SPRING 2011 / ISSUE 2

JACOBIN

"AND YET IT MOVES"

$5.99

CITOYENS

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DISTRIBUTION, Disticor

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

Jacobin is published in-print four times per year and online at http://jacobinmag.com

Subscription price: $19.95 per year, $29.95 intl.

Editor's Note:
"And Yet It Moves"

"*Eppur si muove*" — Galileo's alleged retort after he was forced to renounce his theory that the Earth revolves around the Sun. It's a delightful story, but the astronomer, in truth, prudently kept his mouth shut. The same could be said for many on the Left who drifted into political oblivion following the collapse of the Eastern Bloc. In the face of a triumphant neoliberalism and intellectual barrages against the "metanarrative," with the decline in working class militancy, how many radicals accepted defeat without truly renouncing a structural critique of capitalism?

The contradictions that punctuate class society haven't gone anywhere. Nothing has been resolved since the retreat of the Left. With the upsurge of the past months this much has been obvious. Since we last published, the Arab world has erupted, driven not just by political oppression, but by unemployment, rising commodity prices, austerity, and the growing gap between the ruled and their rulers. Austerity has also sparked resistance in the Anglophone world. Facing cuts that threaten to lower the standard of living for a generation and rollback the gains won by working people throughout the last century, millions have been emboldened.

The response in Wisconsin has been especially inspiring and despite the setbacks of this past week, it does not seem likely that the mobilizations will peter out anytime soon. Indeed, as the resistance builds in Ohio and other states facing similar anti-union legislation and public service cuts, it seems possible that a revitalized labor movement is on the horizon. But what kind of labor movement will this be? The recent passing of a friend of *Jacobin*, labor journalist Bob Fitch, should cause us to reflect on the structural corruption he saw as endemic in American unionism. The model of unionism that Fitch critiqued has been in free-fall over the past forty years — a victim of capitalist assault, not of working class reform. The present uptick could augur its resurgence, result in another noble defeat, or the building of something radically different.

There is no need to say which of the three prospects seems more likely. Regardless, we must think clearly about what strategy can yield the best chance of victory. Though it is easy to cast cursory aspersions from afar, we can look at the United Kingdom where sectarianism has lead the Left to fail to capitalize on anti-cuts resistance. Rather than unite politically in an open and democratic organization, seemingly every segment of the radical Left there has set up their own competing "right to work" front group. This is the kind political practice that the Left cannot afford at such a conjuncture.

The fierce urgency of now, however, should not dull us to the importance of political debate and theory. This issue of Jacobin is offered as another modest contribution in that direction. If the response to our project so far is any indication, there's an audience for thoughtful left-wing commentary. That being said, there's a far larger audience at the moment for Thomas Friedman's aphorisms and Glenn Beck's gold fetish than socialist agitprop of any type, which shouldn't be as discouraging as it sounds. For the first time in many of their lives, a new mass of students and workers are actively engaged in class struggle. This is a good thing and they deserve engagement, not dicta or discouragement.

I try to avoid quoting dead Europeans twice in 600 words, but it's worth remembering what Trotsky said about Lenin — he thought in terms of epochs and continents while Churchill thought of parliamentary fireworks and parlor gossip. There are no short-cuts or substitutes for patient organization and deliberate political practice. There are politics waiting for us beyond what is possible now.

— Bhaskar Sunkara, Washington D.C.

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BY PETER FRASE

As the Egyptian revolution began to unfold in late January, the response of the Obama administration was appalling, yet predictable. The American government seemed perpetually one step behind the rapidly unfolding movement on the streets of Cairo, as each reluctant escalation of their rhetoric was rendered inoperative by events on the ground. Obama was calling for "restraint" on both sides even as Mubarak's one-sided brutality became obvious, before moving on to make favorable gestures toward vice-dictator Omar Suleiman even as Tahrir Square signaled that he was equally tainted by his central role in the Mubarak police state. As events built toward the climactic moment of February 11th, American officials seemed to be rhetorically trapped, as they continually chanted the phrase "deeply concerned" as if in a kind of repetitive-compulsive trance.

The uprising in Libya similarly befuddled the American regime, although by this time "deeply concerned" had been traded in for "strongly condemn" — a necessary concession to a dictator so brutal and delusional as to make the farcical nature of the previous talk about "concern" and "restraint" obvious to all. Once again, the administration seemed at a loss, unsure what to do even as it faced demands for forceful action from all sides.

American leftists and liberals have a familiar script to read from in times like these, and initially many of us returned to it in reaction to Obama's vacillation. In one respect, both left anti-imperialists and liberal humanitarian interventionists have a similar critique of American foreign policy, as it is traditionally practiced: democracy and human rights abroad are perpetually sacrificed in the service of the "national interest." Liberal interventionists tend to believe that narrow calculations of American interest should be supplemented with a more idealistic commitment to universal humanitarian norms, while anti-imperialists argue that such idealism is itself typically a cover for the projection of imperial power, and that the best thing America can do for the countries of the periphery is to stop meddling in their affairs. Either way, Obama's response failed to measure up and both critiques could be heard in the midst of events in Egypt.

Implicit in both the Left and liberal version of this criticism, however, is a premise about American6 power: namely, that Obama has the power to decisively influence events in the Arab world, but chooses not to exercise it. But the Egyptian and Libyan revolutions have done much to challenge this premise, and Obama's reluctance to intercede is perhaps better understood as reflecting American weakness rather than (or in addition to) American cynicism.

In the case of Egypt, it initially seemed clear that Obama had an important source of leverage against the Egyptian military: the $1.5 billion in aid that the United States sends it each year. So long as that aid was not revoked, Obama's professed inability to influence events in Egypt rung hollow to most observers. Yet many students of American foreign policy eventually concluded that Obama's hesitation was less a reflection of his cynical realist geopolitics than it was an attempt to conceal America's weak hand.

It is true that U.S. aid makes up over 20 percent of the Egyptian military's budget. However, much of this aid flows to American contractors who sell equipment and training to the Egyptians, so it is in some ways just a back-door subsidy to the American military-industrial complex. The Egyptian military has its own independent sources of power: its heavy investments in the domestic economy, and its continuing popular legitimacy among the Egyptian people (as indicated by the popular Tahrir Square chant "the people and the army are one"). What's more, any relation of dependency that exists between the Egyptian and American regimes is not one-way: Egypt has helped the U.S. government launder its policy of torture by taking responsibility for interrogating supposed terrorists who were outsourced by the policy of "rendition," and Egyptian support has been critical to the American-Israeli policy of illegally blockading the Gaza Strip. This suggests that the real reason aid was never cut off was that by playing the aid card, Obama would only have impelled the Egyptian regime to go it alone — thus revealing that military aid was not the trump card we all assumed it to be. A weakness of the American empire would thus have been on display for the world to see.

In Libya, the U.S. has never had the kind of close ties to the Gaddafi regime that it enjoys with the Egyptian generals. So in the face of the Libyan rebellion, the demands on Obama — from left and right — moved directly to some kind of military intervention. At this writing, an actual invasion has been ruled out by most — a widespread reluctance to occupy yet another country being one of the few positive legacies of the debacle in Iraq. But calls for a no-fly zone have come from many sides, including the Arab League and some of the Libyan revolutionaries themselves.

Once again, however, it seems that the real question is not what Obama should do, but what he can do. Defense Secretary Gates has been one of the few voices of reason in the often fantastical no-fly zone debate, pointing out that enforcing such a policy would entail bombing Libyan air defenses, and could easily end up drawing American forces into combat on the ground. If that happened, the U.S. would risk attracting the hostility of both the Gaddafi loyalists and the opposition, while becoming ensnared in yet another a prolonged invasion and occupation. In other words, Libya could end up another Iraq or Afghanistan, an outcome that would do more to erode American imperial might than to reinforce it — and that would of course do nothing to improve the lot of the Libyan revolutionaries themselves.

Those of us who have been active on the Left for a while are accustomed to internal debates about foreign policy playing out in a predictable way, ever since the end of the Cold War: liberals demand U.S. military action for "humanitarian" ends, while the anti-imperialist Left argues that such interventions have a very poor record of actually leading to desirable political or humanitarian outcomes. In the course of such a debate, each side finds itself fighting alongside some rather unsavory allies: the liberals are objectively allied with the forthrightly imperialist designs of neo-conservatives, while leftists must put up with the vulgar anti-imperialism of

those who insist on glorifying any enemy of the United States, up to and including creatures like Milosevic and Saddam.

But the Arab revolutions of 2011 seem to be upending this dynamic: on both the Left and the Right, traditional battle lines have become scrambled. On the conservative side, Egypt revealed a deep split between those who continued to take the Bush-era rhetoric of "democracy promotion" seriously, and those for whom white supremacy and anti-Muslim hysteria took precedence over everything. Thus we were treated to the spectacle of neo-conservative ghoul Elliott Abrams deriding Obama for his insufficiently enthusiastic support of the anti-Mubarak protests, even as Glenn Beck was warning that those same protests signaled an Islamist-Communist plot to impose a new caliphate in the Middle East.

On the Left, too, positions have become unexpectedly fluid. Michael Walzer, a prominent liberal apologist for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, has argued for respecting Libyan sovereignty, saying that true liberation will only come if the people topple Gaddafi themselves rather than depending upon the assistance of foreign powers. It was only a few short years ago that Walzer was ascribing these sorts of arguments to a self-hating faction of extremists, who had no place in his definition of a "decent left" that appreciated the democratic virtues of American warmongering.

And what of the vulgar anti-imperialists? Although there are a few holdouts who insist on defending Gaddafi, these are few and far between. Of greater interest is the stance of groups like the Workers World Party, a Leninist sect that has distinguished itself over the years with its reflexive affinity for any anti-American regime, no matter how detestable its behavior toward its own citizens. In response to Libya, this reflex has been fairly muted. While Workers World (and its split-off, the Party for Socialism and Liberation) have made some predictably positive noises about the anti-colonialist content of Gaddafi's revolution, they have also tried to express sympathy for the rebel fighters, while warning of the danger that these opposition forces will be undermined or co-opted by imperialist intervention.

"on both the Left and the Right traditional battle lines have become scrambled."

Ultimately, such warnings about American intervention seem a bit beside the point — not because they are wrong in principle, but because the prospect of a U.S. invasion of Libya seems so remote. As of this writing, it is impossible to say what the ultimate outcome in Libya will be — but if foreign troops do become involved, it seems more likely that they will come from European or Middle Eastern states, rather than from the U.S. It is increasingly obvious that in general, calls for the U.S. government to somehow "help" other people's liberation struggles are couched in what the blogger Daniel Davies calls the Superman Conditional — that is, they make sense only if one assumes that America possesses a power over world events that is very much not in evidence. The revolutions in the Arab world have revealed the extent to which America's power in the world is declining, and that decline is making old debates seems superfluous. The liberal imperialists — those like Walzer, Paul Berman, and Samantha Power, who dream of imposing American ideas of human rights and liberal democracy at gunpoint — now seem more absurd than dangerous. And as their influence wanes, so the anti-imperialist Left will be able to spend less time agitating against their delusions.

But the bright side of American decline goes well beyond this. Anti-imperialist politics in the United States has long been based on the belief that because activists here live in the "belly of the beast," we have a special duty to struggle against our government's manipulation of events abroad. And for all the historical truth of this position, American Leftists and liberals are not exempt from the broader cultural tendency to see their country as exceptional and supremely powerful, and thereby overstate their own importance in global events. But if we can overcome this belief in the face of declining American power, we can also begin to overcome the distortions that U.S. imperialism imposed on its domestic Left — chief among them, the redirection of activist energy away from our own country. In my lifetime, many of the major struggles in left-wing youth politics — especially among middle-class activists — have involved solidarity with struggles elsewhere: the anti-Apartheid movement, the anti-sweatshop movement, the anti-Iraq war movement, and so on. Such expressions of solidarity are important and necessary, but it is equally vital not to neglect the struggles closer to home.

Just as the Middle East was exploding in upheaval, Wisconsin saw a revival of mass protest unlike any we have seen in some time. There were plenty of jokes about the spread of unrest from Cairo to Madison, but perhaps the comparison is less humorous than it appears. By revealing the increasing impotence and irrelevance of the American empire, the people of Egypt and Libya helped free us to concentrate on our own domestic struggles. Out of the chaotic swirl of messages that emanated from Tahrir Square after January 25th, this is the one that Americans needed to hear most of all: this is our revolution, and we neither want nor need your intervention either for or against us. ¶

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New Politics comes out twice a year.
All subscriptions are for 4 issues (2 years)

www.newpol.org

NEW POLITICS • 155 West 72nd Street, Room 402 • New York, NY 10023

Beyond the Fields

BY STEVE EARLY

No modern American union has a larger alumni association or a bigger shelf of books about itself than the United Farm Workers (UFW). Even at its membership peak thirty years ago, this relatively small labor organization never represented more than 100,000 workers. Yet, in the 1960s and '70s, the UFW commanded the loyalty of many hundreds of thousands of strike and boycott supporters throughout the U.S. and Canada. While the union is now a shell of its former self, the UFW diaspora — from young organizers who flocked to its banner to key farm worker activists shaped by its struggles — remain an influential generational cohort in many fields: public interest law, liberal academia, California politics, labor and community organizing, social change philanthropy and the ministry. Like the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) "Justice for Janitors" campaigns several decades later the UFW generated widespread public sympathy and support because it championed low-paid, much-exploited workers — people of color courageously struggling for dignity and respect on the job. Its original multi-racial campaigns were inspiring and their legacy is lasting.

Most other late 20th century labor organizations had an inadequate social justice orientation and a far more insular approach; at best, they tried to improve workplace conditions for their own members, in a single occupation or industrial sector, and helped secure protective labor legislation for everyone else. Their appeals for solidarity from non-labor groups tended to be few in number and transactional in nature. Few unions, except during the 1930s, ever became such an important training ground for future organizers of all kinds or built as many lasting ties with far-flung community allies. As San Francisco lawyer, journalist, and housing activist Randy Shaw documents in *Beyond the Fields,* there is a strong historical link between the UFW in its heyday and myriad forms of progressive activism today. UFW alumni, ideas, and strategies have influenced Latino political empowerment, the immigrant rights movement, union membership growth initiatives, and on-going coalitions between labor, community, campus, and religious groups. During the 2008 presidential race, the union's old rallying cry--"Yes, we can!"-- even became the campaign theme of a former community organizer from Chicago who now resides in the White House. The same determined chant can still be heard, in its original Spanish, at marches, rallies, and union events involving Latino workers throughout the country.

Shaw's book, and those by Miriam Pawel and Marshall Ganz, are not in the cheerleading tradition of earlier volumes written during the UFW's glory days. Other writers about the union, including John Gregory Dunne, Jacques Levy, and Peter Matthiessen tended to be ardent admirers of its founder and president, César Chávez. The latest literature about farm worker unionism in California tries to explain, in more complex ways, how the union achieved its remarkable early success but then, ended up in a 30-year downward spiral. Such questions are not just a matter of historical interest to academics and journalists. And they're not just the personal concern of the many people, once connected to the union, who have contributed their own vivid memories and postmortems to Leroy Chatfield's unusual online archive, the Farmworker Movement Documentation Project. In California and elsewhere, over the last several years Farm Worker veterans have found themselves on opposite sides of the barricades in the biggest inter and intra-union conflicts since the UFW squared off against the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, when it became an agribusiness-ally four decades ago. These high-profile fights have, ironically, involved the two unions — SEIU and UNITE-HERE —which have the most UFW alumni in their leadership and staff. The deep disagreements about union structure and strategy that triggered recent civil warfare within labor's progressive wing, contain a distinct echo of the internal tensions and struggles within the UFW recounted by Shaw, Ganz, and Pawel. Controversy over the role of union democracy, membership dissent, and charismatic leadership is very much alive and still unresolved in the labor movement today.

Even for authors less focused on the UFW's founding father, it's hard to separate the UFW saga from the compelling personal story of César Chávez. All the books under review here recount, in different ways, his legendary career as a trade unionist. No novice as an organizer, Chávez spent nearly a decade knocking on doors in urban and rural barrios to build community organization throughout California. Before that, he had been a rebellious teenager, working in the fields alongside his family and chafing at "Whites Only" signs in restaurants and the "colored sections" in movie theaters, where Mexican-Americans and Filipinos were consigned, along with Blacks. In the 1940s and 50s, Chicanos faced a humiliating system of discrimination in jobs, schools, housing, and public accommodations that would have been very familiar to African-Americans in the segregationist South. Chávez responded to these conditions by becoming a voting rights activist. Under the tutelage of Fred Ross, an apostle of Saul Alinsky-style grassroots organizing, Chávez succeeded in mobilizing tens of thousands of Mexican-Americans to register to vote and use their newly acquired political clout to deal with issues ranging from potholes to police brutality. In 1962, he set aside voter registration and political agitation to organize farm workers. His fledgling National Farm Workers Association (later to become the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee and then the UFW) faced competition from several other groups; at the time, none seemed capable of breaking with California's long history of failed unionization efforts in agriculture throughout the first half of the 20th century.

