it's best to cultivate a certain lack of clarity about the limitations of your expertise.

Over the years, the "What is design?" question has prompted revealingly spacey answers from some of the twentieth century's most famous designers and critics. Here's Victor Papanek: "A conscious and intuitive effort to impose meaningful order." And Herbert Simon: "Devising courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones." And Ralph Caplan: "The artful arrangement of materials or circumstances into a planned form." Bruce Archer, who made great efforts to garner recognition for design as an academic field, offered this mouthful: "The area of human experience, skill, and understanding that reflects man's concern with the appreciation and adaptation of his surroundings in the light of his material and spiritual needs."

What all of these definitions have in common is that they contain virtually no information. Each description could encompass the entirety of deliberate human activity. From there, it's only a short logical leap to the appealing delusion that an expert in design is an expert in everything, and that even if professional designers are perhaps not the people best qualified to do every sort of work, they should at least be paid to oversee it. It's rare, of course, to meet a designer so full of megalomania and cockiness that he or she would endorse that view explicitly (though I know a couple), but it's a surprisingly common subtext in situations where designers are employed.

It's tough to pinpoint the genesis of this disciplinary expansionism, but it probably began at the Bauhaus, in the 1920s, with Walter Gropius and Bruno Taut's notion of "Total Architecture." From the standpoint of the present, German modernism had a disturbingly fascist bent, underscored in hindsight by the fact that early-twentieth-century German artists and designers tended to be big fans of Richard Wagner. Total Architecture was a variation on Wagner's vision of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or total work of art, in which all artistic disciplines would be united and synthesized to create an operatic work under the direction of a single composer. Total Architecture, to simplify it grossly, was the idea that architects should be in charge of everything. It's "a fantasy about control," as the architect Mark Wigley has

described it, "in which the architect is authorized to design everything, from the teaspoon to the city. Architecture is understood to be everywhere. Indeed, it is argued that the influence of the architect has to be felt at every scale, or society would go terribly wrong."

By the time Gropius resigned as director of the Bauhaus in 1928, the school's architecture curriculum had been widely adopted internationally. Similarly totalizing conceptions of design quickly spread to other fields, though not always with such high-minded aesthetic motivations. Depression-era manufacturers in the US began investing more heavily in styling, in an attempt to coax money out of thrifty consumers, and industrial designers seized the opportunity to expand their own practices. Since expanding practices is sort of an end in itself, this often involved moving into areas previously unassociated with design.

So went the rise of Raymond Loewy, dubbed the "Father of Industrial Design" and best remembered for his streamlined styling of cars and locomotives. Loewy at least was upfront about his objectives: as he told his publicist in 1941, his goal was to be on the cover of *Time*. He subsequently grew his studio into a broad consultancy that did everything from store interiors to market research. But when he did make the *Time* cover in 1949, design was still widely viewed as nothing more than "applied art," a superficial add-on for boosting product sales. Beneath Loewy's picture on the cover, the title read, "DESIGNER RAYMOND LOEWY: He streamlines the sales curve."

Now things are different. Loewy's model of the multidisciplinary studio that will do anything for a price has been institutionalized in the form of the design consultancy. Firms like IDEO, Frog, and Continuum have made names for themselves by providing an array of services, from typography to management consulting ("business design"), and it's not unusual for a company's in-house design team to be involved in top-level planning decisions. Indeed, many business leaders have come to believe that design serves an indispensable function at the highest tiers of management. It's just not always clear what function.

"Design-led business" is one of this season's corporate buzz phrases. A few seasons back, it was "design strategy." Various design associations, and advocacy groups and their lobbyists (yes, there are design lobbyists), will give different definitions of these terms, but they mostly boil down to the idea that designers should be the ones running companies. The UK Design Council boasts, "Our Design Index – an index of 61 design-led businesses – has out-performed the FTSE 100 by more than 200% over the past decade."

Companies where designers make strategic decisions are likely to have better practices in a lot of areas, but those don't necessarily require professional design qualifications to implement. They include: unclogging bureaucracy, actively seeking out new opportunities, not making ugly stuff, and paying attention to how people actually use things.

It's disingenuous to promote the idea that these are the exclusive purview of a single professional group. Professionalized design can have an exploitative character, leveraging its growing institutional status to extract rent from clients by claiming a monopoly on widely needed skills.

Designers themselves offer the most acerbic critiques of the design strategy trend. The British consultancy Mind Design has a satirical strategy arm, "Poopoo Strategy" (slogan: "We know shit."), which advertises the following:

> So far we have been doing design without any thinking at all. Our work had no purpose and no direction, it just miraculously materialised. Things have changed. Now we also offer STRATEGY (!!!) to our clients. We wear nice clean shirts and talk a lot, using all the latest marketing buzzwords (don't worry if you don't understand them, we don't understand them either). We have the biggest flip charts, order new stacks of Post-its on a weekly basis, we organise holistic client workshops, spoil our focus groups with luxurious lunches, produce highly impressive powerpoint presentations, convincing diagrams and technically advanced logo construction drawings. We offer the full programme! Enjoy the ride through our process! 100% boardroom satisfaction guaranteed. Obviously we will charge you for it – shit loads.

The strategists lampooned here are just the latest in a long line of designers who have sought money and status by obscuring and essentializing their work. It's tempting to dismiss this as a case of sleaziness, but for all the scummy aspects of the new design-industrial complex, I can't help but see something admirable in it. It's almost – not really, but almost – well alright, it isn't at all, but from a certain angle it looks like – a large-scale con of management by labor. Design used to be a form of factory work – just one rung above the assembly line, performed in cramped rooms at long rows of drawing boards by poorly paid draftsmen. In the 1980s, there was even speculation that it could be automated: Thackara writes in *Design After Modernism* that

> The notion that all design and planning in an information society, because it does not involve manual work, is necessarily intellectual and creative, is one eagerly propagated by the ideologues of the information society. But the reality is quite different.… The first step in the machine displacement of human professionals (such as designers) is the standardization of their methodology.

Turns out that's difficult if no one knows quite what you do. ■

THE NOVEL AS DICTATOR

by Toral Gajarawala

WHY SOCIALIST REALISM LOSES OUT TO AVANT-GARDE AESTHETICS.

I FIRST READ Pepetela's *Mayombe* in a literature course taught by the Kenyan writer-in-exile Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Unlike the other texts we trooped over to Revolution Books on Fourteenth Street to buy, this one came in a shadowy photocopy, Ngugi's own smudged handwriting littering the sides. The radicalism of the novel began before I opened it by conjuring all those other texts, out-of-print, market-dismissed, that lay in other languages, only to be recovered by activist-scholars. Published in Portuguese in 1979 and translated into English three years later, the novel *Mayombe* has since been difficult to obtain, with large gaps in its publication and circulation history.

Named for a forest in the province of Cabinda, Angola and written by a former guerrilla, *Mayombe* has all the hallmarks of literary forgettability. It was a novel of decolonization, tightly wound to the moment of 1961 and the launch of the MPLA, the Peoples Movement for the Liberation of Angola against colonial rule. Anchored in the forest with occasional trips to the base, the novel stages the battle between the Portuguese "tuga," the settlers, and the fragile and hypermasculine ethos of a new revolutionary organization. It is organized by a series of astute guerrilla narrators, with names like Theory, and New World, and Struggle, each with his own ideological objective. Lush descriptions of the forest, the beauty and stature of trees soon to become timber, the shimmer of undiscovered streams, all compete with the harsh realities of sustaining troops during a time of brutal warfare.

Why do certain fictions become part of literary history, and others fall by the wayside? This is, in essence, the politics of cultural selection. You haven't read *Mayombe* like you read Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* in school, or Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* when he was awarded the Nobel Prize. You didn't study it in your World Cultures courses alongside Nadine Gordimer and Anita Desai. In fact, even those who know non-Anglophone African writers like Ousmane Sembene and Ferdinand Oyono have mostly never heard of it. Why?