Agribusiness didn't come to the bargaining table quickly or easily. Powerful growers of fruits and vegetables had every reason to believe they would never have to negotiate with Chávez's organization, or any other. Farm workers lacked any rights under the National Labor Relations Act, which covers most non-agricultural workers in the private sector. Before 1975, this left them with no mechanism for securing union recognition, other than conducting strikes and consumer boycotts. Workers had no legal recourse if they were fired for union activity, a penalty which also included eviction and black-listing of entire families from grower-owned migrant labor camps. When grape or lettuce pickers walked off the job to join UFW picket lines, they faced court injunctions, damage suits, mass arrests, deadly physical attacks by hired guards, and the widespread hostility of racist local cops. How Chávez, his union, and their diverse allies overcame such formidable obstacles was not only inspirational. As Shaw and Ganz both note, the UFW provided useable models for later campaigning by other unions, which have focused on sectors of the economy where Spanish-speaking immigrants flocked, in large numbers, when their employment options were no longer limited to back-breaking agricultural labor. More

than any other union in the past half-century, the UFW creatively employed recognition walk-outs, consumer boycotts, hunger strikes, long distance marches, vigils, and creative disruptions of all kinds to win its first contracts.

Chávez's own public persona contributed much to the union's appeal. Deeply religious, the UFW president was, like Martin Luther King, Jr., a home-grown Ghandian frequently criticized, as King was, for opposing the war in Vietnam. In 1968, as strike-related confrontations swirled around him, Chávez embarked on the first of many widely-publicized fasts to demonstrate the power of moral witness and non-violent action. California farm workers became a national cause célèbre that attracted college students, civil rights activists, liberal clergy, and political figures like Robert Kennedy, who conducted U. S. Senate hearings on working conditions in the vineyards of Delano and visited Chávez when he ended his fast. Among the cross-over talents drawn to the union from a background in campus and civil rights organizing was the author of *Why David Sometimes Wins*. A Bakersfield native and son of a local rabbi, Marshall Ganz participated in the "Freedom Summer" campaign in Mississippi in 1964. He dropped out of Harvard to work full-time for the civil rights movement and had his first contact with unions during a Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) training session at the Highlander Center in Tennessee. When he returned home to California, Ganz observed, in Shaw's words, "that the plight of California's rural farm workers involved many of the same injustices he had witnessed being perpetrated against black people in the South." Ganz played a major role in building the UFW over the next sixteen years, becoming its organizing director and an executive board member before leaving in 1981.

Within the ranks of the UFW, many indigenous militants emerged under the tutelage of Chávez, his co-worker Dolores Huerta, and recruits from the outside like Ganz. Some, like Eliseo Medina who is profiled in Pawel's book, went on to careers in labor lasting far longer than Ganz's. When Medina first showed up at a UFW hiring hall in 1966, he was only 19-years old and seeking work as a grape picker. Instead, he was recruited by Huerta to help win a hotly-contested union representation vote at DiGiorgio Corporation, an agricultural conglomerate then the largest grape grower in the Delano area. As the target of a UFW strike and boycott, DiGiorgio favored the management-friendly Teamsters. IBT goons surrounded Medina in a UFW sound-truck, smashing his face and sending him to the hospital to get four stitches in his lip. Nevertheless, the UFW beat the Teamsters by a margin of 528 to 328, in what proved to be a crucial victory for the smaller union. It also helped propel Medina into a multifaceted 44-year organizing career. After his departure from the UFW leadership in 1978, Medina spent time working for the Communications Workers of America in Texas and then SEIU in California. He later became an executive vice-president of SEIU, its chief public advocate for immigration reform, and, in the fall of 2010, national secretary-treasurer of the union.

> "The teamsters were about money not empowement"

The UFW's initial gains were nearly swept away when growers signed sweetheart contracts with the Teamsters to freeze out the dreaded "Chavistas." Today, the 1.4 million IBT and the 6,000-member UFW are, ironically, fellow members of Change To Win, the dwindling band of unions that broke away from the AFL-CIO in 2005, under the leadership of SEIU. Back in the 1960s and '70s, the Teamster bureaucracy was corrupt, gangster-ridden, and frequently prone to the use of violence and intimidation for a variety of purposes (including keeping its own members in line). The conservative, Richard Nixon-endorsing IBT was the personification of top-down "business unionism" and thus a handy, if brutal, foil for the UFW. As Pawel, a former reporter for *The Los Angeles Times*, writes:

"The Teamsters were about money, not empowerment. As the leader of the Western conference of Teamsters [Einar Mohn] explained in an interview, he saw no point in having membership meetings for farmworkers. 'I'm not sure how effective a union can be when it is composed of Mexican-Americans and Mexican nationals with temporary visas … As jobs become more attractive to whites, then we can build a union that can have structure and that can negotiate from strength and have membership participation."

The inter-union mayhem, between the UFW and IBT, finally ended when California legislators were forced to act. After UFW-backed Democrat Jerry Brown became governor (the first time) in 1974, he created an Agricultural Labor Relations Board (ALRB) to referee farm labor disputes. Before the ALRB was eventually subverted by Brown's Republican successors, UFW victories in government-run elections drove the Teamsters out of the fields, while briefly stabilizing job conditions in California's central valley. At long last, some farm workers were finally getting a living wage, health benefits, better housing, and protection against dangerous pesticide use. Unfortunately, the UFW fared worse than most unions during the ensuing Reagan-Bush-Clinton-Bush era. The steady erosion of its membership and influence has stemmed from never-ending grower opposition, the massive influx of undocumented workers from Mexico, over-reliance on appeals to consumers, and a related failure to link boycott activity to ongoing organizing in the fields. The UFW also suffered, in a rather fatal fashion, from its own deeply flawed internal structure. Virtually all power was concentrated in Chávez's hands, leaving rank-and-file members with little ability to curb his increasingly autocratic behavior when it began to tarnish the union's reputation and make future gains impossible.

This painful but important detail has been airbrushed out of many glowing official portraits of Chávez. Since his death at age 66 in 1995, the UFW founder has, as Shaw notes, been posthumously transformed into "a national icon," while his darker side has "been minimized or ignored." The aura of secular sainthood that surrounds him obscures one major reason for the terminal decay of a union once so dynamic and respected. As Shaw, Pawel, and Ganz all confirm, Chávez was not accountable to anyone within the UFW. Internal critics of his charismatic leadership were purged, then black-listed, and driven from the fields in truly disgraceful fashion. In *The Union of Their Dreams*, Pawels recounts this story most poignantly by profiling Mario Bustamante, a lettuce strike leader from Salinas. Bustamante bravely challenged Chávez over the issue of elected ranch committee leaders, whose role the union

president wanted to curtail, lest they defy his authority in their day-to-day dealings with employers. Bustamante also sought to expand rank-and-file representation on the staff-dominated UFW executive board. His opposition slate, composed of working members, was ruled ineligible to run at the UFW's 1981 convention. Bustamante, his brother Chava, and their supporters walked out forever to shouts of "Bajao los traidores" ("Down with the traitors") and "Muerte a los Bustamantes" ("Death to the Bustamontes"). Chávez made sure his critics were virtually unemployable in the fields; he even sued nine of them for libel and slander, seeking $25 million in damages. Mario became a taxi driver and, later, was even denied a small UFW pension.

Other potential rivals like Medina, a UFW vice-president, and key staffers, like Ganz, had already left the union in dismay (although neither aided the UFW rebels in 1981). Medina's differences with Chávez prefigured disagreements, thirty years later, about union priorities within Medina's new home, SEIU. Just as the UFW was gaining greater traction under the state's new farm labor law, Chávez began pushing the idea that UFW should become a broader (but more amorphous) "Poor Peoples Union." He was not happy, Pawel reports, that UFW was now focusing on "issues he considered more mundane—contracts, wages, benefits, and grievances." If UFW organizers "did not embrace poor people in the cities, Chávez warned, the movement would wither." Medina, on the other hand, took the more pragmatic and sensible view that fragile contract gains had to be consolidated first. "Our business is take care of home base—our members, " he wrote in a strategy memo. He argued that the union could not "run off to do crusades, instead of service the membership," because UFW activists faced continuing opposition from their employers and needed stronger backing at the local-level.

Over time, rational debate about such policy differences became difficult, if not impossible, at La Paz, the union's headquarters. Both Medina and Ganz were there when Chávez began to consolidate his rule by employing a bizarre and destructive group therapy exercise known as "the Game." Chávez borrowed this tool of control from Synanon, a cultish drug treatment program already controversial in California. "The Game" required participants to "clear the air" by launching personal attacks against one another, an experience that created much anger, bitterness, and emotional trauma. As former UFW research director Michael Yates describes, with great vividness, in his recent memoir, *In and Out of the Working Class*, these exercises were manipulated by Chávez personally to humiliate, isolate, and then cast out staff members he disliked or distrusted. In 1977, Yates saw "a screaming mob of 'Game' initiates" purge 'enemies of the union'" at La Paz. When one victim had the audacity to ask for a formal hearing on the trumped-up charges against him, Chávez called the police, had the volunteer arrested for trespassing, and taken to jail. Over time, Chávez further stifled "creative internal deliberation" by replacing "experienced UFW leaders with a new, younger cadre, for whom loyalty was the essential qualification," Shaw reports. The result was a dysfunctional personality cult. Since its founder's death, the UFW has been tightly controlled by Chávez family members, in the same nepotistic North Korean fashion as some local affiliates of the Teamsters or various building trade unions.

In Why David Sometimes Wins, Ganz describes how Chávez also used union centralization, quite systematically, to crowd out constructive criticism and political pluralism. "Control over resources at the top and the absence of any intermediate levels of political accountability — districts, locals, or regions — meant that potential challengers could never organize, build a base, or mount a real challenge to incumbents," Ganz writes. In an interview with Shaw for Beyond The Fields, he recalls that "[T]he UFW was not giving workers any real power or responsibilities in setting the union's direction ... Chávez's decision that the UFW would not have geographically distinct 'locals' left the union without the vehicles traditionally used by organized labor to obtain worker input. [As early as 1978] the UFW's executive board had no farm worker representation, leaving those working in the fields with no way to influence the UFW's direction."

As Chávez critic Frank Bardacke points out in his forthcoming book from Verso, *Trampling Out The Vintage*, UFW leaders and staff were even more detached from the membership than in other, more labor organizations because UFW "had its own source of income, separate from union dues." Between 1970 and 1985, payments from workers represented less than 50 percent of UFW income; the rest of the union's money was generated by boycott-related direct mail activity or from donations by wealthy individuals, other unions, and church groups. The UFW established and continues to operate, in the name of its dead founder, "a network of organizations which receive money form private foundations and government grants." The UFW was always a combination of farm worker advocacy group and collective bargaining organization. According to Bardacke, initial (but hard to reproduce) UFW success with wine, table grape, and lettuce boycotts convinced Chávez "that the essential power of the union was among its supporters in the cities rather than among workers in the fields."

As Pawel notes, a new generation of workers now toils in those same fields, under terrible conditions with little or no UFW contract protection, and few active urban supporters. Many are undocumented, indigenous Mexicans who arrive not even speaking Spanish. They earn the minimum wage, lack health care coverage, and "desperately need the kind of help the union once offered." How UFW veterans have processed this sad history and its present-day consequences varies widely. Reconciling proud memories with the profound sadness and political disillusionment that sometimes followed Farm Worker duty is not easy, particularly amid contemporary union conflicts that contain distinct echoes of the UFW's troubled past. Between 2008 and early 2010, the charismatic leader of SEIU, Andy Stern, used his similarly unchecked powers as national union president to unleash a series of Chávez-like attacks on internal adversaries. The result was widespread turmoil among SEIU-represented health care workers in California, accompanied by 18 months of open warfare with UNITE HERE, the garment and hotel workers union that was once Stern's closest ally in Change to Win.

Both conflicts were triggered, in part, by major disagreements about union structure, organizing and bargaining strategy. These were eerily similar to the differences that emerged within the UFW over its leadership, staff roles, and functioning. Under Stern, who retired as president last year (and has since joined the board of directors of a drug company), SEIU turned away from strong contract enforcement for the benefit of existing members. Smaller SEIU affiliates were consolidated into multi-state "mega-locals," often under the direction of national union officials who were appointed by Stern, rather than elected by the membership. The role of union stewards — the equivalent of elected UFW ranch committee leaders — was increasingly undermined and

replaced by the use of corporate-style "customer service centers" to handle member problems and complaints — an experiment that has been a disaster. Greater union centralization and top-down control was necessary in SEIU, Stern argued, so more resources could be shifted to large-scale, staff-run campaigns for membership growth and political influence. Until recently — and the attacks on public workers in Wisconsin, including SEIU members there — the union tended to downplay battles over existing contract standards and benefits, as a selfish defense of "just us," instead of a broader fight for "justice for all" (as if the two were mutually exclusive).

Like the dissident Chavistas who raised the banner of democracy and membership control in the UFW long ago — only to be crushed and expelled — some west coast SEIU activists organized a reform movement in 2008 that challenged Andy Stern's autocratic rule and flawed political vision. Led by Sal Rosselli, a longtime SEIU vice-president (and one-time UFW grape boycott volunteer), these dissidents sought greater membership participation in the union and a strong rank-and-file voice in bargaining and new organizing. In response, Stern spent tens of millions of dollars on a military-style take-over of Rosselli's 150,000-member local, the second largest in California. Since this January, 2009 SEIU "trusteeship" over United Healthcare Workers-West (UHW), hundreds of elected stewards have been purged for "disloyalty;" 16 ousted elected leaders (including Rosselli) were sued by SEIU for $1.5 million in damages. A rival health care union has been formed, and most organizing of the unorganized in California health care has ground to a halt while the new National Union of Healthcare Workers (NUHW) and SEIU battle it out, David & Goliath-style, for the right to represent tens of thousands of already unionized workers at Kaiser Permanente and other hospital chains.

This SEIU family feud is replete with ironic role reversals from the old days. When Rosselli was removed as UHW president, he was replaced by a team of Stern loyalists that included Eliseo Medina. Mario Bustamante's brother Chava, is now a SEIU trusteeship staffer and personally removes stewards who favor the rival NUHW. Legal work aimed at crushing the rebellion has been handled by a California firm headed by Glenn Rothner, a one-time UFW lawyer. Among other prominent UFW alumni on the SEIU side are Scott Washburn and Stephen Lerner, architect of SEIU's Justice for Janitors campaigns. Meanwhile, Dolores Huerta, the still formidable 80-year old founding mother of UFW, has become an outspoken champion of worker dissent within SEIU — even though she sided with Chávez when he pushed out the Bustamantes and drove away Ganz and Medina. At a recent NUHW press conference, Huerta accused SEIU staffers of Teamster-style bullying when she tried to meet with health care workers at Kaiser in Los Angles. Her fellow campaigners for NUHW include former UFW staffers Gary Guthman, Fred Ross, Jr. (the son of Chávez's old mentor), and Mike Casey, from UNITE HERE, whose union has pumped several million dollars and many organizers into NUHW campaigning against SEIU in 2009 and 2010.

Mike Wilzoch is one of many former UFW staffers caught up in the carnage. He spent 23 years working as an SEIU organizer. In a May, 2008 to Stern, Wilzoch urged the then-SEIU president to end his "destructive conflict with UHW" before it tarnished his personal legacy and SEIU's own future prospects. "I remember all too well what happened to the UFW in the 1970s after it devolved into loyalty oaths and vicious personal attacks on anyone asking pesky questions," Wilzoch wrote. "They burned their culture and so many top flight organizers that it did permanent internal and external damage to the union and the dreams of the workers." Nine months later, Stern went ahead with his take-over of UHW, ousting all of its elected leaders and staffers, including Wilzoch. In his letter to the SEIU president, Wilzoch noted that "history is replete with tales of radicals and reformers who became what they once despised. Even the smartest and bravest fuck up sometimes. Tragically, few had the raw courage to pull back in time, find the best in themselves that had gotten sidetracked somehow, and repair the damage." As Shaw, Ganz, and Powell reveal in their important new books, that course correction never occurred in the United Farm Workers of César Chávez. With the UFW experience in mind, many labor observers now wonder what it will take, in the wake of Stern's departure last year, to repair the latest union dreams shattered so badly in California and elsewhere. ¶

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Burn the Constitution

on an unhealthy fetish ...

BY SETH ACKERMAN

The worldwide revolutionary turmoil of the years immediately following World War I witnessed the single biggest leap in labor's long forward march.

At least, it did in most places.

But while general strikes were panicking European elites into making sweeping concessions to their working classes, here in America the Wilson Administration was swiftly re-privatizing the economy and dismantling progressive wartime labor codes — prompting Felix Frankfurter to render a despairing judgment: the United States, he wrote, appeared to be "the most reactionary country in the world." When the unimpeded rule of the plutocrats was confirmed by Calvin Coolidge's election six years later, William Howard Taft concluded with satisfaction that Frankfurter had been right: "This country is no country for radicalism. I think it is really the most conservative country in the world." But why was that so? There were many theories. The patrician editors of *The New York Times* had given this matter some thought, and on Constitution Day, 1921, they provided one plausible explanation: "If it is true, as there is much evidence to prove, that Americans are showing themselves the most conservative nation in a turbulent world, the largest cause of it lies in our Federal Constitution." The Constitution, the editors explained, "makes the American people secure in their individual rights as citizens when these are imperiled by passing gusts of sentiment."

These dubious "gusts of sentiment," in the lingo of American constitution-speak, are precisely what other societies call "the democratic will." It stands to reason that a document drafted by a coterie of gilded gentry, openly contemptuous of "democracy" and panicked by what they saw as the mob rule of the 1780s, would seek to constrict popular sovereignty to the point of strangulation. Thus, brilliantly and subtly, the system they built rendered it virtually impossible for the electorate to obtain a concerted change in national policy by a collective act of political will. The Senate is an undemocratic monstrosity in which 84 percent of the population can be outvoted by the 16 percent living in the smallest states. The passage of legislation requires the simultaneous assent of three separate entities — the presidency, House, and Senate — that voters are purposely denied the opportunity to choose at one time, with two-thirds of the Senate membership left in place after each election. The illogical electoral college gears the whole combat of presidential elections around a few, almost randomly determined, swing states that happen to contain evenly balanced numbers of Democrats and Republicans. And the entire system is frozen in amber by an amendment process of almost comical complexity. Whereas France can change its constitution anytime with a three-fifths vote of its Congress and Britain could recently mandate a referendum on instant runoff voting by a simple parliamentary majority, an amendment to the U.S. Constitution requires the consent of no less than *thirty-nine different legislatures comprising roughly seventy-eight separately elected chambers*.

> "... the Constitution is more than that: it is a charter for plutocracy."

There was a brief moment in U.S. history when the Left acknowledged these truths. During the Progressive Era, the Socialist Party branded the Constitution a menace to democratic government and a number of progressive intellectuals, including Charles A. Beard, Vernon L. Parrington, Carl Becker, and J. Allen Smith, lucidly recognized the document's reactionary constraints and sometimes called for their overthrow. Beard established a Committee on the Federal Constitution which advocated subordinating the Constitution to popular control, declaring that "the people of the United States have not control over their fundamental law at the present time, save in a minor degree. The consequence is, our institutions do not reflect the popular will, but in reality other forces over which we have only a measure of control." The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Amendments, authorizing a federal income tax and direct election of Senators, were the most enduring (if inadequate) fruits of this period of ferment.

But unfortunately it was the counterattack that proved far more lasting.

During the 1920s and 1930s, as historian Michael Kammen has demonstrated, constitutionalism "assumed a more central role in American culture than it ever had before," thanks in large part to "the efflorescence of intensely partisan organizations that promoted patriotic constitutionalism as an antidote to two dreaded nemeses, governmental centralization and socialism." The National Association for Constitutional Government, the American Legion, the Constitutional League, the National Security League, the Sentinels of the Republic, all came together to "pledge themselves to guard the Constitution and wage war on socialism." A national Constitution Day was instituted. Local school boards were pressed to further glorify the sacred parchment. All of this, I would argue, amounted to America's version of the anti-democratic nationalist populism that was spreading in Europe in the same years. Today's Tea Party, with its mania for constitutionalism, is the direct heir to this venerable conservative tradition that embraces the Founding Fathers' masterwork as a bulwark against democratic adventurism — hence the Congressional Republicans' ritual Constitution-reading, and their new rule requiring that specific constitutional authority be cited for each bill. Like *Action Française* or the antirepublican

peasant leagues of Weimar Germany, the Tea Party's patriotic constitutionalism originated in the 1920s as a conservative reaction against the working class movements that had surged forward to remake the state into the democratic instrument of popular aspirations.

It's easy to make fun of the Right's bizarro Constitution fetish, especially in its current Glenn Beck-ified form. Beck's late guru, the Bircher and Mormon extremist W. Cleon Skousen, is now the main source of the Tea Partiers' constitutional wisdom; his books, once out of print and gathering dust, have become posthumous bestsellers and required reading at Tea Party training courses. A true fanatic and weirdo, Skousen believed the Founding Fathers were inspired by the example of the ancient Anglo-Saxons, who in turn were inspired by the Biblical Israelites. All adhered to the divinely sanctioned principles of limited government, a system under which America made more progress in its first century than the world had made in the previous 5,000 years (hence the title of Skousen's magnum opus, *The Five Thousand Year Leap*). But, it all started falling apart at the start of the twentieth century, when progressives and socialists attacked the Constitution and Woodrow Wilson, embracing their Satanic cause, took the first fateful steps on the road to the serfdom we know today: minimum wages, a Federal Reserve, national parks, Medicare — all, Skousen insists, are unconstitutional.

All of this is nonsense, of course. But what is equally lamentable is that the recent rise (or, rather, return) to prominence of this constitutional crankery has spawned a whole genre of anxious liberal commentary aimed at rescuing the document's honor from the clutches of uncouth reactionaries. It is an article of faith in this commentary that the Glenn Beck crowd simply misunderstands the Constitution and the intentions of the Founders. They think our founding text enshrines conservative principles, when in reality (the claim goes) it's an ambiguous document whose meaning is contested and constantly changing — or maybe even a warrant for ceaseless progress and change. But whatever it is, the Constitution according to today's liberals is always misunderstood and never at fault, usually treated with a fond if wised-up reverence and never with the disapproving righteousness of the more advanced progressives. In a take-down of Tea Party constitutionalism, Dalia Lithwik in *Slate* writes that "the fact that the Constitution is sufficiently open-ended to infuriate all Americans almost equally is part of its enduring genius." "It is an integrative force — the cornerstone of our civil religion," writes Andrew Romano in *Newsweek*; but "the Tea Partiers belong to a different tradition — a tradition of divisive fundamentalism." "The Constitution is ink on parchment," writes Jill Lepore in a recent *New Yorker* piece ("The Battle Over the Constitution"), "it is forty-four hundred words. And it is, too, the accreted set of meanings that have been made of those words, the amendments, the failed amendments, the struggles, the debates — the course of events — over more than two centuries. It is not easy, but it is everyone's." That sounds nice and awfully inclusive, but unfortunately the Constitution is much more than that: *it is a charter for plutocracy*.

It is a measure of our current ideological morass that liberals, in their own enlightened and open-minded way, still masochistically embrace a throne-and-altar orthodoxy that subordinates the people's will to a virtually unalterable diktat handed down by an ancient council of aristocratic, semi-deified lawgivers. At this very moment, when expansionary monetary policy and debt relief for homeowners are demanded by the Left to address the ongoing, grinding social crisis, it should not be forgotten that "a rage for paper money" and "an abolition of debts" were precisely the sorts of "wicked project[s]" that James Madison, writing in *Federalist No. 10*, specifically hoped his Constitution would rule out. You would almost think Madison had been listening to Glenn Beck. ¶

Lenny Bruce is Not Afraid

a reply to James Heartfield

BY JAKE BLUMGART

We are far too wise to fall for any utopian dreaming, but instead we have fallen prey to any number of dystopian nightmares," James Heartfield writes in his Winter 2011 *Jacobin* essay "The End of the World." He worries we have succumbed to delusions of devastation, and that we are "slaves to histrionic fears". He reels of a list of our supposed mass neuroses: peak oil, genetically modified food scares, the collapse of capitalism in the wake of the Great Recession — and global warming. Most of Heartfield's examples, save the last, are good examples of exaggerated terrors that periodically grip certain segments of the population. But his overall concern is baseless: Apocalyptic rhetoric is not the defining characteristic of our age, and if Heartfield wants a utopian political project he should check in with the movement to combat climate change.

Today's policy makers, advocacy groups, and media figures are no more inclined to indulge in disaster divining than their historical precursors, and we are not markedly more susceptible to their efforts than previous generations were. It isn't as though we are being seduced en masse into Armageddon worshipping death cults, or something. (Somebody email me if death cult membership does rise dramatically. I bet I could score a Pulitzer off that story.)

Heartfield trots out a series of straw men to support his theory. But how many people are really kept up at night worrying about peak oil? Beyond the back-to-nature crowd, where is the large and politically relevant constituency unnerved by genetically modified foodstuffs? Only a wistful core of old Marxists thought the Great Recession marked the collapse of capitalism. With some major exceptions (Glenn Beck's, diminished, but still disturbingly vast, audience springs to mind) most people recognize that these aren't the end times. Unfortunately, in an example I'll return to later, when regarding one instance where apocalypse-mongering is justified — global warming — our generation is not reacting with the urgency the moment requires.

Fretting over an imagined blight of Armageddon-related political nightmares simply isn't worth it. Such hyperbole isn't a sign of the times, it's just a standard rhetorical tactic, like ginned up activists using warlike political language, or elected officials endlessly promoting their love of country. Heartfield's piece itself is studded with examples of people prophesying doom decades, even centuries ago: Ellen White's awkwardly specific premonition of The End, Mother Shipton's mystical musings, King Louis XV self-centered delusions, Ronald Reagan's well-documented obsession with the Day of Judgment. Further examples are practically limitless: Millennialism and the ever-postponed apocalypse has been a part of Christianity since before the collapse of the Roman Empire. Michael Wigglesworth's *The Day of Doom* was a bestseller among the American Puritans. And let us not forget that most European socialist parties wasted much of their pre-war energy and influence waiting for the "inevitable" collapse of capitalism (a decision that had far more significant political consequences than most of the contemporaneous examples Heartfield cites).

> " ... there are rare issues that actually warrant apocalyptic rhetoric."

Apocalyptic predictions are certainly attention grabbing and a great way to make headlines. I'm far more likely to read an article that screams "Dr. Doom predicts Global Collapse" than, say, "Mr. Man Estimates Possible Negative Externalities". Sometimes apocalyptic rhetoric is even politically expedient. The HIV/AIDS example Heartfield uses in his essay is an excellent example of this. While a heterosexual pandemic may have never materialized (in White America or Western Europe), the fear that it would universalized the threat, which was particularly useful in that many of the most dramatically affected groups were effectively marginalized minorities, with little social power. Would the public school debate currently obsessing our political elites have received as much attention if those same elites didn't buy into the popular myth that the American public school system is in terminal decline? (The real crisis is mostly concentrated in urban schools with majority poor black or Latino populations: Again demographic groups that are quite weak on the national scene.)

And then there are the rare issues that actually warrant apocalyptic rhetoric. Can anyone doubt that the peace and anti-nuclear movements of the Cold War era were anything less than justified in their fears of atomic holocaust? Today, the threat of global warming is just as serious, despite Heartfield's dismissals. "As worried as we are today about global warming, forty years ago people were worried about global cooling," he writes. That's kind of true, but the devil is in the details and in a sentence that vague the details are too easily cloaked. Concern over global cooling in the 1970s sputtered out after a couple books, a few attention grabbing mainstream media stories, and a smattering of speculation in the scientific community. It all but vanished after a few years, much like the over-dramatized fears of avian flu that Heartfield rightly derides.

Today's fears over rising global temperatures, however, have been sustained by an almost universal scientific consensus. Every national academy, scientific institution, military command, and major political party (with one elephantine exception) in the developed world agrees that global warming is happening, and it will get worse if emissions levels are left unchecked. All the recent science indicates that this is exactly right. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) recently announced that 2010 tied with 2005 for warmest year on record. Scientists report, as of late January 2011, that the warm temperatures in the northern Atlantic are unprecedented in recorded history. The Center for American Progress's Dan Weiss notes "There have been more hurricane disaster declarations

in recent years. From 1954-1997, there was only one year — 1985 — with more than 10 hurricane disaster declarations. There are five such years from 1998-2008." Insured losses from catastrophe have dramatically spiked as well, from $3 billion in 1980 (close to $8 billion in 2005 dollars) to over $70 billion in 2005. Weiss ties both of these disquieting facts to the increasingly erratic and extreme weather patterns brought on by global warming.

Heartfield calls out certain scientists for their exact predictions of when we will reach the point of no return. "But still, here we are, and the world has not come to an end," he smirks. Yes, but these scientists are not saying we'll all die in a fireball come 2016. They are saying that there are certain levels of carbon in the atmosphere beyond which will bring inestimable damage on the heads of future generations and dramatic changes to human-sustaining living environments around the world. (The emerging nations of the Global South are likely to bear the brunt of climate change but, again, promoting an apocalyptic understanding helps universalize the danger.)

Indeed, if Heartfield is seriously nostalgic for the utopian political projects of the past, he need look no further than the efforts of climate hawks to revolutionize and moderate our energy usage, in the teeth of deeply entrenched and fiercely reactionary opposition. There is certainly a debate to be had about whether the apocalyptic warnings that climate hawks often use is an effective way to rally support for the cause. But there is little doubt that, in this instance, such rhetoric is completely legitimate. ¶

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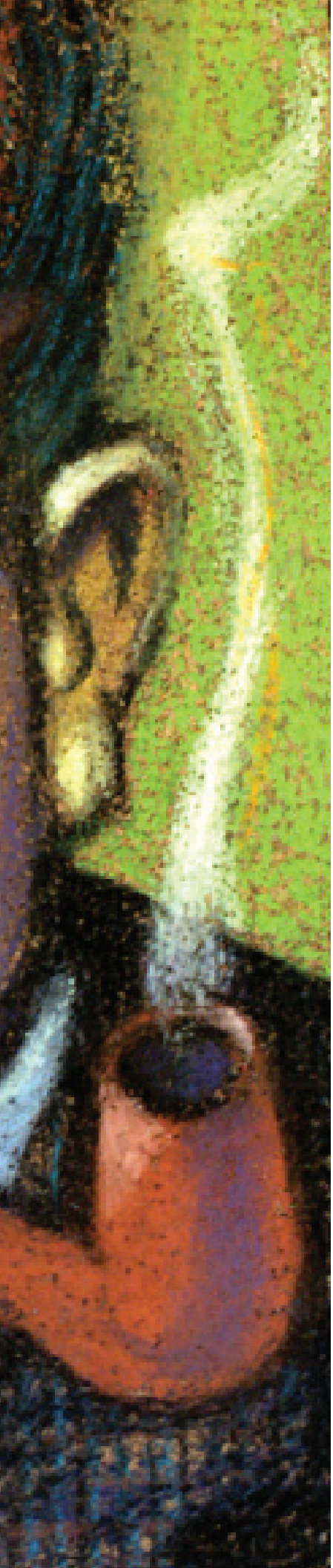

Letter to the Next Left

C. Wright Mills and the Modern Academic Mill

C. Wright Mills died in 1962 at age 45, from the last of a string of heart attacks. The author of such enduring classics as *The Power Elite*, *White Collar*, *The New Men of Power*, and *The Sociological Imagination*, he was one of the world's foremost social scientists as well as the leading intellectual influence on the emerging New Left until his tragically early death. As an academic, Mills was committed to the rigors of scholarly inquiry, but this did not mean that he thought that intellectual work should be value-free. Far from it. In a 1959 address at the London School of Economics that harshly criticized contemporary U.S. society, he provided his audience with an intellectual disclaimer that succinctly characterizes the spirit of his work: "You may well say that all this is an immoderate and biased view of America, that this nation contains many good features… Indeed that is so. But you must not expect me to provide A Balanced View. I am not a sociological bookkeeper."

Although he has been dead for close to 50 years, Mills remains a towering intellectual figure whose work merits close attention today. Many of the problems and questions he raised continue (unfortunately) to be highly relevant to a world amid major overlapping social, economic, and ecological crises. Of particular note for those of us who choose to remain on the Left in these trying times is his 1960 "Letter to the New Left."

Initially addressed to the British New Left and subsequently circulated in North America, this short and fragmentary but highly suggestive piece is, characteristically, epigrammatic in its prose and dizzyingly broad in its political and intellectual aspirations. It remains famous for its definitive takedown of the complacent formulations peddled by the end-of-ideology crowd that held sway during the 1950s ("Its sophistication is one of tone rather than of ideas; in it, the *New Yorker* style of reportage has become politically triumphant"). But here I want to focus on two aspects of the Letter that I think most concern us today – what it means to be on the Left, and the seeming collapse of the historic agencies of change identified by and with the Left, particularly the labor movement. The problem of agency is especially relevant to what remains of the Left today, and it is the part of Mills' letter that is the most problematic.

by Chris Maisano

What It Means to be Left

Speaking of the political and intellectual milieu in which he wrote, Mills identified a trend that sought to subsume differences between Left and Right in the warm, amniotic embrace of liberal technocracy. According to its proponents, who in Mills' time were legion, such an "objective," expert-driven approach to solving social problems would obviate the need for political or — god forbid — class conflict. This orientation seems to be an almost ineradicable part of modern social and political life; it finds expression today in Barack Obama's appeals to post-partisan transcendence and in noxious formations like No Labels, which masks its neoliberal ideology with a "reasonable" and "serious" call to "put our labels aside, and put the issues and what's best for the nation first."