There are many reasons, of course. In the discourse of world literature, Africa is more marginal than India, just as Portuguese is second (or third or fourth) to English, and Angola is sidelined for Kenya. But I would suggest that more than anything else, this is a subterranean debate about aesthetics.

Mayombe is a typically nationalist novel, patriotic even; ours is a moment of post-national cynicism, tribalism, civil war and migration. It is prototypically realist in a literary sphere that privileges formalist play and conscientious style. And it is fiction with a formula – a clear, recognizable message – in a time of disdain for didacticism. Tribalism, the novel proclaimed, alongside the privileges of the intelligentsia and the indulgences of the private sphere, was the death of the economic and ideological unity necessary for independence. *Mayombe*'s publication was prodded along by Angola's first president, Agostinho Neto, and it is influenced by the thinking of Amilcar Cabral, the revolutionary leftist from Guinea-Bissau who founded the MPLA alongside Neto and was instrumental in the broader eviction of the Portuguese. In addition to the material problems involved in the staging of guerrilla war, the novel takes up the problem of the creation of a national consensus, as well as the larger issues of love, fidelity, and betrayal in a time of historical crisis. The book is a kind of classic founding fiction, weaving tightly the conventions of its genre with a sense of nationalist responsibility.

It is precisely this link between nation, novel, and realism, that countries eventually outgrow as they enter the world stage. Recent criticism by Franco Moretti and Pascale Casanova has theorized the political and cultural economy via which the literary sphere

transcends the local in favor of the universal. Casanova's *World Republic of Letters* (2005) dismisses the notion of the national literature as "provincial," where the provinces are a "disinherited territory" and a historical anachronism. For these literatures, nationalism becomes destiny, but also a tragic horizon, which is closed to other forms of community and worldliness. In Casanova's formulation, derived in part from world systems theory, the national is actually a new petty localism, preventing participation in the politically consequential "world republic of letters", where, predictably, European powers determine cultural futures and a global cosmopolitanism rules. *Mayombe*'s preoccupations are thus old – but also old world – values, without much literary currency now. Literary forgettability comes in many forms.

For books like *Mayombe*, literary forgettability is produced by the trap of didacticism, a most common charge made against novels with very sharp axes to grind. *Mayombe*, so named for the largest forest in Angola, is the "story" of a group of revolutionaries, and their time of guerrilla struggle during the late sixties. One of the most compelling is named Theory, for his revolutionary Marxism/Maoism but who also expounds beautifully on egotism, tactics, sex, and love. The time in the forest reveals the struggle over strategy, the problem of an incipient revolutionary justice, as well as hunger, deprivation, petty grievance, and the constant specter of tribalism. It is a compelling narrative, but is clearly caught up in its own anticolonial fervor to educate.

Early in the novel, when the guerillas come upon a Portuguese logging operation, they set the bulldozer on fire, and take the laborers in custody for a bit of old-fashioned political education. This is the note that Fearless, the Cuban cap-wearing commander, leaves behind:

> BASTARD COLONIALISTS, GO TO HELL, GO HOME.
> WHILE YOU ARE HERE,
> IN SOMEONE ELSE'S LAND
> THE BOSS IS ENJOYING YOUR WIFE OR SISTER, THERE IN THE GREENS!
>
> The commissar objects, albeit with a small laugh. "Not very political!" he says. "What do you expect?" Fearless responds. "Copying out a chunk of Marx? This is the only politics these tuga understand."

Mayombe might thus be read as an example of what Marxist literary critic Frederic Jameson refers to as an "agitational didacticism." In his commentary on the Bertold Brecht–Gyorgy Lukacs debates of the 1940s, Jameson echoes the by now routine dismissal of such governed artistic practices, fiction on a particular mission. The putative bad art of socialist realism has almost always lost out to the more spectacular avant-garde aesthetics of a generally understood Marxism. Despite courting Gorky and Yashpal, the deliberate "artlessness" of social realism couldn't survive the anachronistic critiques of literary history, which has deemed it pedestrian, overtly pedagogical, stylistically unprovocative – and therefore politically unchallenging. Critiques have ranged from charges of hack art and bad style (social realism produces ugly work) to the mandate of the state (intellectual freedom can't be governed by the government), to the more sophisticated claim that art must do more than "reflect" reality. Terry Eagleton describes the heyday of socialist realism under Stalin as "one of the most devastating assaults on culture ever witnessed in modern history – an assault conducted in the name of a theory and practice of social liberation." (According to Eagleton, Vsevolod Meyerhold, the theater producer who was crucial to Brecht's "agitprop" once said, "This pitiable and sterile thing called socialist realism has nothing to do with art.")

What is so wrong with "agitational didacticism", or – as Alok Rai calls others forms of literary protest hampered by the same kind of pedagogic dictatorialism – "prescribed militancy"? The social realist text was too digestible, says Adorno, too mimetic, says Lukacs, too smooth, too digestible, too naïve in its belief in culture as a kind of modeling clay.

The anticolonial moment in Africa produces a different politico-literary debate. Pepetela's work is rooted in the revolutionary thought of Amilcar Cabral, for whom, with Frantz Fanon, national culture had a certain prescriptive value. "Culture," writes Cabral, "is simultaneously the fruit of a people's history and a determinant of history … In culture there lies the capacity (or the responsibility) for forming and fertilizing the seedling which will assure the continuity of history, at the same time assuring the prospects for evolution and progress of the society in question." But in Africa too pedagogical art can be seen as an aesthetic stepbrother. In the Nigeria of the 1960s, Wole Soyinka responded to the charge of aesthetic indulgence in his work with: "The tiger does not go about announcing his tigritude, it pounces." Soyinka's critique was directed towards negritude, and what he felt was an excessive and degrading politics of blackness, which reified the black-white binary. Responding to the charge leveled against his own work – that he was emulating the aesthetics of a European literary modernism – Soyinka derided the simplistic and largely realist canon of his critics as an unsubtle proclamation of a "revolutionary" imperative.

Do *Mayombe*'s tigers proclaim their tigritude? Do they state, in other words, too loudly their claims? The novel does read to some extent like an intellectual exercise. Each section of the text is flagged by a subheading, "I, the Narrator, am Theory" only to be superseded twenty or so odd pages later

by, "I, the narrator, am New World." Wrenching the tale firmly from any fiction of omniscience, the novel uses this formal device of juxtaposition to individualize the guerrillas, revealing their quirks as well as their ethnic affiliations. Mutianvua, we learn, is "post-tribal" – his time as a sailor as well as his sexual conquests (he will sleep with women of all stripes) has decoupled him from region and family. He is the modern Angolan. Other moments advance the plot of guerrilla struggle, base encroachment and tactical failure, while differentiating the fighters along class lines. Here is one such moment: the musings of the Operations Chief, son of a peasant.

> Fearless is an intellectual, an intellectual cannot bear his child to die. We are used to it. Our children died from the bombs, from the machine guns, from the foreman's whip. We are used to seeing our children die. […] The bad thing is that he is an intellectual, that's the bad thing: he will never be able to understand the people.

This is didacticism in what might be considered the worst way. The reverie of a minor character is transmuted into naked sentiment and marked by narrative repetition. The Operations Chief displays his function as character – to delineate the fracture of class war in the anticolonial struggle; his Fanonian critique of the intelligentsia is lodged within biography. "We could never discuss," he says of Fearless the commander, "He is an intellectual, and I, a peasant's son." In the novel, the narrative of the Operations Chief serves a frank utilitarian purpose. Fearless, wearing the Cuban cap that signifies his worldliness, is drawn from a cosmopolitan global Marxism; the Operations Chief signals the rural, but also the provincial. On the one hand, this imaginary conversation, this literary conversation, in fact, is the only form the dialogue between the peasant and the intellectual

will take. On the other, the fractured structure of the novel, the conflicting narrative voices that mimic superficially the tropes of postmodernism, work in the service of producing a rhetorical harmony between the Kimbundu man from Quibaxe, the Kikongo intellectual, and the biracial anti-tribalist, at least on the page. This is how didacticism makes meaning.