Mills will have none of this. He defends the continuing salience of Right and Left as opposing regulative principles for approaching social life, and defines them as such:

> "The Right, among other things, means — what you are doing, celebrating society as it is, a going concern. Left means, or ought to mean, just the opposite. It means: structural criticism and reportage and theories of society, which at some point or another are focused politically as demands and programs. These criticisms, demands, theories, programs are guided morally by the humanist and secular ideals of Western civilization — above all, reason and freedom and justice. To be "Left" means to connect up cultural with political criticism, and both with demands and programs. And it means all this inside every country of the world."

To some extent, the opposition between Right and Left that Mills defined has been inverted today. In the U.S., at least, the organized Right in its Tea Party incarnation appear as today's Jacobins and Bolsheviks, at least in their rhetorical calls for "revolution" and "Second Amendment remedies." Their political program, obviously, seeks not a new social order but a counterrevolution – no taxes, smashed labor and social movements, and queers and people of color put back in their place. But they pursue their program with a tenacity and singularity of purpose that recalls the sectarian revolutionaries of left-wing lore. Damn the consequences, the tax cuts must go through!

On the broad Left, by contrast, the prevailing mood tends to be conservative. The late Tony Judt, for example, makes this orientation explicit when, in his last writings before his death, he called for a "social democracy of fear" and the modest program of defending whatever is left of the 20th century welfare state. Coming from a somewhat different angle, political scientist Sheri Berman has called on the Left to "commit to managing change rather than fighting it, to embracing the future rather than running from it," which amounts to a political program focused strictly on "helping people adjust to capitalism" rather than the structural changes that Mills called for. To be sure, there remain a number of individuals and organizations that do not seek only to maintain past victories or accept the inevitability and finality of capitalism. But these voices are fairly marginalized even on the Left, to say nothing of the broader society. There doesn't seem to be any shortage of excellent proposals to deal on a short-term basis with various problems caused by capitalism, and these should be vigorously pursued. But very few people these days, even most socialists it seems, can imagine living in a world beyond capitalism.

The "Labor Metaphysic"

It's not hard to understand why. As Mills argues, the historic agencies of change identified by the Left all seemed to have collapsed or stuck in a period of slow but terminal decline – a problem that he identified as "the most important issue of political reflections – and political action" for his time. It remains, I think, the most important issue of our time as well. If the Left is to resurrect itself and effect the structural changes we desperately need to avoid social and ecological disaster, we need to figure out who is going to do it and where. Mills proposed a tentative answer to this question, but while it seemed plausible at the time he wrote his Letter, the experience of recent decades appears to suggest otherwise.

Mills named the social agents given a privileged role in liberal and socialist ideology — voluntary associations and the working class, respectively — and characterized them as spent forces, vestiges from a bygone era. In particular, he reserved the bulk of his criticism for those New Left writers who "cling so mightily to 'the working class' of the advanced capitalist societies as the historic agency, or even as the most important agency" even though Mills thought that the development of state-coordinated welfare capitalism made this proposition obsolete.

In a famous phrase, he termed this continued commitment to the working class the "labor metaphysic" and characterized it as a holdover from "Victorian Marxism" — an "ahistorical and unspecified hope." The working class, Mills argued (though, it must be said, tentatively) could only play a decisive political role as a class-for-itself during the early stages of industrialization or in an openly repressive political system, conditions that no longer prevailed in any of the advanced capitalist countries. As such, a new historical agent that could occupy the leading role traditionally played by the working class in Marxist ideology had to be found. In a famous phrase, he termed this continued commitment to the working class the "labor metaphysic" and characterized it as a holdover from "Victorian Marxism" — an "ahistorical and unspecified hope." The working class, Mills argued (though, it must be said, tentatively) could only play a decisive political role as a class-for-itself during the early stages of industrialization or in an openly repressive political system, conditions that no longer prevailed in any of the advanced capitalist countries. As such, a new historical agent that could occupy the leading role traditionally played by the working class in Marxist ideology had to be found.

> "The young intelligentsia [...] has instead become incorporated into the working class."

Mills thought that he found this agent in "the cultural apparatus, the intellectuals" — specifically the young intelligentsia who appeared to be at the head of a wave of social and political upheaval in the West, the Soviet bloc, and the Third World. To Mills, it was not the workers who were "fed up with all the old crap" and ready to move, but rather the young intellectuals and students. Here was the historic agent that possessed both the strategic social location and the élan necessary to make the radical change he sought.

Mills was one of the first to make this sort of argument, but the search among Left intellectuals and activists for a substitute proletariat was commonplace during the 1960s and after. In addition to radical intellectuals and students, theorists such as Herbert Marcuse and Frantz Fanon came to identify elements of what Marxists called the lumpenproletariat — racial and ethnic minorities, criminals, the long-term unemployed — as leading forces in a revolutionary movement. Underlying all these analyses was the assumption that the organized working class had been hopelessly bought off by the welfare state and integrated into the social order

that the New Left wanted to overthrow. As such, many New Leftists (but by no means all) came to view the organized working class as an enemy that needed to be fought.

There's no doubt that the official labor movements of the time complacently accepted their place in the postwar order and in some instances were shot through with racism, sexism, and homophobia (a disgrace that unfortunately is still not completely eradicated). And it's equally true that radical youth and marginalized groups played a huge role in the movements of the 1960s and after. But the rejection by Mills and other New Left thinkers of the organized working class as the leading force for radical change was one-sided and sometimes produced disastrous results. Take Cuba – whose revolution Mills ardently championed until his death – for example. The substitution of a small band of young intellectuals and revolutionaries for a mass movement of the working class all but ensured the development of authoritarianism in that country.

Most importantly, the theoretical premise that underpins Mills' rejection of the working class is deeply flawed. As noted above, he argued that organized workers could be a decisive force only during the beginning stages of industrialization or under conditions of political autocracy and repression. The historical record does not bear this argument out. It does not hold when considering workers' movements around the turn of the 20th century, and it has even less explanatory power when we look at the 1960s and 1970s. An unprecedented strike wave hit the U.S. and Western Europe in this period. In 1970, there were over 5,700 strikes in the U.S. involving over 3 million workers, and radical rank-and-file caucuses challenging conservative union bureaucracies in addition to the bosses sprung up in a number of major unions. In Italy, the 1969-1970 "Hot Autumn" strike wave was one of the biggest and longest in history. These events undermined the New Left thesis that the welfare state bought off the working class and undermined its traditional role as the leading force for radical social change. Indeed, through full or near-full employment and social policies that provided a measure of income support and social security for working people, it helped to encourage such action.

Giving at the Office

The idea that intellectuals qua intellectuals can be the leading force in a radical social movement seems even more far-fetched today, especially in the U.S. For one thing, most of them have been sucked into an increasingly corporate and insular academy. Widespread urban gentrification has made it incredibly difficult for any young radical not living off of mommy and daddy's money to devote the bulk of their time to badly paid (or even unpaid) movement work. Perhaps most importantly, the skyrocketing cost of college tuition has saddled the average graduate with a $24,000 student loan burden. This debt economy channels many students toward "practical" (i.e. business-oriented) majors, forces them to work long hours while in school, and directs them away from movement work on campus and after graduation. Organizing students has always been notoriously difficult, and these recent developments only make the task harder.

Mills lived and wrote during the flood tide of postwar liberalism, which placed a huge emphasis on the establishment of a system of mass higher education lavishly funded by the revenues generated by the Golden Age of welfare capitalism. In such a system, young intellectuals and students in the universities enjoyed a rather privileged life that is scarcely imaginable by the legions of toiling graduate students and adjunct instructors that do so much of the work in today's neoliberal university. The relative leisure that marked the lives of the young intelligentsia of Mills' time is little more than a distant memory. As the scholar and critic Jeffrey J. Williams observes in an essay on intellectuals in a recent edition of *Dissent*, "gone is the relaxed, privileged way of live, whereby one got a job because one's adviser made a phone call, and one received tenure on the basis of two or three articles and had a decade to mull over a book." With widespread precarity of academic labor (Williams reports that over 50 percent of teaching in higher education is now done by part-timers – over two thirds in English), the conditions that allowed members of the young intelligentsia to not only burnish their academic reputations but to participate in politics as a discrete social group are gone, and they're not likely to come back.

In a development that Mills could not possibly have foreseen or anticipated, the young intelligentsia that he thought would supersede the working class as the leading force for social change has instead become incorporated into the working class. I suppose one can quibble over whether people possessing high levels of education and advanced degrees can plausibly be considered part of the working class. Here I would encourage the adoption of a very simple standard similar to that employed by Supreme Court justice Potter Stewart when asked how one might define pornography: I know a worker when I see her. If the appalling wages, benefits, and working conditions that define life as an adjunct or graduate assistant does not make one a worker, then what does?

In a well-known essay from 1991, Richard Rorty lampooned the apparent insularity and depoliticization of the contemporary intellectual. Assuming the voice of a hypothetical member of the English faculty, he quipped: "I've just finished my latest book on cultural studies – I gave at the office." But as Jeffrey J. Williams recognizes in the same *Dissent* essay noted above, the young intelligentsia of today is not a privileged class ensconced in the ivory tower, protected from the maelstrom raging beyond its walls — "academic politics is not a world apart, and particularly since the 1990s, it is frequently union politics." Neoliberalism has invaded and transformed almost every arena of social life, and the campus is no exception. The struggles of adjuncts and graduate students at colleges and universities around the country for union recognition and the right to collective bargaining attest to this fact. In this sense, giving at the office is perhaps the best contribution that the young, campus-based intelligentsia of today can make toward the kind of radical social change that C. Wright Mills so ardently desired.

At the risk of indulging in a political rhetoric reminiscent of the musty sectarian formulations of yesteryear, I'd like to close by reaffirming the enduring centrality of the working class in the project of the Left. It's no coincidence that the level of social struggle has declined significantly, at least in the U.S., during a period defined primarily by long, painful decline of the labor movement, however disappointing and compromised it may be — and it's equally clear that a revival of working class organization is sine qua non for a broader revival of the Left. Hal Draper put the matter succinctly: "No other class has its hands so closely on the basic work without which the system grinds to a halt. Not a wheel can turn without them. No other class can precipitate a social crisis by the deliberate decision of its organized cadres as in a large-scale strike." Despite all of the major structural changes capitalism has experienced in years, this is still a fundamental truth of social life and political practice. Continuing to see the working class in all its occupational, racial, ethnic, and sexual variety as the leading historic agency for radical change is not metaphysics — it's a recognition of the enduring realities of life under capitalism. The Next Left would do well to keep this in mind. ¶

James Petras M.I.A.

Book Review: *War Crimes in Gaza and the Zionist Fifth Column in America* by James Petras

BY MAX AJL

James Petras has been cloned. Petras I is still reliable, if a bit creaky in his old age. He digs for information in Chapare, Chiapas, and elsewhere in the Latin American countryside, interviewing militants from the Venezuelan National Peasant Front Ezequiel Zamora, rural organizers from the Brazilian Landless Worker's Movements, syndicalists in Uruguay, and slum-dwellers in Argentine villas de miseria. He pores through primary resources in Portuguese and Spanish, clattering out endless reams of political journalism on the struggle of the dispossessed in Latin American, situating their struggles within the political economy of global imperialism. Petras I's analysis may be a little theoretically fuzzy, but he gets his hands dirty and deals with facts.

Then there's another Petras. Petras II is slightly off the rails. Still kind of coherent, he deploys Marxist sociological analysis in the pursuit of a highly idiosyncratic series of theses: that an interwoven complex of institutions called the Zionist Power Configuration has taken over the American government, that the ongoing aggression against Iraq emerged not out of Texaco, but out of Tel Aviv, and that the Iranian Green Movement was a bunch of Gucci revolutionaries from the posh neighborhoods of North Tehran. Both are busy, but especially the latter, who has been churning out pamphlets accusing Israel of allying with an American Fifth Column at the rate of one a year for the past half decade.

Petras II seems like he's been stealing copy from Anthony Giddens and post-9/11 Rudolf Giuliani. He writes of the "post-colonial ethos of the American people" and is concerned that Israeli irredentism is jeopardizing the "work and security of American businessmen and officials" as they day-in and day-out construct the economic and political filigree of empire. He also offers counsel to the American fighting forces as to how to carry out our imperial wars, noting that things have gotten so bad that an American general – he means David Petraeus – commented that "Israel's colonial dispossession of the Palestinian people has prolonged the war [in Iraq]…and undermined the capacity of the U.S. armed forces to successfully operate on multiple fronts to promote U.S. imperial interests."

This latter Petras poses difficult problems for the Left. Is it better that the U.S. armed forces aren't free to carpet bomb the Bolivarian Revolution because the Israeli Army's carpet bombing of Gaza and transformation of the West Bank into a set of cantons traversed by endless Jewish-only roads and peppered with illegal settlements inhabited by glaze-eyed khasidim from Williamsburg insistent that the Torah gives them the right to uproot olive trees, beat the crap out of Palestinian shepherds in the South Hebron Hills, and generally thrash and steal from the aboriginal population, is slowing down the American occupation army in Iraq? Or should the Left instead oppose Israeli settler-colonialism and seek to shatter the spine of the American Israel lobby that supports it, so the U.S. Army, having ripped Iraqi society apart, can move back to its normal safari grounds in Latin America? Petras II would have us destroying the societies Petras I has been protecting for half a century. Not on purpose – but once we remove the imperial foot soldiers from the Middle East, we know that they tend to get busy elsewhere.

The rub is that Petras I and Petras II are one. Revolutionary intellectual cohabits the same body with reactionary ideologue. The gist of Petras's argument – in this case, presented in a short pamphlet entitled *War Crimes in Gaza and the Zionist Fifth Column in America*, about 25 percent of it devoted to reprinting the Executive Summary of the Goldstone Report, a valuable service to those of his readers unfamiliar with the World Wide Web – is that Israel has "strategic domination" of the U.S. political system, and the "Zionist Power Configuration" controls the "mass media," while "Americans have suffered major losses as a result of Israel's relentless pursuit of military-driven power in the Middle East." Furthermore, "Israel's arrogance damages attempts by U.S. private investors to broker oil deals for multinational corporations." The problem is an abusive "*relation between states*," or as Petras quickly rejiggers the argument, a relationship between peoples in which one group, "Israeli Jews and their powerful one percent fifth column agents in the U.S." imposes their bellicose, tribute-taking agenda on another group: "the American taxpayers, soldiers, workers and businesspeople." His italics.

In the process, the Left comes in for heavy abuse. Petras attacks the "Marxist…Zionist fellow travelers" of the American Left for not printing any "critical essays on Zionist power" in such journals as the *New Left Review* (British), *New Politics*, *Socialist Register*, and so on, especially upset that his and John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt's books don't receive leftist attention.

The reaction to Walt and Mearsheimer is simply untrue. They were reviewed and responded to, if not always convincingly, and frequently far too dismissively. As for Petras, who can blame the Left? Most anyone not wearing a tinfoil hat would recoil from his conspiratorial gobbledygook. The Left in particular would tragically but correctly accuse Petras of whitewashing empire. Both reactions are too easy. Some of what Petras has been issuing in an unending stream over the past six years is correct. The Israel lobby – drop the "Zionist Power configuration" – is powerful. The mass-media does filter its news through a Zionist sieve. And it's true that there has been a "Zionist/Israeli influence in promoting U.S. war policies." The lobby's power does hurt the many for the interests of the few. One can hardly find fault with Petras's assertion that it must be countered. And Petras is enough of a leftist that parts of his political program are welcome. We should support "the class and popular struggle against finance, real estate and insurance billionaires." But other things do not follow. Against his insistence, it is hard to identify "U.S. wars for Israel in the Middle East," and Petras's comment that the U.S. Left should organize under a banner with the legend, "ISRAEL DOESN'T TELL U.S. WORKERS WHO TO FIGHT" will not sit well with many leftists, having nothing to do with "Jewish 'sensibilities'" as he writes and everything to do with the political and moral basis

for left organization: that workers shouldn't be fighting in capitalist wars.

Petras identifies institutional politics oriented towards ethnically conceived interests as the knot of the problem. But the lobby, pace Petras, Walt-Mearsheimer, and others, is not a fifth column-esque force making America deviate from its "national interest," a bit of metaphysics imported from the conceptual universe of international relations theory. Those concerned about Palestinian liberation should know this more than anyone. The autocratic Palestinian Authority kowtows to Washington and Tel Aviv and promises Tzipi Livni the "biggest Yerushalayim" ever in return for the aid inflows that construct a collaborator class willing to administer the cantons from penthouses in Ramallah so long as the cash keeps piling up in the PA's coffers. The children of the collaborator layer now have the freedom to puke in front of nightclubs just like in Western Europe, while their parents create employment for the underlying population in Palestinian industrial zones. Meanwhile Mohammed Dahlan's Vichy torture squad tortures muqawama for fighting for their people. There are no "national interests," merely class interests that permeate porous national borders. Money knows no flag.

Yet too much of what Petras says is correct for to be simply brushed off along with the nonsense. Noam Chomsky may not be a "liberal Zionist," as Petras accuses, but when the latter wrote in The Fateful Triangle that "no pressure group [e.g. the lobby] will dominate access to public opinion or maintain consistent influence over policy-making elites unless its aims are close to those of elite elements with real power," and in a later comment on the lobby wrote that what is at stake is weighing "(A) strategic-economic interests of concentrations of domestic power in the tight state-corporate linkage, and (B) the Lobby," problems arose. It feels impertinent to type out the words, but Chomsky's analysis was not entirely sound. The appropriate binary is not between "pressure groups" and "domestic power," precisely because the lobby is not a "domestic pressure group," but a component of class power. As Gabriel Ash comments, "the Israel Lobby should rather be a shorthand designation for a segment of the elites that fully participates in making U.S. imperialism happen" – an elite which traverses national lines.

The Israel lobby about which Petras is so pissed is precisely that: a class alliance between American and Israeli capitalists. It is more the outcome of Israel's useful work as a regional Sparta and global arms merchant, dealing materiel to the terror states of Central America and the Southern Cone, to the Shah and Pretoria, than the cause of it. For that mercenary work of bloodletting amongst the brown people of Latin America and southern Africa, Israel got rewarded well: a couple billion dollars yearly since 1967. Given the links between the state and capital in Israel, that means Israeli elites got richly rewarded—chiefly, the ahusalim, or Ashkenazi founders of the state. While most of that money re-circulates back to the American military-industrial complex – the main role of Israeli political institutions in the political economy of American accumulation is to make the rich even richer – 25 percent is consistently allowed to stay in Israel, where it has built up a sizable domestic high-technology and military-industrial complex.

The physical plant stayed there, but the ownership did not. In a world of globalized capital movements, starting in the mid-1990s the "Israeli" MIC became decreasingly Israeli and increasingly American in ownership. Jonathan Nitzan and Shimshon Bichler have calculated that the correlation coefficient between the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange (TASE) and the NASDAQ was .7 in the five-year span from 1996 to 2001 – meaning 70 percent of variations in the TASE were "explained" by variations in the NASDAQ. From 2002 to 2007, a nearly synchronous 92 percent of variations in the TASE were explained by movements in the NASDAQ.

"There are no 'national interests,' merely class interests that permeate porous national borders. Money knows no flag."

The Israeli economy is a misnomer. There is an Israeli state with a constellation of institutions, not least among them an army, and an American state similarly poised, and between them flows of capital and flows of people with dual-passports, jet-setting from the Upper East Side to Eilat. The Israel lobby is certainly real. But it's an expression of, and a complement to, material links. Ideology plays a role: the settlers' American-abetted insistence on growing the Israeli state by nibbling away at the bits of land left for the Palestinian people, alongside the refusal to recognize the legitimacy of Palestinian nationalism that pervades the camouflaged hawks of the Israeli "peace camp."

Petras and the lobby theorists hyperventilate about the settlement project endangering American interests, and they may be correct, even once one has reinterpreted "American interests" to mean the uneasy compromise between the decreasingly autonomous political apparatus operating as the executive committee of the ruling class and whichever fragments of capital propelled that elite into office. But they still ask the wrong questions, restricting their inquiries to the "fifth column." That "fifth column" is just the American allies of the Israeli ruling class. They press on the U.S. government to facilitate settlement expansion because to cease or reverse settlement expansion runs the small but real risk of tearing Israeli society apart. No Israeli political leader would carry out such a task. And so Israel's American allies, with billions of dollars in foreign investment in Israel, don't push for it either, and they all shrug as messianic payes-sporting American and European Jews build up Judea over piles of Palestinian corpses. The lobby, deeply institutionalized in American politics, ensures that America does not exert pressure on Israel, while the PA skips happily along, gorging on aid inflows that will never develop the Palestinian economy. No one particularly cares.

Once one has sifted through the endless pages of bureaucratese and the self-deluded jargon of defense intellectuals, the lobby debate as it is conducted on the right is whether or not having Israel as an American ally is the best way to secure American capitalist interests in the Middle East. Petras, Mearsheimer, and Walt insist not. In juxtaposition with the "global hegemony strategy" called for by the Bush Administration and previous Republican administrations, they call for "off-shore balancing," in which, as Walt writes, "the United States would intervene with its own forces only when regional powers are unable to uphold the balance of power on their own." A part of this would be "giving Israel a choice: it can end its self-defeating occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and remain a cherished partner of the United States, or it can remain an occupying power on its own." As he astutely notes, "This policy would undoubtedly be anathema to the different elements of the Israel lobby and would probably make some other Americans uneasy." We get to the root of the issue: the

lobby blocks the two-state settlement that would secure American regional interests.

Misunderstanding those interests, some claiming to be on the Left insist that any support of Israel irks the oil-rich Gulf sheikhdoms. Let Israel loose, they insist, and let's be friends with the guys sitting on tremendous pools of petroleum. That analysis misunderstands the political economy of petroleum from the perspective of the oil majors and the state apparatuses they serially capture. Their sole interest is keeping prices elevated and controlling the flow of proceeds from those elevated prices. To do so, they need the sheikhdoms to be controlled by friendly regimes. Israel in that sense is a secondary issue, troublesome only to the extent that it incites popular pressure against the collaborator regimes, especially Aladdin's cave – Saudi Arabia, capable of producing 10 million barrels of oil per day and sedulous about reinvesting the proceeds from its oil profits into American financial securities and American weapons systems. As Robert Vitalis comments, "For the region known as the Gun Belt, the Persian Gulf represents a critical market at a time of crisis in the arms industry," keeping entire production lines going during lulls in Pentagon procurement.

"People make money off suffering and death in the Middle East..."

To keep weapons purchases whirring along, excuses are helpful, even if the arms themselves sit in warehouses in the peninsula's deserts. Israel provides the best excuse: the U.S. government's legally-binding commitment to Israel's Qualitative Military Edge ensures that it must have the latest weapons systems at all times. When Lockheed Martin wants customers for the F-35, apparently an over-sophisticated under-engineered ostrich of an airplane that can barely get off the ground, it looks to Israel. Israel obliges, with American taxpayers footing the bill. Israel thus equipped with the latest gewgaws out of Bethesda, U.S. death-merchants can sell the F-15 to Saudi Arabia, this time with dollars extracted from American taxpayers not through the IRS but at the gas pump. Meanwhile Israel's itinerant bombing runs destabilize the Middle East, part of the consequence of creating what Chaim Weizmann called an "Asiatic Belgium." Israel was envisioned as foreign irritant and plays precisely that role. The result is constant conflict. The Middle East has been aflame non-stop from 2001 to 2009. BP, Chevron, ConocoPhillips, ExxonMobil, and Shell made 876 billion in profits during that span. Coincidence, surely.

Misunderstanding this point, Petras, like so many of Walt and Mearsheimer's epigones, also insists on casting the Iraq War as a tremendous failure for America, with American oil companies now not even bothering to place winning bids for development of Iraqi oil fields and with Iraqi oil production still trickling out at its pre-war levels, with the national interest crumpled somewhere between Fallujah and the Green Zone. Their mirror-images on the "Left" like Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri vacuously rumble about the inadequacy of thinking that U.S. military actions are "primarily directed at a specific economic advantage…Such specific goals are secondary … Military force must guarantee the conditions for the functioning of the world market." The dual metaphysics of capital and national interests explain everything – and nothing. Hardt and Negri are so scared of the accusation of vulgar economism that they miss the basic correlation between war and conflict in the Middle East – 1973, 1979, 1980, 1982, 1991, 2001, 2003 – and elevated profits for the oil companies and the arms merchants that sell their wares to the petro-states seeking something to do with the freshets of capital pouring into their bank accounts, while the rightist neo-populists and realists don't ever look at capital accumulation and don't see that the oil companies do just fine while Israel mucks around with dense inert metal explosives in the Middle East and Gaza burns.

They benefit because when the embers of instability are banked, burning steadily but hotly, gas and oil prices remain elevated. Petro-dollars gush into the coffers of the oil majors as well as the Gulf States, who then spend their cash on arms — overwhelmingly, American arms. Most of the rest provides the circulatory flows keeping the FIRE sector flush with cash. People make money off suffering and death in the Middle East, and they can easily hide behind the Israel lobby. Something strong enough to both hide and legitimate immense power, while contributing to American militarism in the Middle East, has a lot of power itself, and for that reason, the lobby is no pushover.

Precisely for that reason, the lobby must be confronted. It is a component of ruling class power, and to deny its influence will not fly. But behind and among it are blood-merchants, and none of them care about Palestinians – nor, one suspects, do Palestinians' latest allies among the "realist" policy intelligentsia. American capital barely cares enough about Israeli militarism and occupation to dump its money into J Street, let alone to crash the hammer down on Zionist malfeasance in the Middle East. They do not and will not care about Palestinians until their interests are threatened more directly. The way to do that is simple. It's by linking demands with others threatened by Israeli militarism, by American imperialism, and by capitalism more broadly, and making the costs of maintaining an Israeli client state in the Middle East higher than the costs of giving it up. Misguided fairy tales like Petras peddles simply won't do in forging the political project that can lead to freedom in the Middle East. Perhaps at this hour it's time for some realism. Which doesn't mean defeatism. Just because the enemy is big does not mean we can't bring it down. ¶

Pessimism of the Will

Book Review: *How to Change the World* by Eric Hobsbawm

BY MIKE BEGGS

It is a little bright spot at the end of the penultimate, gloomiest chapter of Hobsbawm's history of Marxism: at least the albatross of "really-existing socialism" might not hang around the neck of the latest generation to turn to Marx. "... [E]ven today only those in their thirties and above have any memory of the actual years of Cold War." The idea that Marx was "the inspirer of terror and gulag, and communists... essentially defenders of, if not participants in, terror and the KGB" was no more valid than "the thesis that all Christianity must logically and necessarily lead to papal absolutism, or all Darwinism to the glorification of free capitalist competition." Most "really-existing communists" in the West had been critics of Stalinism since 1956 (yes, says Hobsbawm, who stayed in the British Communist Party into the 1980s, even "by implication" within Moscow-line parties). But the line that socialism meant Stalin and Mao was always an effective rhetorical strategy for anti-communists, always a way to change the subject whenever socialists were in the conversation. As the Soviet Union and the Great Leap Forward recede into history, surely the shadows they cast over the very idea of a post-capitalist society will lighten.

No such luck for Hobsbawm himself. The Guardian sicced Iraq War apologist Nick Cohen onto *How to Change the World*, and ended up with a quarter of a review and three-quarters reheated lines like: "If Hobsbawm had followed the logic of his convictions and moved from Nazi Germany to seek a home in the Soviet Union rather than Britain, his chances of surviving would have been slim." In a "review" in Australia's *Monthly*, John Keane mentions Hobsbawm's book three times, two of them to complain about things he did not write about, such as "Karl Marx's outdated philosophical fixation on the conquest of nature through labour, his failure to grasp the constitutive role of language in human affairs and his bogus claim that historical materialism was a science like Darwin's," and "the fact that Joseph Stalin alone killed more communists that all twentieth-century dictators combined, or that whole nations were made miserable by Marxism."

Such attacks must be exasperating for Hobsbawm. The people who will read a history of Marxism with most interest are surely people with some stake in it, his political compatriots. But, as Perry Anderson noted about Hobsbawm's autobiography, he has since *The Age of Extremes* sometimes written as if explaining or apologising for his politics to an audience of establishment liberals. He takes pride in those features that appear in the press every now and again about "the return of Marx," about how Marx predicted "globalization," or the GFC, or the fall of communism. Indeed, the first chapter of *How to Change the World* is based on a speech of his own recorded in the *New Statesman* in 2006 under the headline "The New Globalisation Guru?" He ends the final essay (originally a 1999 lecture) saying that socialists and neoliberals alike "have an interest in returning to a major thinker whose essence is the critique of both capitalism and the economists who failed to recognise where capitalist globalisation would lead..." But the latter is an ungrateful audience that sees his life's political hopes as foolish at best, and it is a shame to genuflect to them.

Fortunately, though, in most of the essays here, Hobsbawm is addressing Marxists and fellow-travellers, past and present. It is even possible to believe Hobsbawm is at least partly writing for us, that post-Cold War generation who have been attracted to Marx and Marxisms of various kinds, with no sentimental attachment to any phase of the Soviet Union, and who cannot in any plausible way be accused of a guilty conscience regarding Stalin or Mao. If Hobsbawm, born in 1917, is surprised to find himself among those of us who first encountered Gorbachev in a Pizza Hut commercial, it feels strange for us to get this transmission from someone who got his formative political experience with the Popular Front on the streets of Paris in 1936. A full generation older than the student radicals of the 1960s, he kept much more distance from the New Left than his near-contemporaries in British Marxism, Raymond Williams and EP Thompson, both of whom he has long survived. This is a dispatch very much from the Old Left, the Class of 1936, but also, paradoxically or not, from the *Marxism Today* cohort of the 1980s, who criticised Bennite Labourism from its right.for left organization: that workers shouldn't be fighting in capitalist wars. to remake the state into the democratic instrument of popular aspirations.

Terry Eagleton remarked in the *London Review of Books* that Hobsbawm writes so dispassionately of the history of Marxism that it would be difficult to tell from this book alone that he had been a partisan within it. This is a strength: far from a celebration, *How to Change the World* is an honest attempt to evaluate its weaknesses as well as its successes. He concludes bluntly that:

> "The "classic" texts cannot easily be used as handbooks to political action, because Marxist movements today, and presumably in the future, find themselves in situations which have little in common (except by an occasional and temporary historical accident) with those in which Marx, Engels and the socialist and communist movements of the first half of this century elaborated their strategies and tactics."

The first half of the book is all about those classic texts, collecting many of Hobsbawm's essays from the 1960s to the 2000s on the works of Marx and Engels. There is plenty of exegesis, but not of the barren kind which treats them as a universe unto themselves, complete and self-contained. The point is always to historicize and contextualize, and so far as it is possible in the glutted field of Marxology, this brings some novel insights. For example, in a study of the influence of the utopian socialists, he argues that they had an enduring impact on the pair, not abandoned after the critique in the *Manifesto* but in some ways deepened in the mature writings, with Fourier an important presence in Engels' *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, and "the youthful Engels... clearly much less impressed with the Saint-Simonians than the later Engels..."

In one of the strongest of those chapters, "Marx, Engels and Politics" (originally published in Italian in 1982), Hobsbawm emphasizes the

changes in their ideas over time and therefore in their political strategies: from the optimism up to the 1848 revolutions and counter-revolutions; to the pessimism about the immediate prospects for revolution in the remainder of Marx's lifetime, especially following the failure of the 1857 crisis to detonate another wave of revolt; and finally to Engels' role as elder statesman to nascent German social democracy. He returns to points well-made in the past, but which bear repeating: the absence of a dilemma between reform and revolution in Marx's worldview; the insistence from the *Manifesto* to the 1870s that communists ought not form political sects that isolate them from the working class movement as it is; and the anticipated protraction of the transformation to socialism before or after any successful proletarian revolution, because of the profound distinction between a changed *state* and a changed *society*.

It is obvious that Hobsbawm means to draw morals for present strategy here — but he is also at pains again to stress how alien the political situation of the last half of the 19th century is to us, and consequently how foolish it would be to try to recreate the strategies of Marx and Engels. Most importantly, Marx and Engels had no experience of universal suffrage and no way of foreseeing how the structure of political conflict and compromise would evolve with it. (This also reveals the anachronisms in John Keane's Monthly attack, his bizarre claims that the passionate supporter of the Chartists saw parliamentary democracy as "bourgeois frippery," and that the veteran of 1848, exiled by Continental reaction, was blind to the "potential evils and political abuse" of "concentrated power.") If there is a single basic idea that separates a Marxian strategy from a liberal or a utopian one, Hobsbawm suggests, it is precisely the recognition of the importance of historical context and a rejection of voluntarism, the belief that society can be changed simply by force of will or morality.

Later chapters deal with the reception of Marx and Engels: one on Victorian reactions (more measured and calm in an age of bourgeois confidence) and one on the publication history of their works. Everybody knows that Capital was left unfinished by Marx, the later volumes worked up by Engels and Kautsky from drafts, and that the *1844 Manuscripts* and the *Grundrisse* were artefacts of the 20th century — in the latter case, accessible to very few until some time after World War II. But Hobsbawm does an excellent job of tracing what the changing body of "classics" meant for the movement, as both cause and effect of shifts and splits in "Marxism" — texts suppressed, texts forgotten, texts rediscovered and used as rhetorical weapons.

This provides a bridge into the second half of the book: Hobsbawm's history of Marxism from 1880 to 2000. Except for an unfortunate gap — the critical years 1914-1929 — this is a relatively unified narrative, three of the essays having been written for the same Italian project thirty years ago, and another newly written to bring the story up to the millennium. It is important to realize what this is not, however: a comprehensive history of Marxism as movement. Rather, it is a history of the intellectual influence of Marxism, in which the movement appears mainly as a medium through which the ideas spread, though its political fortunes and problems shaped the course of those ideas. Hobsbawm is not much interested here in "official Communism" of Soviet or Chinese varieties, especially after 1945, presumably because he sees it as sterile — where Marxist thought went to die. It is thus mainly a history of Marxism in the West, though not only in Europe and not only the "Western Marxism" of philosophers and literary critics. The geographical and historical scope covered in these short essays comes at the expense of much depth of engagement with content: these are broad descriptive outlines rather than detailed genealogies. Still, certain forms reveal their shape more clearly at a distance.