And yet, within the reverie of the peasant's son, there is a tangible pathos, far beyond its use-value. As I read it, *I see that the peasant's son is right*. The didactic moment is "the bad thing" – both literally and literarily – the directive appears in this last line. But the first section of this passage is powerfully evocative. It conjures the affect of subaltern worlds, where "we are used to seeing our children die."

Pepetela was a descendant of Portuguese settlers, one of the many radicalized by the Cuban revolution. Born in 1941, he lived a comfortable life in Benguela, Angola. He went on to study engineering in Lisbon, but when war broke out at home, he was called on by the Portuguese state to serve, and left instead for Paris. There he became involved with the MPLA. When the headquarters of the organization was established in Brazzaville, Congo, he joined the armed struggle and eventually became the Vice Minister of Education in independent Angola. He has continued to write fiction since.

By the time I heard him speak at Berkeley in 2003, his lyrical Portuguese translated live into English, he was sixty-two years old. Even then, thirty years after *Mayombe*, he was concerned with the project of writing the nation and the construction of national identity. What had the novel to do with negotiating, on behalf of the people, the postwar, neocolonial, class-fractured landscape? Everything.

This is an unpopular genre of question for today's culture workers. There is a deep resistance among the intelligentsia to the notion that culture should be pedagogical, prescriptive, and proscriptive especially. The generalized postmodernism that Fredric Jameson theorizes – late capitalism, pastiche, irony, and collage – makes it difficult for the novel, both theoretically and politically to advocate, instruct and agitate in the old-fashioned way. But this is precisely what Peptela's *Mayombe* did. Like an entire generation of third world intellectuals before him, Gandhi included, Pepetela thought of the novel as a kind of democratizing instrument, the project of the organic intellectual, particularly in societies of low literacy. For Pepetela, the cause was an independent Angola, and the crisis was tribalism. This was a period of intense and passionate belief in the role of the novel.

Should we revindicate didacticism as a value? Should novels tell us what and how to think? Literary critic Kenneth Burke, channeling Marx and Freud, said reading was "equipment for living." It seems to me that "didacticism" in art was and is underwritten by a democratic impulse, which could be paternalistic, most certainly, but is often driven by accessibility. In its envisioning of alternative visions of the future, art has always taught us how to think, particularly when the political status quo only makes certain possibilities visible. The problem is that this kind of realist literature – realist *art*, in fact – doesn't survive well the tides of history. Its life cycle is intimately tied to the life cycle of the passing social movements that it crystallizes, and its reappearance in moments of sociohistorical crisis is often left out of the ledgers of history. The postmodern moment, riven by identarian fracture and deeply suspicious of the social as a concept, has abandoned this project, relegating its traces to the margins.

The tragic fallout of Heinemann's African Writers series, which originally published the translation of *Mayombe*, is a crinkle in the global publishing apparatus but is particularly devastating in the context of the modern African novel, constraining an already slender market to only the most "modern" and "worldly" texts, i.e. those that fit into paradigms and pathways carved out by global cosmopolitans like Salman Rushdie and Kazuo Ishiguro. In these new grids, there is no room for modern day *Mayombes*, even on the chance that the new social movements produce a need for them. The value of these novels, "equipment" only for a particular place in a particular time, tends to lose out to a more spectacular aesthetics built for a global consumer. Ngugi's novels – *Petals of Blood*, *A Grain of Wheat* – are a perfect example of this. Sometimes heralded as "the conscience of the nation," sometimes dismissed as provincial and simplistic. One critic says, "Ngugi is building an alliance with the people-a common voice, a common vision, not only in Kenya, but in the world." No small thing for a writer who currently writes in Gikuyu, and might be accused of his own kind of tribalism.

There are all kinds of worldliness: that of a new global elite that shares spaces and goods and, of course, culture; and Ngugi's kind, more reminiscent of a period of third world socialisms, the politics of the Bandung conference and the nonaligned movement in 1955. Indeed, when I first sat down with him in an office piled with paper on University Place to go line by line through *The Communist Manifesto*, the context was a discussion of labor and caste in India for my research. And maybe a subtle appreciation of the didactic novel requires just such a retraction of the self, the same brief renunciation of our own intellectual sovereignty demanded by student life. Perhaps rather than the novel-as-dictator, we should think of didactic fiction as the novel-as-mentor, less novel-as-police and more novel-as-tutor. ■

THE SOUL OF STUDENT DEBT

by Chris Maisano

NOT QUITE FEUDALISM, STUDENT DEBT IS A PECULIARLY CAPITALIST FORM OF SOCIAL CONTROL.

Janet Lynn Parker is a middle-aged elementary school art teacher from Arkansas. She graduated in 1991 from Arkansas State University with a degree in art education and $25,000 in student loan debt. Unable to find a job in her field of study, she bounced around from job to job until 1999, when she finally found employment at a public school at an annual salary barely over $20,000. Over that time, her mounting financial difficulties forced her to ask for multiple forbearances and deferments on her loan, pushing the balance of her educational debt up to about $70,000.

Adding injury to insult, Parker broke her back in a boating accident in 2000. It left her in a back brace for months after the incident and reliant on pain medication to get her through the day. In spite of it all, she continued to teach and to care for her young granddaughters during the summer months, when school was out of session. Still, the strains took a toll on her family and her marriage. Parker and her husband separated in 2003 and divorced in 2004. With her student loan, credit card, retail, and medical debts running far beyond her ability to pay them, she finally filed for bankruptcy in 2004. Because of the peculiarities of US bankruptcy law, she had to file a separate petition to seek a discharge of her student loan debt. Despite the substantial odds against her, she actually won: the bankruptcy judge wiped out her student loan debt, agreeing that it constituted an "undue hardship."

But the story didn't end there. Parker's creditor, the Student Loan Guarantee Foundation of Arkansas, appealed the bankruptcy court's decision, bringing the case before a federal bankruptcy appellate panel. Despite the ample evidence that Parker's educational debt was ruining her life, the panel decided to reverse the lower court's ruling and compelled her to continue making payments on her loans.

The reasoning behind the panel's decision is revealing, and perfectly consistent with the merciless logic of capitalist rationality. According to the judges' decision, Parker failed to demonstrate undue hardship because she hadn't adequately maximized her income and minimized her expenses, a requirement of the test adopted in case. As the panel argued, "the Debtor has a duty to maximize her income.... Although she is working as a full-time teacher, the Debtor admitted that 'it would be possible' for her to get a paying summer job. The bankruptcy court found that the Debtor was capable of summer employment and attributed to her additional net income of $100 per month." No matter that the unpaid care work she performed over the summer months was a crucial source of support for her daughter, a single mother. For these Gradgrinds, the bonds of family and the imperatives of caretaking are, as Marx so vividly put it, to be drowned in the icy waters of egotistical calculation.

In the end, the bankruptcy panel directed Parker to consolidate her student loans under the William D. Ford Consolidation Program, which would reduce her monthly payments but leave her only $15 after expenses at the end of each month. It would also require her to make those payments for an additional 25 years – at which point she would be 76 years old.

The issue of debt generally, and student loan debt in particular, quickly emerged as major concerns of the US Occupy movement. In June 2010, total outstanding student loan debt surpassed total outstanding credit card debt for the first time in the country's history, and in the spring of 2012 student loan debt broke the $1 trillion mark. This explosion in student loan indebtedness has been the logical result of the dramatic inflation in the cost of higher education (particularly public higher education) in recent decades. Economists estimate that the cost of tuition and fees has more than doubled since 2000, easily surpassing the rate of inflation in energy, housing, and even health care costs.