Most prominently, Hobsbawm draws a vast gulf between Marxism before the Second World War and the Marxism of the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1930s, it tended to be based around a small canon of classical texts -- Marx, Engels and Lenin and a selection from the Second International. It was for the most part excluded from the university and developed mainly among intellectually self-sufficient communist parties. Western intellectuals joined dissident Marxist groups, especially Trotskyist ones, "but such groups were numerically so small compared with the main communist parties that this is quantitatively negligible." So, when Hobsbawm was setting out on his career as a historian after the war, there were few "Marxist or near-Marxist" works of history in English. By the 1960s, a different world:

"Intellectual Marxists since the 1960s have been submerged in a flood of Marxist literature and debate. They have had access to something like a giant supermarket of Marxisms and Marxist authors, and the fact that at any time the choice of the majority in any country may be dictated by history, political situation and fashion does not prevent them from being conscious of the theoretical range of their options. This is all the more wide since Marxism, again mainly from the 1960s, has been increasingly integrated into the content of formal higher education, at least in the humanities and social sciences."

Hobsbawm himself was, of course, in the vanguard of the march into the institutions, one of the historians most responsible for the flourishing of Marxian approaches in his discipline. But he is deeply ambivalent about the development, as is to be expected from someone who stayed in the party after 1956 when most of his peers moved out. His chapter on 1945-83 portrays the period as the great flowering and maturation of Marxism as an intellectual force, even as it declined politically. The 1960s multiplied both the producers and consumers of Marxist literature "in a spectacular manner," and the 1970s saw Marxism emerge as a force within most academic social sciences. He compares the radical upsurge with 1848 — coming from nowhere and disappearing almost as quickly, but leaving much more behind than it first seemed to. The social base of Marxism in the West was now primarily intellectual, as the working class base, where there had been one, was fading away.

"Communists were always internal critics of the labor movement rather than its leaders."

A sometimes unfair caricature of a theoretical fashion victim 1970s academic New Left emerges, with Hobsbawm finding the most egregious quotations from some Althusserians — i.e., "the study of history is not only scientifically but politically valueless" — while mostly ignoring the likes of his peers EP Thompson, Raymond Williams and Perry Anderson, who combined serious scholarship with active attempts to open political space outside Labour and the Communist Party. But he leaves little doubt that official Marxism had intellectually atrophied and there was no going back:

"It tended to be reduced to a few simple elements, almost to slogans: the fundamental importance of the

class struggle, the exploitation of workers, peasants of the Third World, the rejection of capitalism or imperialism, the necessity of revolution and revolutionary (including armed) struggle, the condemnation of 'reformism' and 'revisionism', the indispensability of a 'vanguard' and the like. Such simplifications made it possible to liberate Marxism from any contact with the complexities of the real world, since analysis was merely designed to demonstrate the already announced truths in pure form. They could therefore be combined with strategies of pure voluntarism or whatever else the militants favoured."

Ultimately, the fate of Marxism depended less, he implies, on anything internal to its thought, but on the decline of the labor movement itself: conditions not of Marxists' choosing. The final chapter redresses the balance of the intellectual history to discuss the relationship between Marxism and the labor movement across the 20th century. Marx and Engels never anticipated that the movement might be integrated into the capitalist political framework in a stable way — but it makes a great deal of materialist sense that it did.

"In short, the (constitutional) countries of developed capitalism, in which revolutions were not on the agenda… contained revolutionaries within or outside labour movements, but most organised workers, even the class-conscious ones, were not normally revolutionary even when their parties were committed to socialism… So nothing in the core states of developed capitalism seemed to stand in the way of a symbiosis between labour and a flourishing economic system at the beginning of the twentieth century."

Communists were always internal critics of the labor movement rather than its leaders. 1917 seemed to bring revolution into the realm of possibility (entrancing even the Fabian Webbs), but in a manner with major consequences for Western Marxism — communism would be forever associated with the Soviet Union. Before the Ancient Mariner shot it down, the albatross was a sign of good luck, and "really-existing socialism" came at first as a revelation. But communism now became a foreign society in the present, with obvious problems, and not just a promise expected to grow painfully but organically from a fatally flawed capitalism. Communists were now as concerned with geopolitics as with the domestic prospects of their labour movements, and the concerns could come into conflict. The Depression brought the heroic-era of the Popular Front, but its glory dimmed with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. After the war, the whole sequence since 1917 turned out to be a temporary divergence from the long-term trend: laborism as a functional element in capitalist society, with socialists — Soviet-aligned or otherwise — critics on the margins, or even outside, of the movement.

From this perspective, the decline of laborism since the 1970s has been much more decisive a blow to Marxism in the West than the fall of the Soviet Union, because most illusions in "really-existing socialism" had already been lost decades before. Hobsbawm does not have much of an explanation for this decline beyond an ideological shift to "neoliberalism," but its consequence is clear: when even the modest reform of capitalism becomes a marginal proposition, socialism becomes a margin of a margin and loses its oxygen.

Does Hobsbawm think Marxism have a future? In one way, its survival is guaranteed as a substantial part of the classical heritage of academic social science. Specifically "Marxist" social science has for the most part dissolved its boundaries with other currents, which have proved both receptive to Marxist ideas and helpful to Marxists. There will be, and indeed ought to be, no going back to "classical" Marxism, which good historical materialists ought to see in context as a product of its time:

"Even if a consensus about what constitutes the Marxist mainstream (or streams) re-emerges, it is likely to operate at a greater distance from the original texts of 'the classics' than in the past. It is unlikely that they will often be referred to again, as they so often were, as a coherent corpus of internally consistent theory and doctrine, as an immediately usable analytic description of present economies and societies, or as a direct guide to current action by Marxists. The break in the continuity of the Marxist tradition is probably not completely repairable."

Academic survival is, of course, cold comfort. Does Marxism have a political future? Hobsbawm is clearly not optimistic. But at the same time, he gives the impression that hard as it may be to imagine the transcendence of capitalism in the short term, it is difficult for him to conceive that socialism is not on the cards in the long run. He still thinks Marx was basically right about the logic of capitalism — to ever greater centralization, or socialization even, of the organization of production, combined with episodic breakdowns. He now thinks Marx was wrong to see the proletariat as the gravedigger, leaving that position vacant.

Those of us who have come so very late to the party, so to speak, inevitably have a different perspective. We discovered Marx long after the flaws of Marxism and "really-existing socialism" had become obvious, in a period of protracted recession in the labor movement. And yet, we still found something of value. Many, probably most, of us learned much of our Marx at university, deeply impressed by that intellectual flowering of the 1970s which Hobsbawm sees as the high-water mark. The course of his life has followed an epic rise and fall which naturally shapes his conclusions. For us, there is a lot more future to come. Hobsbawm is right that Marxism is academic without a labor movement whose margins can be haunted. But it is hard to believe that the labour movement is dead, even in the rich countries of the West. Surprisingly, "working class" is nearly always prefaced with "industrial" in this book, and it is indeed unlikely that the labor movements of the future will be dominated by manufacturing workers. But in the broad sense, in Marx's sense, the proletariat includes anyone who has to work for a living. They are still around, and more than a few of them even go to university.

"Does Marxism have a political future?."

Reform will need to revive before there are many people to talk to about revolution. But the point that Hobsbawm sees as the core of a Marxian approach to politics will be as relevant as ever: that political strategy takes place within a framework of social forces that voluntaristic moral force cannot overcome. This is a point that can be read in different ways, and in the past Hobsbawm has read it the wrong way, as one of the right-wing communists of the 1980s who tried to save U.K. Labour from the unelectable Tony Benn — as if Labour needed Marxists to look after its electoral interests. But it can also be read the right way. The unrealistic utopians of our day are busy developing non-partisan position papers proposing rational reforms of financial regulation and making reasonable cases for a reduction in inequality, because it is harmful to the social fabric and to health and safety. But there is no genuine way forward that does not polarize class interests and galvanize a movement, and if there is a lesson to be taken from the politics of the last few decades it is that there will be no sustainable gains that do not fundamentally undermine wealth and its power. ¶

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Awful hip hop and the logic of social media production

Based and Superstructure

BY GAVIN MUELLER

Jacques Attali argued that music anticipates social change earlier than any other cultural form. He wasn't talking about hip hop, but he might wish he had been. The form was born out of hustle, rapidly morphing to nestle in the contradictions of whatever constellation of economic and technological forces prevails at the time, scraping together artistic and financial survival in creative, illegal and dangerous ways. If you want a barometer for how the next revolution in advanced capitalism will be lived, you should probably look to a rapper. Specifically, you should probably look at Lil B.

The young Berkeley rapper has built a sizable fan base of hip hop fans and hipsters, though not without controversy. Lil B makes music — a lot of music, an incredible amount of music, literally dozens of songs a day — whose artistic merit is, even fans will admit, questionable. He raps in an affectless nasal voice with little regard for the traditional aesthetic qualities of rapping such as rhyme, flow, conceptual coherence. He seems determined to rap about every possible topic (in the words of a recent NPR profile, "cat care and back pain, black liberation and becoming a deity") over every possible type of music — gabber, opera, juke. I find the music barely listenable, though that hasn't stopped me from sifting through dozens of his tracks. I want to like Lil B because being a part of his absurd carnival seems like fun.

This is the key to the Lil B phenomenon: he inspires the flurry of social media interaction (often dubbed "participation") in a movement he calls "Based." Every day my Twitter feed is choked with "#based" and "#swag," hashtags derived from Lil B colloquialisms. Tumblrs share images emblazoned with THANK YOU BASED GOD. Recently a fan archived a collection of songs Lil B had uploaded to dozens of cryptic MySpace profiles, 676 in all. The experience of seeing my media feeds cluttered with content about a rapper I don't like produces a feeling akin to when someone talks to me about American Idol or Survivor: I'm aware of its existence and its significance, but I can't muster the enthusiasm to turn it 93

> "Lil B's corpus articulates a different phenomena: conspicuous production."

The reality television metaphor goes a long way towards explaining Lil B's success. Reality TV has to convince its audience that obviously artificial social situations possess the authenticity of a documentary. It constructs faux transparency through tearful confessionals and constant surveillance. Lil B also produces his own version unparalleled access. He tweets incessantly, offering followers (over 150,000) constant access to his thoughts and actions. He responds to practically every mention of his name, popping up on blogs about him to offer unbridled enthusiastic commentary. His compulsively created stream-of-consciousness raps about his quotidian existence, his fantasies, his contradictory desires promise that no stray thought will be left unrecorded or unheard. Even listening to individual songs produces the feeling of a reality show, waiting for something bizarre, hilariously absurd, or poignant to strike unexpectedly. And then moving on: just as rewatching cheaply produced and aesthetically flat shows like Celebrity Rehab and Jersey Shore feels burdensome, deeply inhabiting any Lil B track seems besides the point. His appeal lies less in listening to the songs he makes than in following the unfolding drama of his prodigious output.

And so, contrary to rappers who flaunt the trappings of financial success, Lil B's corpus articulates a different phenomena: conspicuous production. It is not the quality of the work as much as that he is always making it and releasing it. That artists must regularly release work to remain in the public eye has long been common sense, and is even more the case under today's environment of intensified media consumption. Lil B doesn't just seem happy to oblige this demand for a steady stream of new content; he seems driven by a manic energy that will allow him to do nothing else. This compulsion to produce is not just an element of Lil B's eccentricity, it is a feature of our new media environments. YouTube and Tumblr and Twitter don't just enable our participation in media creation, their business models rely on it. We're goaded to produce and distribute ("share") to the point where friends worry when regular Facebook updates dwindle and everyone refers to their internet usage in the terms of addiction. Lil B turns this content generation into spectacle.

Hip hop has long drawn power from playing with and perverting existing media forms. N.W.A. detourned the reactionary rage of cop shows and action movies into defiance against these authorities. Raekwon reworked low-level street hustling into pathos-laden mafia sagas. Now hip hop plays with the contours of our 2.0 subjectivites: Lil B is the rapper who pushes the logic of social media production to its most surreal extremes. ¶

"Went to boarding school in Massachusetts, and college at Yale and Harvard. I would've gone to the University of Texas for law school but there was one small issue: I was not accepted."

— Will Ferrell as George W. Bush, *You're Welcome, America*

In 1920, just three years after a tiny handful of Bolsheviks captured the all-but-abandoned Winter Palace, the Soviets reenacted the less-than-mythic event in front of 100,000 spectators. Only this time, hundreds of soldiers—as opposed to the original two-dozen — valiantly rushed into the palace under the guidance of theatre director Nikolai Evreinov. Fireworks and canon shots went off at the moment of victory. A few years later, the great Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein depicted yet another reenactment of the Winter Palace capture in his 1927 film *October: Ten Days That Shook the World*, this time for an audience of millions.

The seizure of the French fortress-prison the Bastille Saint-Antoine was similarly propagandized. Just a few months after it was stormed—in which a mere seven prisoners were liberated — a local huckster named Pierre-François Palloy effectively took control of the Bastille's ruins and began charging admission and selling off the stones as souvenirs before the whole thing was demolished a few months later. In 1840, the towering July Column was inaugurated on the site — now the Place de la Bastille — commemorating the 1830 revolution. 615 victims of the July Revolution were interred beneath the column and later, an additional 200 casualties of the 1848 revolution.

The great radicals of Russia and France knew what they were doing—they were selling a narrative and a ritual. In comic book lore, "the origin story" of the revolution. But what is our Winter Palace? We have, effectively, hundreds. Where is our Bastille? We have thousands. The enormity of the task ahead is overwhelming.

In 2011, the dominant tyrannical ideology of our time, neoliberal capitalism (and its supporting institutions) has achieved takeoff velocity with the power elite, with proponents unleashing an endgame of "reforms" from tuition hikes to union-busting legislation, regressive taxation to the privatization of public utilities and the "future winning" policies of charter schools and social-spending cuts. Resistance is beyond the reach of liberalism or electoral democracy. It will be revolutionary fervor that delivers the deathblow to neoliberalism.

What we need then is an arena from which to fight back and challenge this power, but it is neoliberalism itself that has robbed us of the spaces from which to strike: the manufacturing or assembly plants of "muscle jobs" have been pushed across the border or oceans, leaving few factories on the ground to occupy, defend, and reconstitute domestically. The "knowledge economy" has robbed us of our best weapons, and labor unions as a whole have been devastated over the past thirty years. The urban centers — once great concentrations of rainbow-coalition resistance — have been re-segregated and suburbanized into shop-scapes and condominium parks. Gone is the prewar Manhattan of pungent, close-quarter solidarity and with it the tradition of "joyous shitting communism," as Céline described it.

"the young plutocrat's brain is a confused mush, delicate and fragile with a cocktail of Adderall, sexual entitlement, and post-bacchanalic intestinal distress"

The United States is now infested with well-guarded, well-fortified, tyrannical edifices of empire and capital — from banks and towering office buildings clustered in metropolitan cityscapes to the growing for-profit prisons and juvenile detention centers scattered out beyond the exurbs. Even my neighborhood in Brooklyn sits beneath the shadow of the towering Citigroup building in Queens, its name lit-up twenty-four hours a day with a piercing and all-seeing glow like the eye of Sauron, cowing the population into submission.

A juicy target, for sure. But as the handful of protesters at the 2009 G-20 summit in Pittsburgh could tell you, the armies of capital are eager to deploy weapons that would terrify Philip K. Dick. A show-of-force in the millions could certainly overcome such an arsenal and capture the Pentagon itself, but let's face it — the American brain is rotten with media-saturated complacency at best and Fox News Kochery at worst. We, the American Left, are small in number, squeamish and merciful in sentiment. We must work with what we have. Therefore we must target neoliberalism's least-fortified yet most potent power center: the Ivy League University, the soft pink belly of the 21st century plutocracy.

"Neoliberalization was from the beginning a project to restore class power," as David Harvey, perhaps the world's most astute critic and scholar of neoliberal plunder, put it. Then what better place to strike than the very institutions that cement and propagate this power? If we're to strangle the practitioners of neoliberalism, we must go looking in its crib when the young plutocrat's brain is a confused mush, delicate and fragile with a cocktail of Adderall, sexual entitlement, and post-bacchanalic intestinal distress — or socially crippled with a daily regimen of Internet pornography and video game addiction.

Just a few years ago, liberals chortled at the corrupt and incompetent McCarthyite Monica Goodling for being a graduate of Pat Robertson's law school Regent University. The Bush administration was indeed rife with Regent graduates. But just a few years later under Ivy meritocrat extraordinairre Barack Obama, liberals would take control and stuff the same agencies and departments with "serious" people — neoliberal Ivy Leaguers, mostly. The "serious" people are back in charge and look what we have to show for it.