The driving force behind this explosion in higher education costs is state disinvestment in public colleges and universities. While public higher education institutions have absorbed the majority of new undergraduate enrollments since 1990, the proportion

of state spending on higher education has dramatically declined. Between 1990 and 2010, real funding per full-time student dropped by more than 26% at public universities, according to a recent Demos study. This shortfall has not been filled by other sources of public funding, but rather by a marked increase in students' out-of-pocket costs. Over the same period, tuition and fees at four-year public colleges and universities rose by 112.5%, while the price of public two-year colleges increased by 71%. Because household incomes have stagnated over the previous two decades, students and their families have had to turn to student loans to cover these costs. According to the Department of Education, 45% of 1992–1993 graduates borrowed money from federal or private sources; today, at least two-thirds of graduates enter the workforce with educational debt.

Even though college-educated workers tend to earn higher incomes than their less-educated counterparts, young college-educated workers have not escaped the pressures of wage stagnation. In the last decade, the average annual earnings of workers ages 25 to 34 with bachelor's degrees fell by 15%. New graduates, meanwhile, saw their average debt load increase 24%. What makes this dramatic escalation in student loan indebtedness particularly troubling is that, unlike most other forms of personal debt, student loans cannot be discharged through the standard bankruptcy process. In the event of default on a private or federal student loan, borrowers face a range of invasive measures: wage garnishment, the interception of tax refunds or lottery winnings, and the withholding of future Social Security payments.

The leading intellectual lights of the Occupy movement have seized on the issue of debt as their leitmotif, organizing their analysis of the economy around what they've taken to calling the "debt system." For them, the explosion in personal and public indebtedness that has occurred over the last three decades represents a break in the logic of capitalism and marks the revival of older forms of exploitation associated with feudalism. At an Occupy conference held shortly after the clearing of Zuccotti Park, David Graeber made the case succinctly:

> I think there's a fundamental shift in the nature of capitalism, where some people are still using a very old-fashioned moral logic, but more and more people are recognizing what's really going on. They just don't know the extent of it. It's not even clear that this is capitalism anymore. Back when I went to college, they taught me that the difference between capitalism and feudalism. In feudalism they take the money directly, through legal means, and they just shake you down, pull it out of your income, and in capitalism they take it through the wage, in these subtle ways. It seems like it's shifting more toward the former thing. The government is letting these guys bribe the government to make laws where they can pick your pocket, and that's pretty much it.

Graeber is certainly correct to point out the ways in which debt and finance can be nakedly exploitative. Marxists have traditionally characterized capitalist exploitation as an abstract social process that takes place behind the backs of those it exploits. But there's nothing indirect about a credit card or student loan bill. All of those seemingly extraneous charges and fees are right on your bill, chipping away at your income and your standard of living, month after month, for years on end.

Still, that's not "pretty much it." The debt-as-neo-feudalism critique that Graeber, the organizers of the Strike Debt campaign, and others advance fails to capture how debt and finance works under contemporary capitalism. It also mirrors the misguided populist discourse that casts the financial sector as a parasitic growth on the productive, "real" economy. In the case of student debt, the neofeudal argument also prevents us from properly understanding one of the main functions of debt and finance within neoliberal capitalism: the way it shapes our economic souls. The social function of student debt is not to render us serfs or indentured servants. It's to teach us how to be investors and risk-takers, entrepreneurs who have taken on debt to finance our climb up the ladder of bourgeois success. The soul of student debt is not feudal, but capitalist through and through.

Any discussion of higher education and student debt needs to be situated within a larger understanding of the turn toward neoliberalism and financialization that began in the 1970s. As the postwar settlement between labor and capital collapsed under the weight of its own contradictions, capitalists and policy makers in governments throughout the advanced capitalist countries pursued what is now a familiar strategy. They set out to smash the power of organized labor, unleash the financial sector, and integrate ever-wider layers of the population into the circuits of finance through the expansion of access to credit. This last point was a particularly crucial aspect of the neoliberal project. As Leo Panitch, Sam Gindin, and Greg Albo argue in their book *In and Out of Crisis*, the expansion of access to credit – and hence debt – "was as or more important to the dynamism and longevity of the finance-led neoliberal era" than any of the other aspects of the turn to neoliberalism. In particular, it allowed the working class to maintain its living standards in the face of stagnating wages, allowing the system to preserve its legitimacy and stability.

The consequences of this shift have been profound, dramatically altering the social textures of everyday life. They have upended relationships

between workers and employers, citizens and the state. They have shifted the place of the individual in society and encouraged the formation of new forms of consciousness and being in the world. As Gerald Davis argued in his book *Managed by the Markets: How Finance Re-Shaped America*, we now live in a "portfolio society" whose animating spirit is the logic of finance. Education, among other things, is conceived as a form of "human capital" rather than as a social good, an investment security for one's personal economic portfolio rather than the foundation of democratic citizenship. Student debt – the price one must pay in order to gain access to the possibility of upward mobility – is now one of the most risky investments in that portfolio.

Modern student lending practices date from the 1950s, when Cold War competition with the Soviet Union spurred Congress to establish the Perkins Loan Program. Perkins expanded student loan lending through need-based loans at low interest rates. But this program was relatively modest. Federal student loan lending expanded further during the Johnson administration, with the passage of the Higher Education Act of 1965 and the establishment of the Guaranteed Student Loan program (known today as the Stafford Loan Program). With the onset of the 1970s fiscal crisis, states began their long-term disinvestment from public higher education, driving up the cost of tuition and necessitating the expansion of federal student loan lending. In 1978, federal spending on student lending was $500 million. In fiscal year 2012, the federal government lent $115.6 billion in new student loans. Today, the average student graduates college or university with over $25,000 in educational loan debt.

For Americans in dire financial straits, bankruptcy offers perhaps the only realistic avenue for relief. As Elizabeth Warren observed in *Law and Class in America*, the bankruptcy courts are a strategic vantage point from which to survey the social wreckage of contemporary capitalism:

> Eventually virtually every social and economic problem in the United States threads its way through the bankruptcy courts. For families, bankruptcy is the place to deal with lost jobs, erratic incomes, inadequate health insurance, no disability insurance, and the financial impact of divorce. The bankruptcy courts deal indirectly from the fallout from stagnant wages and a part-time or "consulting" workforce, with the high cost of housing and daycare that chews through a parent's take-home pay.

Article 1, Section 8 of the Constitution authorized Congress to enact uniform bankruptcy laws under federal jurisdiction to offer a "fresh start" to those who simply could not keep up with their debts. In 1970, Congress appointed a Bankruptcy Act Commission to assess the effectiveness of the nation's bankruptcy laws, which hadn't been significantly altered in almost a century. The Commission released its recommendations in 1973, and they generally accorded with the relatively pro-debtor bias of the fresh start principle. Crucially, however, the Commission decided to make an exemption for educational debt. Until 1976, all student loans were eligible for discharge, just like most other forms of consumer debt. But the Commission argued that this provision was necessary to prevent unscrupulous borrowers from financing their education through easily-accessible federal loans and then declaring bankruptcy after graduation.

Even though there was little evidence to suggest that students were running up huge debts simply to dump them back on the taxpayers, Congress included the exemption of student debts from discharge in the Bankruptcy Reform Act of 1978. The Act, however, contained one crucial caveat: such debts could be discharged through separate proceedings if borrowers could demonstrate conclusively that repayment of the debt would bring "undue hardship" on themselves.

But Congress neither defined exactly what constituted an "undue hardshipv nor did it recommend a uniform standard for determining how and when a debtor's personal financial situation met that threshold. Bankruptcy courts have employed a number of tests for determining whether plaintiffs have adequately demonstrated undue hardship, but the most commonly used is the "Brunner test," established by the Second Circuit bankruptcy court in 1985's *In re Brunner*. The court's decision in this case used a three-pronged test to assess whether debtors could corroborate their claim of undue hardship. First, debtors had to show that they could not maintain a "minimal" standard of living if forced to repay the loans. Second, the available evidence had to confirm show that this sorry state of affairs was likely persist over the course of the repayment period. Third, debtors had to demonstrate that they had made a good faith effort to repay the loan.

By abdicating any responsibility for determining just what constitutes undue hardship, Congress gave bankruptcy judges an enormous amount of leeway to interpret and adjudicate claims arising from the growing pile of student loan debt. As representatives of the judicial branch of a capitalist state, it should come as little surprise that these judges have, more often than not, privileged the claims of the creditor over those of the debtor. In doing so, they have reinforced the normative and disciplinary assumptions of what Michel Foucault called neoliberal governmentality.

Neoliberal governmentality seeks to subject our social life to the logic of what Foucault called the "enterprise society." In *The Birth of Biopolitics*, he

argued that it encourages the formation of subjects whose moral character and economic activity resembles that of the risk-taking entrepreneur. This should not, however, be construed as a simple top-down process of domination. The genius of this form of social control is that it elicits the active participation of the population in the construction of its own discipline. By bringing ever-widening circles of the population into the orbit of finance capital, it imbues the process of financialization with a spirit in line with democratic norms of mass participation and equal opportunity. After all, what could be more American than the proposition that everyone have access to a college education and, presumably, a chance to go as far as your talents can take you?

As states disinvest from public higher education and compel students to take on ever-increasing debt loads to fund their studies, the experience and purpose of higher education is transformed. The pursuit of a college diploma becomes an entrepreneurial activity, a species of personal investment and risk-taking that places the attainment of future returns above all other concerns. By integrating higher education into the circuits of financial capitalism, the state encourages debtors to look to the market for self-improvement and personal security. Like the subprime mortgage borrower or the worker with a 401(k) plan, the indebted student is taught to view access to credit and the financial markets as the golden ticket to prosperity and security.

Student debt subjects the borrower to a distinctly capitalist pedagogy, transforming higher education into an increasingly expensive commodity that is bought and sold on the market. But as the legions of student loan debtors can attest, investment in a college education is no longer a guarantee of remunerative employment or personal financial security. It is an increasingly risky investment that can bring the student debtor into severe financial distress and, in the worst cases, to the door of the bankruptcy court to seek relief.

Federal case law offers an important glimpse into the ways in which student debt works to impose a particularly capitalist form of discipline on borrowers. The judges on these cases often seem like social workers trained by the University of Chicago economics department. In cases where debtors have their claims rejected, a common theme quickly emerges. In denying plaintiffs relief from their debts, judges and appellate panels often seek to encourage economic behavior more akin to a competitive firm than a healthy human being.

Janet Lynn Parker's story is, admittedly, something of an extreme case. But her treatment by the bankruptcy courts is not entirely anomalous for the small segment of student debtors who attempt to have their debts discharged. The case law is replete with examples of judges resorting to a particularly merciless form of reasoning to deny plaintiffs relief.

Consider the case of Steven and Teresa Hornsby, a Tennessee couple who came to bankruptcy court with approximately $30,000 in student loan debt. Like Janet Lynn Parker, the Hornsbys received a discharge from a lower court only to have the decision reversed on appeal. The appellate judge agreed with the Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation's argument that the couple did not adequately "tighten their belts" in order to make student loan payments. In moving from Tennessee to Texas (a state with higher monthly rental expenses), taking on debt to purchase a newer used car, and running up "relatively high bills for telephone use, electricity, meals eaten out, and cigarettes," the Hornsbys failed to meet the highly restrictive standards of judgment adopted by the court. The appellate judge seemed particularly concerned with the couple's ostensibly "exorbitant" telephone usage as well as the $100 they dared to spend on cigarettes each month.

In other cases where they have denied discharge, judges have directed dance teachers to seek better-paying work in other, often unrelated fields; reproached workers for leaving higher-paying jobs for lower-paying ones, regardless of the reason; and, in one case, advised the pastor of a small, financially insecure church to close it and do something more profitable with his time. Unsurprisingly, many student loan debtors desperate enough to seek relief through the courts work in public sector professions. In an extensive 2005 empirical study of undue hardship cases, Emory University law professor Rafael Pardo and Tulane University mathematician Michelle Lacey found that a disproportionate number of plaintiffs worked in education, training, and library occupations. In today's enterprise society, becoming a teacher or a librarian just isn't a wise investment.

As Doug Henwood pointed out in his critique of Strike Debt's Rolling Jubilee initiative, debt is not a system. It's a symptom of the restructuring of the US state and its priorities away from social provision toward capital accumulation, both at a national and a global scale. If the scourge of student debt is to be confronted in any meaningful way, Occupy and its offshoots will need to struggle on a terrain that they have assiduously avoided – that of politics, public policy, and the state.

In addition to the Rolling Jubilee, student debtors and their allies should begin building toward a concerted attack on the country's bankruptcy laws, particularly the egregious Bankruptcy Abuse Prevention and Consumer Protection Act (BAPCPA). This 2005 "reform" law, passed at the behest of the creditor lobby to tighten the screws on debtors, made it harder than ever

for student borrowers to win relief. For the first time, the law excluded loans from non-governmental lenders from discharge through the normal bankruptcy proceedings. Because of the time and effort required to file a totally separate claim for undue hardship, many borrowers in extreme financial distress don't even bother to do so. It's estimated that less than 1,000 student debtors make an undue hardship claim in the US each year. And when they do, it can take years for the courts to resolve them.

While there are many obstacles standing in the way of relief, there is some evidence that more student debtors should consider filing undue hardship claims. As reported in a *New York Times* series on student debt, a recent study of such proceedings from around the country found that 39% of claimants eventually received full or partial discharges. While it's not an adequate solution to the problem, we need to make it easier for student debtors to file for bankruptcy and to win at least a partial discharge of their debt. Repealing BAPCPA and overhauling the bankruptcy process for student debt should be just as high a priority for Occupy as the Rolling Jubilee.

Ultimately, however, the problem of student debt cannot be resolved without winning free public higher education for all. The Quebec student movement provides an instructive example in this regard. In its victorious battle to stop the provincial government's tuition hike earlier this year, the movement made a brilliant strategic decision. It made demands that not only spoke to the immediate needs of the people, but pointed toward a broader transformation of their society – and of the state. Perry Anderson once remarked that class struggles cannot be resolved anywhere besides the realm of politics and the state. That's where the struggle over student debt and public education must ultimately be fought, and won. ■

FAREWELL TO THE WORKING CLASS

DEBTORS OF THE WORLD, UNITE?

by Rebecca Burns & Simon Swartzman

In his 1960 "Letter to the New Left," sociologist C. Wright Mills chastised those "clinging" to the working class as the only possible agent of revolutionary change. Today's workers, he argued, were screw-ups asleep at the switch. Pacified by the welfare state, they were no longer able to lead anticapitalist struggle. In their stead, Mills proposed the vibrant "cultural apparatus" of radicalized intellectuals and touched off a long search in post-Marxist theory for other replacements. The New Left looked to national liberation movements; Fanonites of the same era elevated the role of "the underclass." In the past decade, academics have responded to the casualization of work by coining a new term, "the precariat," – leaving behind boring, old Lenin to embrace boring, new Lena Dunham.

Occupy activists carried this trend further by staging a general strike reimagined as a "day without the 99%." The move to expand resistance into everyday life – "no school, no shopping, no banking" – reflects in part the diminishing possibilities for workplace action. As the factory floor has given way beneath traditional models of left organizing, it's unclear who might take the mantle from the industrial proletariat. "The people," Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari once proclaimed, "are missing."

Strike Debt has set out to find them, proclaiming debt the "tie that binds

the 99%." The Occupy offshoot's first communique gestures to an "invisible army of defaulters": those who, already unable to pay their debts, could form the base of a new mass movement. Though some Marxists have given short shrift to secondary forms of exploitation such as credit, they've been key to capital's recent advances. And though many critics have noted that "debt" is an imperfect gloss for "capitalism," Strike Debt has rightfully identified an issue that touches nearly all working people.