Make no mistake: despite post-'68 claims of meritocracy and growing "diversity," it is the explicit mission of elite universities — like the Ivy League and de facto members like Stanford, the University of Chicago, Georgetown, etc. — to institutionalize, and ensure continuation of, class privilege. Their goal is inseparable from neoliberalism's. "The doctrines of egalitarianism forbid the convenience of a ruling elite present at birth. The product must be fabricated," as Lewis Lapham wrote

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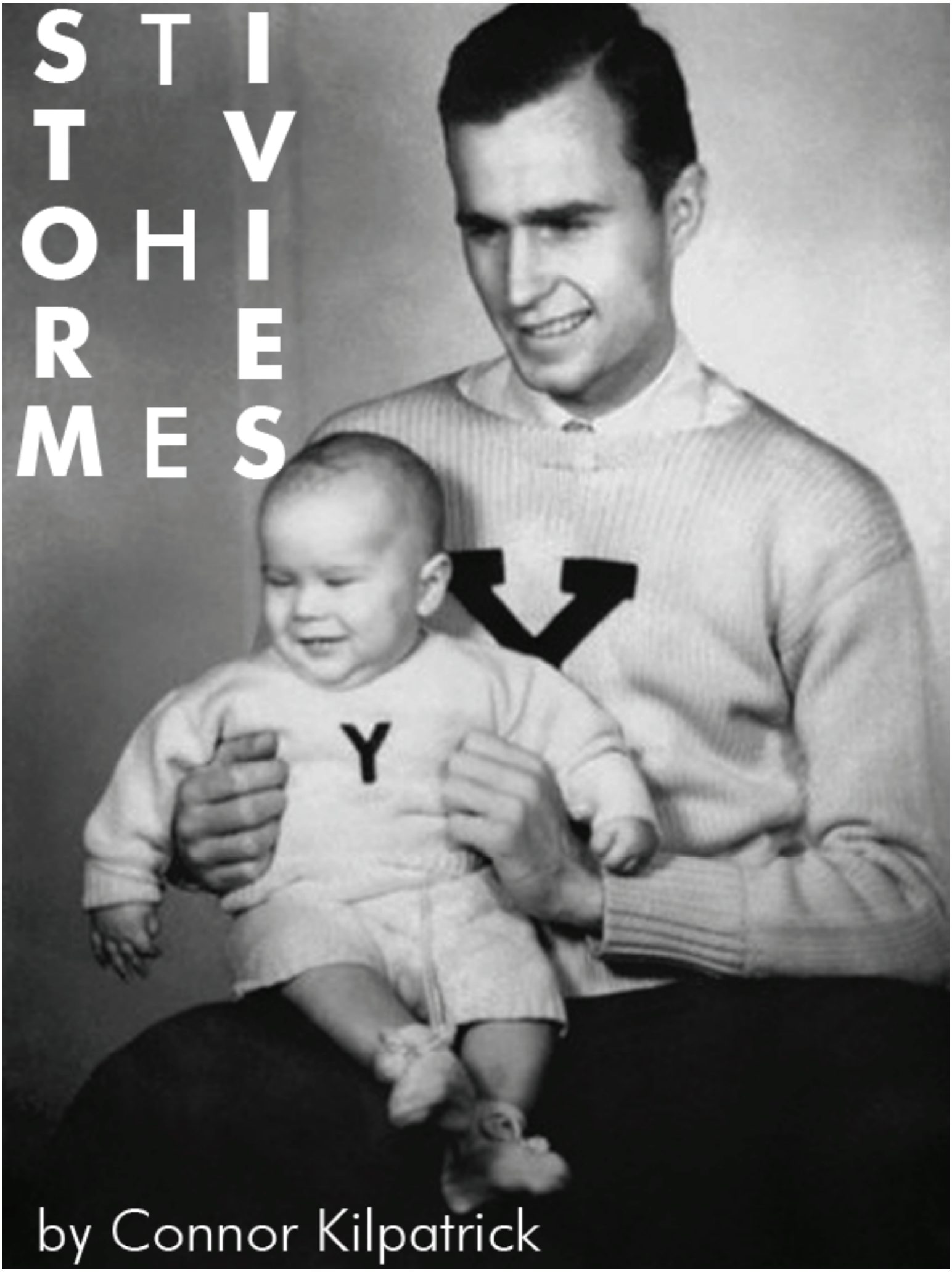

by Connor Kilpatrick

in a recent essay documenting the nation's rule under "Achievtrons."

"After some trouble with the realignment of the educational objective during the excitements of the 1960s, the universities accepted their mission as way stations on the pilgrim road to enlightened selfishness. As opposed to the health and happiness of the American people, what is of interest is the wealth of the American corporation and the power of the American state, the syllabus geared to the arts and sciences of career management — how to brighten test scores, assemble the résumé, clear the luggage through the checkpoints of the law and business schools. The high fees charged by the brand-name institutions include surer access to the nomenklatura that writes the nation's laws, operates its government, manages its money, and controls its news media."

Or, as Matt Taibbi put it recently, the top 80 percent of an Ivy League law school class goes to Wall Street and the related corporate defense firms. The bottom 20 percent joins the SEC. These are the skills the plutocracy values. This is the "pragmatic" education that we hear about from the Ivy MBA'ers, the same crowd that tells us how worthless the humanities are and lobbies to remove them from high school curriculums.

It's this unique ability to institutionalize class power that the postwar plutocrats have exploited for at least forty years. They haven't been exactly subtle about it either. While "Bohemian Grove," Bilderberg, and Trilateral Commissions abound in the discourse of the contemporary right-wing conspiracy theorist, it's worth pointing out that there is, in fact, a "secret" document, a Blueblood's Rosetta stone, from which the American elites have used to plan and launch their attack on the people of the United States. But unlike the ridiculous cartoons of today's Alex Joneses and other neo-skinhead paranoids, the document is neither "secret" nor all that colorful (lacks lizard people): the Powell Memo. The manifesto of the post-'68 counterrevolution and the spirit germ of neoliberalism's unholy birth on these shores.

Written in 1971 by a top corporate lawyer just two months before Nixon appointed him to the Supreme Court, Lewis Powell's infamous memorandum laid out the blueprint for the elite's backlash against the democratic gains of the 1960s. In the memo, Lewis Powell called on America's corporations to fund a new series of think tanks to draw up pro-plutocrat propaganda to counter those "who opposed the American system, and preferred socialism or some form of statism […] the assault on the enterprise system is broadly based and consistently pursued. It is gaining momentum and converts." (He goes on to describe other such "horrors" against men of property and capital emanating from campuses, and even manages to quote, admiringly, "Dr. Milton Friedman of Chicago" and single-out Ralph Nader as "the single most effective antagonist of American business.") It wasn't the New Leftists though that worried Powell (whom he called "a small minority")—but the "perfectly respectable elements of society: from the college campus" which he calls "the single most dynamic source" of the attack on the American enterprise system. His solution was clear—create a parallel "faculty" at various think tanks to monitor textbooks, to invest more time and corporate funds in "Graduate Schools of Business" as well as to assist in drawing up curriculums.

It was just a few years later that the most-assuredly non-elite but prestigious and tuition-free City University of New York began to charge tuition. And just a few years after that, the school ended their radical democratic policy of "open admissions." Before that, CUNY had been open to all high school graduates, regardless of class rank or any test score. Unsurprisingly, after implementing tuition fees and closing "open admissions," the school's prestige dropped dramatically. The University of California system also began to charge steep fees (though still barred from calling it "tuition") on their once free-and-open university system after Governor Reagan campaigned almost entirely on student-bashing.

So what this attack did in effect—along with the revenue-drops resulting from the anti-tax madness of the 1970s—was concentrate power in the crusty old campuses of the Ivies and their hefty endowments ($27.4 billion for Harvard, $14.4 billion for Princeton, and $16.7 billion for Yale). The "public universities" were no longer that public, nor prestigious—with ever-rising tuition, and funding concentrated in the business schools. After all, why give working class kids a debt-free higher education? Who knows what could happen with a weapon like that—social spending increases, democracy, the end of the permanent war economy, dogs and cats living together. Better to entrust privileges like higher education with the progeny of the upper classes. its electoral interests. But it can also be read the right way. The unrealistic utopians of our day are busy developing non-partisan position papers proposing rational reforms of financial regulation and making reasonable cases for a reduction in inequality, because it is harmful to the social fabric and to health and safety. But there is no genuine way forward that does not polarize class interests and galvanize a movement, and if there is a lesson to be taken from the politics of the last few decades it is that there will be no sustainable gains that do not fundamentally undermine wealth and its power.

Or, as Harvey argues:

"In singling out the universities for particular attention, Powell pointed up an opportunity as well as an issue, for these were indeed centres of anti-corporate and anti-state sentiment […] But many students were (and still are) affluent and privileged, or at least middle class, and in the US the values of individual freedom have long been celebrated (in music and popular culture) as primary. Neoliberal themes could here find fertile ground for propagation."

The Ivies have always been wary of handing over higher education to the masses. Back in the mid-19th century, while Yale, Harvard and Princeton were indoctrinating their respective student bodies with the Royalist "free trade" nonsense seeping over from across the Atlantic, congressional Republicans built the Land Grant Colleges and stocked them with a 'protectionist' administration and faculty. This strategy originated in the 1840s with Jonathan Baldwin Turner—a classical scholar, abolitionist and later, ardent anti-corporate activist who wanted to provide free education for America's working classes. In effect though, the Land Grant colleges hewed closer to the model of the Republican legislators who finally implemented them — they were training mills for the industrial revolution and provided a convenient way for mid-nineteenth century industries to offset R&D costs onto the public sector. That said, they provided an opportunity for socioeconomic advancement and did not burden students with a lifetime of debt — a far cry from the de facto working-class higher education model of 2011.

After all, what good is a skilled domestic labor force in a neoliberal economy? Very little, it turns out. Student loan serfdom is the norm in 21st century U.S.A. In the neoliberal era, exorbitantly expensive for-profit universities have replaced the old land grant colleges as far a federally sanctioned and subsidized (to the tune of thirty billion a year) education model for the working classes. Matriculating a skilled workforce is a secondary aim, if that. Instead, the goal is to create a neo-feudal order in which graduates spend their lives in the service sector, paying off steep loans at eight percent interest. Defaulting isn't a problem for the plutocracy either — when a graduate defaults on a student loan, they cannot declare bankruptcy. Instead, they have their wages garnished indefinitely. As it stands, the default rate on student loans for for-profit colleges is around 25

percent. So instead of life spent as a "de facto" serf, the defaulting student is a serf.

"It's not that the Ivies have changed really. It's just that they're not even pretending anymore."

For a particularly by-the-book demonstration of "the Powell method" par excellence, we now turn to Columbia University where just a few weeks ago, it was revealed that the school's prestigious Teachers College — once the wellspring of progressive education thanks to ardent leftists like professors John Dewey and William Heard Kilpatrick (some relation, I hope) — had opened its doors to one of the nation's most vile neoliberal thinktanks — the Peterson Institute for International Economics. If you aren't familiar with the name, no doubt you're familiar with their work. That's "Peterson" as in billionaire Pete G. Peterson—former Nixon Treasury Sect., former CEO of the Blackstone group, and the man who's led a tireless thirty-year quest to destroy social security with a series of debt-and-deficit-mongering "reports," "studies" and outright propaganda including a feature-film entitled *I.O.U.S.A.* (Roger Ebert gave it 3.5 out of 4 stars), paving the way for future neoliberal propaganda pieces like *Waiting for Superman* to reach the coastal and very-serious Thomas Friedman crowd. And it was Peterson whom Bill Clinton had tapped to help destroy social security in the 1990s before Monica and the blowjob heard round the world bought the country's workers another few years of post-retirement dignity, forgoing cat-food dinners at least until the next Neoliberal Democratic presidency. And for what purpose is the Peterson Institute partnering with Teachers College? To help develop a financial curriculum for high school students across the U.S.A. — in return for a couple of million dollars worth of funding, of course. American children will finally learn a thing or two about their various "deficit-exploding" entitlements like public school and Head Start meals.

(A fitting turn of events for Columbia University: the same school that—at the turn of the century—gave William A. Dunning a platform from which to disseminate the doctrine of Lost Cause propaganda that is still with us today, and perhaps the myth most responsible for building the ground for the Southern Strategy that destroyed the economic populism of the Democratic Party, and turned the southern states into a fiercely anti-labor "Right to Work" voting bloc.)

Ivy League economics department websites today look something like a rogues gallery of neoliberal entrail-readers. If the Ivies themselves are high priests of neoliberal doctrine, then the economics departments are the "warrior monks" ready to be deployed. A quick visit to any department website is illuminating. Over at Harvard, we have Robert Barro, a media-trolling class warrior who needs no introduction. John Y. Campell, department chairman, paid propagandist for the financial sector and unwitting star/victim of Inside Job. Then onto the big daddies like Martin Feldstein, the great Grand Uncle of American neoliberalism — Reagan's chief economic adviser, former board member of JPMorgan and current board member of the pharmaceutical Eli Lilly (a massive supply of Lilly's Prozac being a necessary condition for Neoliberal conquest), and President Emeritus of the National Bureau of Economic Research, a group with, as Harvey writes, an explicit mission:

" ... to construct serious technical and empirical studies and political-philosophical arguments broadly in support of neoliberal policies. Nearly half the financing for the highly respected NBER came from the leading companies in the Fortune 500 list. Closely integrated with the academic community, the NBER was to have a very significant impact on thinking in the economics departments and business schools of the major research universities. With abundant finance furnished by wealthy individuals (such as Joseph Coors, who later became a member of Reagan's 'kitchen cabinet') and their foundations (for example Olin, Scaife, Smith Richardson, Pew Charitable trust), a flood of tracts and books, with Nozick's Anarchy State and Utopia perhaps the most widely read and appreciated, emerged espousing neoliberal values."

And let's not forget the particularly shameless Greg Mankiw, unrepentant architect of the Bush taxcuts, fellow at the far-right American Enterprise Institute, and, not surprisingly and perhaps most alarmingly, the author of several widely read economics textbooks. There's Kenneth Rogoff, an IMF economist so gruesome that Joseph Stiglitz felt compelled to publicly ostracize him for his crimes. And then of course, there's Lawrence Summers, Clinton's Treasury Secretary and the current director of Obama's National Economic Council. It was Summers and other members of this very department, including Andrei Shleifer who just a few years earlier as part of the Harvard Institute for International Development, tore Russia apart piece by piece, only to finally abandon the carcass—today a frigid hell of billionaire mafiosa and bloodstained roadways.

Keep in mind, no matter how heinous the record, this is just one Ivy league economics department. Others currently shelter (or have recently birthed) plutocratic courtiers like Ben Bernanke (Princeton), Jeffrey Sachs (Columbia, Harvard), Harvey S. Rosen (Princeton). But it is Harvard that is the lodestar, the spirit germ of class war and the American Ancien Régime. The Original Gangsta. The other Ivies pale in comparison. Bill O'Reilly, seeking the cold kiss of the oligarchy after years of stagnation in the syndicated tabloid-TV trade, enrolled — at the age of 46 — in Harvard's JFK School of Government. It was only then that he was fully and properly indoctrinated in the Ivy program of class war and imperial conquest — the two core tenets of neoliberalism—that he was ready to hit the big-time. Not long after graduating, O'Reilly began his current role as the jingoistic and "blue collar" mouthpiece of the plutocracy over at Fox News broadcast, cheering on the expansion of markets and empire in the name of the common man. I suppose we can call his show a "deep cover" operation.

It's not that the Ivies have changed really. It's just that they're not even pretending anymore. They've simply returned to their original role—the perpetuation and protection of American plutocracy. In fact, this unholy alliance between corporate and Ivy power is written into American judicial precedent. In 1811, The New Hampshire state legislature put Dartmouth in its sights. Nationalization was imminent. The state wanted to dissolve the trustees and turn Dartmouth into a public institution—the rationale being that the college's corporate charter had been granted by the unpopular King George III and was now worthless in the young republic. The backlash from the trustees was so severe that the indignant royalists took the state all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. Then, in an almost perfect example of the intertwined destinies of Ivy aristocracy and American corporate power, the case — *Dartmouth College v. Woodward* — set

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legal precedent for the immortality of corporate charters. And it's been this doctrine of immortal corporate-capitalist expansion and private and unimpeachable tyrannies that has been so good to the Ivy bluebloods ever since.

Today, Dartmouth is — appropriately enough — an excellent example of an unreconstructed Ivy and I applaud them for forgoing even the tiniest pretense post-'68 "liberalism." Hair is worn short, shirts are tucked in, and Frat Power rules the social circuit. Two of our most prominent 21st century class-warriors — Tim Geithner and Henry Paulson—spent their salad days up there.

The last shreds of democracy are slipping away, and we're running out of time. It might seem overwhelming, but just remember, comrades: there are only eight Ivy League universities, only four of which being atrocious enough to warrant the greatest show of revolutionary manpower. They have grown slothful and arrogant since the student radicalization and occupations of the 1960s and 70s. There are numerous hedges, shrubberies, abstract sculpture gardens, and dusty library stacks ready to serve as cover. Campus police are a joke and could potentially be radicalized and converted on the spot. Harvard Yard could be taken in less than an hour. Remember: it only took two-dozen Bolsheviks to wrest control of the Winter Palace.