Could the debtors of the world unite? The Left's willingness to embrace new historical categories sets it apart from the Right, now in its third millennium of organizing affluent white men. But there's an important distinction between new models that respond to categories generated by modern capitalism and paradigm shifts that jettison the baby, bathwater, and modern plumbing.

In *The Debt Resistors' Operations Manual* – an Emma Goldman-meets-Suze Orman self-help manifesto – we get a vision of history that is sweeping, but punctuated. Tracing the arc of "powerful debt resistance movements" from ancient Greece, to the 1787 Shay's Rebellion, to the present, the manual says debtors are finally taking center stage in our financialized era. But in this story, the working-class hero is written out. Instead of a character defined by a web of interconnected exchange relationships – trading time for money, work for land, money for food, internship for resume filler, and so on – we get the debtor, defined by a single exchange of credit.

Could class power be organized around borrowing, rather than working? Last fall, the Occupy Student Debt Campaign issued an intriguing call for a "debt strike." As soon as a "pledge of refusal" garnered one million signatories, graduates would launch an experiment in a new form of collective bargaining and refuse to repay their student loans together. Discussing the prospect of "debtors' unions," *The Debt Resistors' Operations Manual* notes that such institutions could "provide support for strategic actions, including debt strikes, akin to the labor battles of earlier eras." Call this the relay-race theory of class struggle – though labor has collapsed, panting at the sidelines, a freshly warmed-up debtors' movement is sprinting ahead.

Alongside new actors, Mills also called for new sites of action. The working class keeps the wheels of society turning; its power, by definition, stems from its ability to bring those wheels to a rapid halt. Feminists, antiracists, and others have pointed to the wheels within the wheels of society, such as the reproduction of daily life through unpaid work. The move to acknowledge class politics beyond the workplace has helped correct the orthodoxy that limited meaningful struggle to certain "real workers," and uncovered the leverage that various unwaged workers have to disrupt production. But by abstracting debt from labor, it's unclear how a movement of

debtors could wield power. Though ideas such as the debt strike posit an equivalence between withholding loan payments and withholding labor, the former, as the Roosevelt Institute's Mike Konczal has noted, is often a boon for mortgage servicers and third-party collection agencies.

So before we turn the page on the era of labor battles, it's important to consider what debt is built on: our work. By commodifying our future labor, debt extracts the promise of more and more work from us. The interest on loan payments are an expansion of how many more hours we have to work – but the long hours are not crammed into the twenty-four-hour day, they're parceled into manageable chunks of time each year, ten or twenty years down the line. At the same time, since lenders extend credit to a worker, her boss can justify keeping wages stagnant while productivity increases. In this way, lenders and employers collude both to garnish our wages through interest payments, and to compel us to continue laboring for the same wage years into the future.

The "debt system" is essentially an alliance between our banks and our bosses. At its most simple, this arrangement resembles a company store, where the owner sells workers everything they need to survive, often on credit, and profits doubly from their debt. Though the actual situation is more complex than this, the distinction between financial and non-financial corporations is thinner than we may often assume. Consider the example of Ally Financial, which began as General Motors' division to make auto loans to consumers, expanded into home and commercial loans in the 1980s, and is now among the lenders being investigated by the SEC for mortgage fraud.

Is debt where we have power, then, or part of how we have lost it? Geographer David Harvey traces the roots of the foreclosure crisis in part to the dictum that "debt-encumbered homeowners don't go on strike." Federal programs to increase homeownership began as an extension of anti-Communist efforts in the 1930s, and homeowners have since spent ever-longer periods of their working lives attempting to pay off mortgage debts. Attacks on social welfare programs have left a "debtfare state" in their absence, where unemployed and underemployed people must borrow to live and accept any work they can get in order to continue borrowing. As Demos noted in its report "Discrediting America," the "mission creep" of credit rating agencies means they now hold sway over not only employment decisions, but access to insurance and utilities.

The labor movement has rarely fought back against this multipronged attack. But the times when it has have been instructive. The movements of urban workers and rural farmers to block farm foreclosures and stop eviction during the Great Depression have been well documented, including by Strike Debt. In 1932 alone, unemployed workers' councils in New York moved 77,000 evicted families back into their homes. But these groups didn't fight debt exclusively: to preserve an alliance between the employed and unemployed, the councils often acted in coordination with striking workers. The support of thousands of the unemployed during the 1934 Milwaukee Streetcar Strike, Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward note, "is what finally broke employer resistance." These episodes illuminate the power of institutions that reach beyond workplace struggles, but remain connected to them.

The energy surrounding the issue of debt could reconstitute, rather than replace, a working-class politics. Debt is again being recognized as a labor issue, particularly as it relates to the issue of home foreclosures. We've seen a Detroit local of the United Auto Workers work with Occupy to stop two such foreclosures; AFSCME and SEIU join with Occupy Homes MN to reclaim a home under foreclosure; and ILWU organizing anti-eviction workshops with Occupy Long Beach. Campaigns like United Students Against Sweatshops' "Kick Wall Street Off Campus" are making connections between students and workers and providing platforms to target one bank at a time.

By leaving us all in the red, the ruling class has provided us an opportunity to build a counterhegemonic bloc. For this, we owe them one. In debt resistance, the tried-and-true categories of classes, movements, and peoples can build a unifying program that simultaneously reveals and opposes the alliance of financial and corporate capital that keeps us working and borrowing.

But it's a program that will appear contradictory unless it addresses debt at its root – in our work. Attacking the moral compulsion perceived to be at its center, Strike Debt has responded with declarations of refusal: "We owe you nothing." "You are not a loan." But the contradictions of debt – and the tendency to view it as the basis for our relations – are a form of its fetishism, the "thingification of social relations."

When debt commodifies our future work into consumer goods like mortgages, car loans, and financial aid packages, it alienates us from this future part of ourselves, obscuring it behind a curtain of bills and statements. From this vantage point, it is easy for us to mistake these debts – though they will be realized as our future work – as alien, metaphysical forms hanging over us, which we can banish through a mass withdrawal of consent. This obscures our real role in the creditor-lender relationship: that our labor is made, daily, as an interest-free loan to capital. We instead might find ways to proclaim, as did one poster at a 2010 protest in Madrid, "Debt? We are the creditors." ■

SHE CAN'T SLEEP NO MORE

by Sarah Leonard

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MARISSA MAYER.

Marissa Mayer was recently made CEO of Yahoo, the struggling online media giant. The board knew they needed a sort of miracle, something so extraordinary that it'd jolt the company into success, so they took a deep breath, prayed and threw a Hail Mary pass: they hired a pregnant woman. A pregnant woman who had occupied the top tier of Google, but still a rare bird. A few months later, Mayer received a further plaudit, albeit a less lucrative one: she topped Business Insider's list of "19 Successful People Who Barely Sleep." "She used to put in 130 hour weeks [when she worked] at Google," explained Insider, and "she managed that schedule by sleeping under her desk and being 'strategic' about her showers."

In an office environment in which success depends on being "strategic" about hygiene, personal time is taken like a Jetson's meal pill: compressed, trivial, quickly swallowed. Employees, to get ahead, not only work all the hours of the day, but all the hours not in the day, and sleep on the couch with pens slipping from their hands like college students. The ideal worker is the worker whose whole meaningful life happens within the four walls of the office, or whose wage work has expanded to fill the home. Nowhere is this more prominent than in the tech world, land of startups, where one is supposed to identify with the company absolutely.

Silicon Valley's countercultural vibe has long masked its Wall Street-style labor discipline: a heavy emphasis on smartness, flexibility, and willingness to work more grueling hours than the guy next to you. Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg has even confessed to "sneaking" out of the office to have dinner with her family so as not to run afoul of overwrought office cultures. So intense is the work expectation that the biography of late Apple CEO Steve Jobs has become a sort of Bible for the aspiringly sleep-deprived. A *Wired* journalist quotes Steve Davis, the CEO of a software company serving financial institutions, and a professed Jobs acolyte, living the dream. "He explained that he had consciously set aside certain aspects of his family life, since he believes that startups fail when those involved aren't committed to being available twenty-four hours a day. Luckily, Davis told me, he was blessed with a wife who picked up the slack."

The journalist doesn't say whether Davis's wife has a job, but if she does, she will likely star in her own magazine article, one in which she "has it all," hearth and boardroom. Feminism is the latest movement warped into the service of money making, with a new crop of Silicon Valley bosses – Mayer and Sandberg chief among them – celebrated as icons of female achievement. Nary an article about Mayer goes by without wide-eyed appreciation of her miracle birth. She has achieved something greater than the Virgin Mary: becoming pregnant without losing her bonus. And she is super excited about it. "The baby's been way easier than everyone made it out to be," Mayer said at the 2012 *Fortune* Most Powerful Women Summit. She's barely taking maternity leave.

Rather than a reflection of Mayer, this is an impressive absorption of female biology into a reinforcement of the work ethic. Everyone knows that men can work all the time by ignoring their families. But women give birth. They're natural nurturers. What if they can perform both roles and somehow center motherhood *and* CEOship? She becomes a superworker, "balancing" two loads too heavy to be borne in any proportion. Women insist that they can "do it all" so as not to appear disadvantaged in comparison to their male colleagues; this scrabbling not to be left behind merely legitimizes the insane work ethic. Women's desire to break the glass ceiling right under Jobs's feet – Mayer has referred to him on Twitter as one of her heroes – reinforces the importance of a brutal, dehumanizing schedule. Women can do that too. Only more.

The way this is done by someone like Mayer isn't a mystery: she hires multiple nannies, a fleet of cars, all the help she could want. But she represents an ideal for the non-millionaire women out there: having it all by doing it all, running the show without losing that most important female credential

– motherhood. Mayer does it all by being rich. Most women aren't so lucky, still doing on average two more hours of housework a day than men and working for wages all the while.

Which points toward the core of the "having it all" debates: time is a feminist issue. Time is a feminist issue because we don't want women to have to birth babies in cyborg wombs – pace Shulamith Firestone – just to hold their own in society. Pregnancy accounts for a great deal of the wage gap because women take time off or are fired before they can ask for a break. It indicates a vast realm of work – the famed "second shift" – that women perform without compensation in addition to the wage labor they perform outside of the home. This labor mostly falls to women, but it raises questions of pace and time for all workers – one shouldn't be penalized for no longer being able to sleep under one's desk. Because it's barbaric.

The practices in Silicon Valley power centers put the lie to any concept of work life "balance." As theorist Kathi Weeks likes to say, this is a site of contradiction, not mere imbalance, the contradiction between production and reproduction that has long existed for women. How one combines the two is dictated to a great degree by the economy; you can bet that if it was popularly believed that the American economy was suffering due to a lack of female middle management, all efforts to relieve working women of home duties would be celebrated, rather than held up to "but is she a good mother?" scrutiny.

Silicon Valley adds another twist to this formula – many of the women rising to the top are doing so in an office culture that is relentlessly sexist, but also dedicated to building products that focus on the "social factory." The term sounds coined for and by people seeking degrees in media theory, but it's a useful descriptor for the work we do commodifying our social relationships: think Facebook profiting from our clicks and Twitter from our tweets. As *Jacobin* contributing editor Melissa Gira Grant points out in a forthcoming *Dissent* essay, Facebook was driven from the get-go by men's relationships to women. It originated as Facemash, a sort of "hot or not" for Harvard women, in Mark Zuckerberg's dormroom.

Employees at such social media companies now are required to maintain profiles themselves and operate as model users. Grant notes that Facebook hired a photographer to take their workers' social media photographs, and employed photographers at all events so that the glamour could be shared in a brand-building exercise premised on the attractiveness of employees. The post-Fordist workplace makes more porous the barrier between personal and professional, and therefore the boundaries between work and home.

The second shift is now something of a permanent shift. Even after every job is done for the day, one updates Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter. Free time is enclosed for an uncompensated personal branding exercise important to a corporate world eager to use up workers' personalities alongside their skill sets. Users may not perceive their experience this way, but social media companies profit directly from clicks and the impetus such sites create to "keep up" are a form of subtley imposed labor. And it means that there is absolutely no time that cannot be dedicated to work. There is no work life balance because work makes its way into life and life is the raw material with which to brand oneself for work.

Even bearing a child, human life, supports office life. In a *New York* magazine profile of Mayer, the writer noted "that the Yahoo board – and Mayer herself – have so successfully capitalized on [her pregnancy] may be evidence, at last, that fertility, intellect, and big ambition can sometimes coexist. Together they can even be a kind of selling point." A woman who is evidently both unorthodox and hard-working by virtue of her mid-career pregnancy sells well to beleaguered corporate boards.

Radical feminist progress has long been premised on technological development – women depend on birth control, for instance, but also on washing machines and dishwashers to save them from overwhelming burdens. In a world of four-hour work weeks, the care work of raising a family would presumably get the time it deserves. But the technological evolution of social media as a form has broken down the concept of work-life balance – simply commodifying a more intimate realm – creating a case study in the uses to which technology will be put under capitalism.

The mad, profit-driven world of Silicon Valley startups traffics in a sexism that makes clear how little women have to gain from the world of tech as it stands. The last few years have seen one contretemps after the other – tech companies make use of scantily clad women in ads, at showcase booths, and in Powerpoints. As *Mother Jones* writer Tasneem Raja noted in April, "a company's product is shaped by the people who make it."

And as of 2011, 80 percent of programmers are dudes. Raja takes the iPhone's Siri feature as an example; the voice-automated robot helper, upon its launch, could find escort services, but not an abortion clinic. Feminist blogger Amanda Marcotte had discovered this and reported that "the problem is that the very real and frequent concerns of women simply didn't rise to the level of a priority for the programmers. Even though far more women will seek abortion in their lives than men will seek prostitutes … the programmers were far more worried about making sure the word 'horny' puts you in contact with a prostitute (a still-illegal activity) than the word 'abortion' puts you in contact with someone who could do that for you legally." This is not merely to suggest that a high degree of Philistinism pervades Silicon Valley. The problem is deeper. Technology as it is being developed paints a veneer of innovation – progress! – over an industry that, for the same reason porn and Bud Light do good business, has encouraged a culture of profitable brogramming that does not serve women. There is no point pretending that the Silicon Valley verison of technology will enhance some sort of feminist project, no matter how many women sit at the tip-top.

It will not shock anyone reading this that the realm over which Marissa Mayer presides is often more oriented toward images of women than the needs of women, and that a particularly sexist work world is very happy to promote female CEOs as representative of its enlightened future. Cutting-edge technologies, instead of being designed to make the grunt work of life easier, are merely commodifying increasingly intimate parts of our existence. Technology hasn't been oriented toward letting us sleep eight hours and still make a living, but has served to make an inhumane work ethic look progressive, innovative, feminist.

Silicon Valley culture and the cult of the CEO encourage the belief that everyone's realm of empowerment is in the restless pursuit of success, bonus if your baby proves that nothing will stop you. Do you buy it? Mayer won't sleep until you do. ■

OUR FISCAL CLIFF

Dear readers,

The past year has been great for *Jacobin* – and we certainly haven't been shy about boasting about it. It's more than narcissism. We hope our improbable success is symbolic of a wider intellectual shift and that the Left's marginality will soon be a thing of a past. With an editorial staff mostly consisting of people in their twenties, we expect to be active participants in that process.

But in the effort to make things that require effort seem effortless, we might have downplayed the challenges that we face. They're mainly monetary. We've grown at a fast rate and our operation needs to catch up. Our online readership is sizeable – increasing five-fold since January – but with so much of our material available for free, we're not converting these readers into subscribers at a rate that can sustain our continued operation. We average around 250,000 unique visitors a month, but barely have 2,000 subscribers. Moreover, as a young magazine with no wealthy benefactors or institutional base, we survive financially issue-to-issue.

Your contribution will ensure that *Jacobin* continues to flourish in 2013; please give now.

Simply, *Jacobin*'s existence is more precarious than publications with less reach and influence. We need your help. Digital subscriptions are just $19; encourage your friends to buy one. Donations are also appreciated.

But your support will do more than simply keep us afloat. We want to get you as excited as we are for the coming year, so here's an outline of what to expect in 2013.

1. We'll be publishing six *Jacobin*-branded books in partnership with Verso. The first wave of titles will be announced in the coming weeks.

2. An original collection from the editors of *Jacobin* will be out from Metropolitan Books next fall. Coedited by myself and wunderkind Sarah Leonard, the book is divided into two sections. The first offers critiques of liberal solutions to social problems. We say forthrightly: we don't think that Teach for America will fix education, that urban gardening will solve the food crisis, that small businesses will jumpstart a sustainable economy. The meritocracy is a myth and we've hit a crisis that we cannot shop, consume, or innovate away.

   Of course, socialists have honed critiques like this for some time now. More novel is that in the second half of the book, we present programmatic radical alternatives. To this end, we cover the future of education, the social purpose of technology, even the socialization of production, and the agents that will make these changes possible.

3. Funding for our writers: Not to exaggerate its novelty, but *Jacobin* was founded on little more than a shoestring by an undergraduate in a dorm room littered with John Starks posters. Naturally, I had no money for printing issues, much less paying contributors. But our success has come on the backs of ideologically motivated and intellectually rigorous writers.

   Though our editors will continue to be unpaid in 2013, we'd like to finally pay authors competitively for their work. I'm using the word "competitively" a bit disingenuously – this plan will come in three phases. In the first, print contributors will be offered $0.25 a

word to a maximum of $500 per essay. Even that amount should allow us to diversify our ranks. We hope this will just be a starting point.

4. Expanded support for our talented art and design team. Anchored by twenty-three-year-old Remeike Forbes, they have no rival. These aren't apolitical hired guns, either. Remeike and the other talents we rely on are committed lefties with radical underpinnings to their work.

5. The professionalization of our circulation and distribution mechanisms. We're pretty efficient getting issues out to subscribers, but readers buying individual copies from our webstore have come to expect delays. No one really gets too irritated. The early days of the *Baffler* are invoked. Jokes about leftist mismanagement and inefficiency are told. But it's still unacceptable.

   Truthfully, managing our circulation in-house has become tremendously inefficient and a waste of our time and resources. We'll be outsourcing the task to Stark Services. Starting December 17, expect fulfillment within the same week of your purchase or we'll buy you a pony. Or, you know, send you a refund.

6. We're also pleased to announce a new video series directed and produced by Harrison Atkins. We'll be filming *Jacobin* contributing editor Chris Maisano interviewing interesting progressive thinkers. The shorts will sport professional production qualities and an aesthetic closer to Louie than the Real News Network.

7. "This American Strife," a podcast featuring Mike Elk and me, will be launched in the next few weeks. We're kind of hoping Ira Glass sues us for copyright infringement – it'd be worth its weight in publicity gold.

8. Events, reading groups, and other programming will be hosted, mostly in the New York City area, for the purpose of cultivating a culture of debate and open exchange, and ultimately an intellectual cadre fit for the challenges of our new era.

9. And a special announcement: We're pleased to announce the additions of Benjamin Kunkel, a founding editor of *N+1*, and regular *Jacobin* contributor Melissa Gira Grant to our masthead as contributing editors. They're both top-notch.

10. We'll be also promoting and materially supporting a number of budding young writers. While there's no close comparison in the publishing world – think Wu-Tang Clan Affiliates.

By year's end, we only need to raise $7,500 and add around 500 more subscribers to do all these things. We take your support seriously and manage your contributions with respect. Our intellectual and political goals are premeditated and motivate our every endeavor. Even with limited resources, *Jacobin* is simply better than all of our competitors – we've emerged as a unique and vital voice on the Left and we'd like to stick around to see our project through.

We haven't asked so crassly for money before, but we need it now. Either that or we'll all start writing for the *New Republic*.

Thanks,

Bhaskar Sunkara
Editor & Publisher

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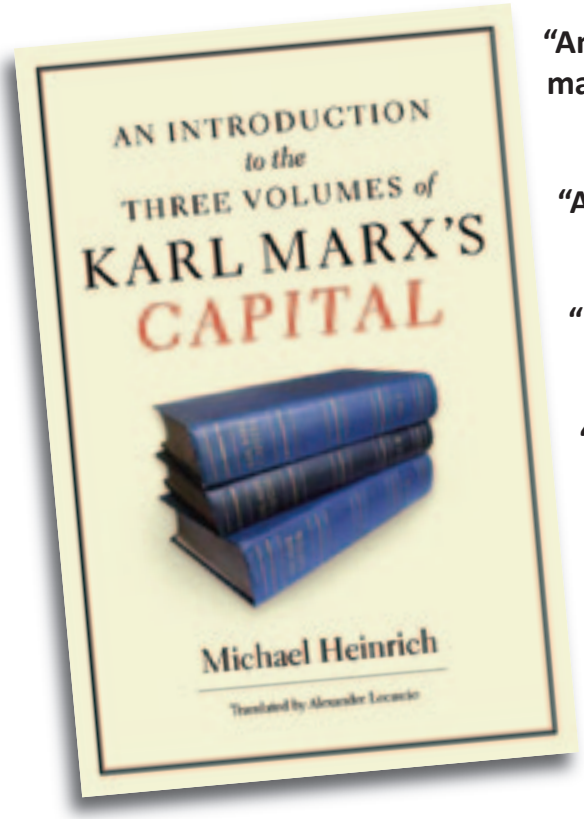

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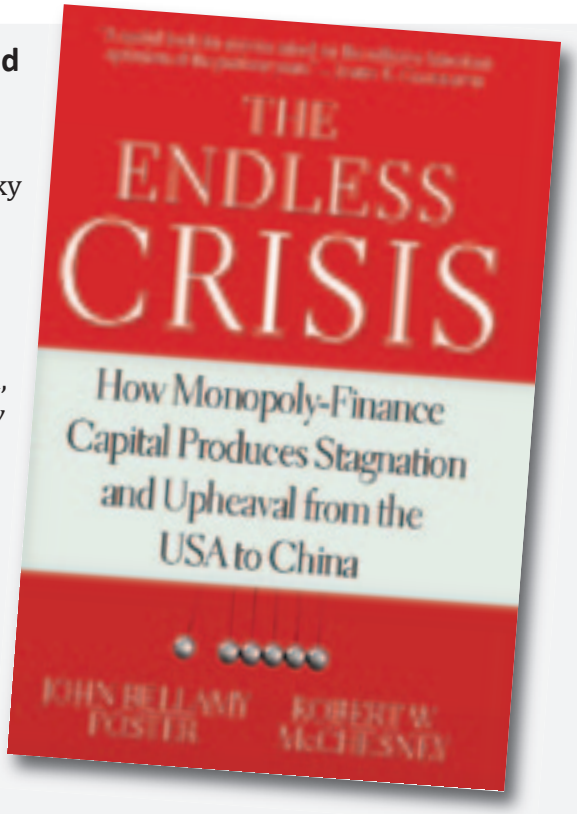

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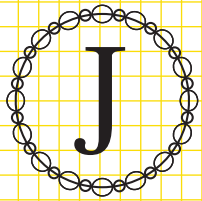

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