The capture of tyrannical structures has always invigorated the revolutionary lizard-brain and it's no different today. Maybe it's the promise of a reclaimed space in which to engender a more just society — the idea that even stone, steel and concrete is not fixed and can be reclaimed. And the power and the reach of the institution can be reappropriated for just causes. Or maybe it's the promise of wrestling something diffuse and ephemeral and omnipresent (like capital) into a single container — pinning it down in one of its many manifestations before delivering the killing blow that could send a ripple of revolutionary vigor out through the world. The vestigial ornamentation of power and tyranny serve to remind us that yes, the world is not fixed and things can indeed change. The Ivy League universities are no exception.

So storm the Ivies, revolutionaries of North America. Nationalize them into submission. Kick away the American plutocracy's favorite ladder and watch a thousand flowers bloom. ¶

In Memory of Bob Fitch

In March, the American Left was robbed of one of its most articulate voices. Journalist Robert Fitch was a strong critic of corruption in the labor movement and an advocate for structural reform within it. He also wrote extensively about the transformation of New York from an incubator of working- and middle-class dreams into a playpen for financial and real-estate elites. Fitch leaves behind two classic texts—*Solidarity for Sale* and *The Assassination of New York*—and a host of contributions in shorter forms.

On a personal note, over the year or so that I was privileged enough to get to know him, Bob was a regular source of encouragement and more than generous with his time. He wasn't afraid to challenge sloppy thinking or offer up an anecdote, story, or joke (of disparate quality).

Doug Henwood penned a tribute worthy of his friend in the *Nation* last month:

For all his truth-telling, Bob was ostracized not only by the progressive establishment in New York but also by academia, which found him not only too outspoken, but too polymath as well. Universities like well-behaved specialists, not rude questioners. Though his material situation improved somewhat in recent years, he lived most of his life on very little money. His major sources of income were freelance writing fees, small book advances, and the sweatshop wages enjoyed by adjunct faculty (which is what you call a temp worker with a PhD). As Guttenplan, the former *Village Voice* editor who introduced me to Bob, wrote just after his death: "[It's a] scandal that they scrape the barrel to give these so-called genius grants to third-rate conventional fakers when Bob Fitch, a man who did his own thinking and his own research, and who came up with truly original insights about some pretty important topics—urban planning, organized labor, critical journalism—had to live like a luftmensch."

Much to my regret, I'd fallen out of touch with Bob in recent years, and had just resolved to reverse that. I missed his mind—and, though he could be a prickly character at times, his warmth. RIP, Bob. They don't make many like you.

Doug's last point is an understatement. The best that members of my generation can do is aspire to continue his crucial work.

— Bhaskar Sunkara

In Defense of Grand Narratives

arguing with postmodernists

BY JASON SCHULMAN

Postmodernists oppose "grand narratives," and perhaps the "grandest" of all "narratives" was authored by Karl Marx, that of the proletariat taking power and creating a society in which all individuals can develop their talents to their fullest. For postmodernists, this is mere verbiage which masks an extension of Enlightenment rationality that serves to legitimize political power and oppression. Where Marxists (critically) defend science, rationality, the idea of an objective, knowable world, and human subjectivity, postmodernists proclaim the impossibility of objective truth, the absence of a pregiven human subject, and that all social movements or societies which seek scientific knowledge or objective truth lead to yet more oppression. The class struggle and socialism are particular examples of such "metanarratives," and in any event have become outmoded.

One can effectively argue against such notions, and Marxists have often done so. That said, there are aspects of the postmodernist critique of Marxism that deserve greater scrutiny. It is true, after all, that no matter how much anti-Stalinist Marxists actively opposed the rulers of the Soviet Union and like states, those rulers spoke in the name of Marxism. Foucault is not wrong to ask what in the works of Marx "could have made the Gulag possible" — or, to put it in more materialist terms, what in those texts could have been used to justify the Gulag. In this spirit, this article will attempt to discern what is valid and invalid in the postmodernist critique of Marxism, and, moreover, if what is valid in the critique of Marxism (as popularly presented) is valid as a critique of the thought of Marx himself.

Why does this matter? Because the core of the Marxian understanding of capitalism — that it is a system of production for the sake of production in which all of life is increasingly subordinated to the needs of capital accumulation, where human life itself is reduced to a "production cost" — remains as true as ever. Yet Marxism is hardly the dominant trend within the so-called "anti-globalization" movement today. The movement is divided between those who are only opposed to neoliberalism, or "globalization," and those with an explicitly anti-capitalist viewpoint. Many of the anti-capitalists are anarchists who eschew Marxism due to the authoritarianism of both the Communist party-states and the innumerable avowedly Marxist sects, both Stalinist and anti-Stalinist.

But the anarchist critique of capitalism is almost purely moral, whereas Marx's critique of political economy represents a move away from such moralism. It is an advance over the mere "capitalism is bad, let's overthrow it" mindset because it recognizes the need to understand the system to make its overthrow possible. Marx provides a theory of capitalist development that recognizes that capitalism is a system of class rule that has arisen from a previous class society but which is more dynamic than any before it. And while postmodernism does not directly influence most left-wing radicalism today, the postmodernist evocation of "micropolitics" is akin, though not identical, to the anarchist repulsion towards power in general.[ii] But as Stephen Eric Bronner rightly says, it is deeply misguided to see power "as a quantum in which less of it is good and more of it is bad: the issue is not the concentration of power, but its accountability."[iii] A movement that rejects seeking power is ultimately rejecting the possibility of lasting radical change. Whatever their flaws, Marxists always understood this.

Enlightenment as Domination

The embryo of the postmodernist critique of Marxism can be found in Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Adorno and Horkheimer had themselves been Marxists at the Institute for Social Research at Frankfurt, Germany. The Marxism of this school was profoundly shaped by the failure of the Bolshevik revolution to set off a world revolution, the rise of Stalinism and fascism, and the political failures of the working class. In particular, despite the generally pro-socialist politics of the German working class, the Nazis still managed to take power. Talk of the inevitability of socialism — a hallmark of both Second and Third International Marxism — no longer seemed even slightly credible.

Rather than seeing the Great Depression, Stalinism and fascism as signs of the decline of capitalism, as Marxists of all stripes did at the time, Adorno and Horkheimer claimed they were the results of the rationalist mode of thinking introduced by the Enlightenment. As they saw it, the Enlightenment desire to control and dominate nature with reason was now being turned on humanity itself. Reason, they claimed, was being used to justify Nazi barbarism and world war. When Nazi experimentation on Jews, homosexuals, and others is done in the name of science, a critique of science — and technology and instrumental reason — seems apt. Hence the statement that "For Enlightenment whatever does not conform to the rule of calculability and utility is suspect ... Enlightenment is totalitarian."

If the class struggle had once been the motor force of history, Adorno and Horkheimer claimed it was no longer so. The primary conflict in the modern world was now one of humanity as a whole versus non-human nature. The objectification of nature that emerged from the Scientific Revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries ultimately led to the objectification of humanity itself in the manner of Nazi "scientific" experimentation. If there is a direct line of continuity from the Enlightenment to Marx then obviously Marx is complicit is this process.

But the argument that the Enlightenment is the cause of totalitarianism is specious. As Kenan Malik explains, "science" in the hands of the Nazis was "the use of the discourse of science to give legitimacy to irrational, unscientific arguments…To engage in mass extermination it was necessary [for Nazis] to believe that the objects of that policy were less than human … to say that it was a rationally conceived plan is to elevate the prejudices of the Third Reich to the status of scientific knowledge."[v] In Marx's case, while he is certainly an heir of Enlightenment thought, his concept of "species-being," derived from German idealism, exempts him from any one-sidedness and linear, mechanistic assertion of "progress" that characterized Enlightenment materialism. As Marshall Berman argues, to see Marx as glorifying the conquest of nature fails to discern that

"If Marx is fetishistic about anything, it is not work and production but rather the far more complex and comprehensive ideal of development — "the free development of physical and spiritual energies" (*1844 Manuscripts*)…Marx wants to embrace Prometheus and Orpheus; he considers communism worth fighting for, because

for the first time in history it could enable men to have both … He knew that the way beyond the contradictions would have to lead through modernity, not out of it."

No crude Promethean would write, as Marx does, that "man lives from nature means that nature is his body with which he must maintain a constant interchange if so as not to die. That man's physical and intellectual life depends on nature merely means that nature depends on itself, for man is a part of nature.

Postmodernism Against Productivism

However, the "productivist" version of Marxism so often attacked by postmodernists cannot be said to have been purely the invention of the Second and Third Internationals. Various writings by Marx give the impression that he considers material production to be the sole and autonomous motor force of history, and consciousness a mere "reflex" and "echo": "In this framework, relations of authority and the ideational forms of social intercourse can be analyzed solely in terms of whether they foster or fetter the development of the forces to the progressive technological self-objectification of the species." Marx writes in *The German Ideology* that

"These various conditions, which appear first as conditions of self-activity, later as fetters upon it, form in the whole evolution of history a coherent series of forms of intercourse, the coherence of which consists in this: in the place of an earlier form of intercourse, which has become a fetter, a new one is put, corresponding to the more developed productive forces and, hence, to the advanced mode of the self-activity of individuals — a form which in its turn becomes a fetter and is then replaced by another. Since these conditions correspond at every stage to the simultaneous development of the productive forces, their history is at the same time the history of the evolving productive forces taken over by each new generation, and is, therefore, the history of the development of the forces of the individuals themselves."

It is not difficult to see how such texts could be interpreted as "a kind of technological evolutionism, where socialism becomes the enforced result of the irresistible advance of the capitalist productive forces themselves, and revolution becomes simply the moment of transition…to the unfettered development of the productive capacity of the species."

Jean Baudrillard aims his barbs in *The Mirror of Production* at precisely this "Marxist" productivism. His fundamental argument is put forth in the book's first chapter, "The Concept of Labor":

"Radical in its logical analysis of capital, Marxist theory nonetheless maintains an anthropological consensus with the options of Western rationalism in its definitive form acquired in eighteenth century bourgeois thought. Science, technique, progress, history — in these words we have an entire civilization that comprehends itself as producing its own development and takes its dialectical force toward completing humanity in terms of totality and happiness. Nor did Marx invent the concept of genesis, development and finality. He changed nothing basic: nothing regarding the idea of man producing himself in his infinite determination, and continually surpassing himself toward his own end."

"The anarchist critique of capitalism is almost purely moral."

Baudrillard is correct to challenge the assumption that liberating productive forces equals liberating humanity. It is a logic that led Marx to write articles for the *New York Daily Tribune* that come close to apologias for British rule in India, "progressive" in its development of the productive powers. It led Lenin to praise German capitalism's productive infrastructure and Taylorist scientific management, to claim that ultimately "productivity of labor is the most important, the principal thing for the victory of the new social system. Capitalism created a productivity of labor unknown under serfdom. Capitalism can be utterly vanquished by socialism creating a new and much higher productivity of labor." It led Trotsky to define Stalinist Russia as a "workers' state," albeit a "degenerated" one, precisely because it was developing productive forces while capitalism had entered its stage of "decline" and "decay."

But Marx himself can hardly be said to be an unambiguous productivist. Since the publication of "Theses on Feuerbach," the *Grundrisse* and the *1844 Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, and the unearthing of the Hegelian influence on *Capital*, it has been clear that Marx's desire to maximize production is subservient to his goal to establish a world society in which all people can develop their talents and abilities to their fullest. Dreams of transcending scarcity aside, it became obvious that Marx did not see human beings as mere production machines. Baudrillard has nothing to say on this tension in Marx's work; for him, Marxism invariably "assists the cunning of capital."

Baudrillard contends, in the chapter "Historical Materialism and Primitive Societies," that Marxism is incapable of understanding primitive societies. It "rewrit[es] History through the mode of production." Failing to break from the framework of political economy, Marxism cannot see primitive societies' irreducibility to production: "The magical, the religious, and the symbolic are relegated to the margins of the economy. And even when the symbolic formations expressly aim, as in primitive exchange, to prevent the emergence with the rise of economic structures of a transcendent social power…things are arranged nonetheless to as to see a determination by the economic in the last instance." Baudrillard locates Marxism within the history of Western notions of science being used to oppress the primitive:

"Western culture was the first to critically reflect upon itself (beginning in the 18th century). But the effect of this crisis was that it reflected on itself also as a culture in the universal, and thus all other cultures were entered in its museum as vestiges of its own image. It "estheticized" them, reinterpreted them on its own model, and thus precluded the radical interrogation of these "different" cultures implied for it. The limits of this culture "critique" are clear: its reflection on itself leads only to the universalization of its own principles. Its own contradictions lead it, as in the previous case, to the world-wide economic and political imperialism of all modern capitalist and socialist Western societies."

Marxism is therefore supposedly as guilty as its bourgeois opponents in miscomprehending societies "without history," trying to place them within the context of political economy and therefore just as guilty of racism and ethnocentrism.

But Baudrillard draws no distinction between thought and practice. It was not the ideas of the classical political economists that led to colonialism. Their theories were generated after colonialism was already a long-established fact. Colonialism sprang from capitalism's expansionary dynamic, its need to force "all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production," and would have done so even if Adam Smith had never put pen to paper.xviii Baudrillard fails to note that Marx and Engels both considered the communal forms of organization of peoples such as the North American Iroquois to be forerunners of communism, as Marx's *Ethnological Notebooks* make clear. More famously, between 1878 and 1881 Marx considered that Russia might be able to "jump over" the capitalist stage of history through its communes

(obshchina) and "pass directly to the higher form of communist common ownership." The "stage" theory of history of "official Communism," an easy target for Baudrillard and postmodernists in general, cannot be reconciled with Marx's hopes for the Russian communes.

Class Reductionism?

Michel Foucault's dispute with Marxism rests less on its supposed productivism and more with what he considers its inability "to go beyond the mode of production to make intelligible the forms of domination that emerge at other points in social space and, in addition, to regard these forms of domination as conceptually distinct from the relations of production." Echoing Nietzsche, Foucault sees the class struggle as only one example of a more fundamental impulse in humanity, the "will to power." He refuses to "take sides" between repression and the "power" wielded by social movements that resist it. Moreover, he refuses to classify those power relationships politically, socially or morally. Foucault specifically rejects the idea of the human subject: "The individual is not a pre-given entity which is seized on by the exercise of power. The individual, with his identity and characteristics, is the product of a relation of power exercised over bodies, multiplicities, movements, desires, forces."

The Marxist response to Foucault begins with the question "where does the will to power originate?" If it is a biologically determined human trait, and it underpins all social conflict, then humanity is genetically damned to suffer oppression. Foucault, and postmodernism in general, offer little more than a reworked version of the religious theory of original sin. But if the will to power has social roots, then it is already called into question as the essential category. What in society produces and reproduces this will? What exists before it? Where does the "power struggle" come from?

Foucault sees the effects of the rise of capitalism on human relations, not just at the level of class struggle, but in the sphere of punishment, training, social oppression and sexual repression. He argues that while feudalism had imposed a political power relationship from above, rising capitalism imposed "self-discipline" through a variety of new social institutions: "This new mechanism of power is more dependent upon bodies and what they do than upon the earth and its products. It is a mechanism of power which permits time and labour, rather than wealth and commodities, to be extracted from bodies. It is a type of power which is constantly exercised by means of surveillance rather than in a discontinuous manner by means of a system of levies or obligations distributed over time. It presupposes a tightly knit grid of material coercions rather than the physical existence of a sovereign. It is ultimately dependent on the principle that one must be able simultaneously both to increase the subjected forces and to improve the force and efficacy of that which subjects them."

These observations are raised to the position of a theory, explicitly opposed to the class struggle as an explanation of historical change: "One should not assume a massive and primal condition of domination, a binary structure with 'dominators' on one side and 'dominated' on the other, but rather a multiform production of relations of domination." But who is the "one" who must be able to increase the numbers of those dominated while increasing the force that dominates them? Who are the dominated?

Foucault's argument against Marxism rests on the allegation that Marxism reduces history to just one set of power relationships — class structure — whereas "power" itself is a more elemental category. But Marx himself, at least, did not do this. For Marx the fundamental human category is not class struggle, nor power, but labor. Because people have to labor to live (regardless of what Baudrillard may write), and because their labor is social, they create societies as a means to implementing labor. Marxism does not have to disregard or reject a connection between power structures and human biology, as Foucault does. Marxism sees human beings as social animals and can comprehend power relationships in relation to the most fundamental human activity — social labor.

Marxism — intelligent Marxism, at least — does not reduce all power struggles to class. It "merely" asserts that social struggles can be defined in relation to class. Carol A. Stabile explains:

"…the three main charges leveled against [Marxism]…[are] that it is "reductive," that it is "too universalistic," and that it fails to consider female labor. On the first point, the general claim is that historical materialism reduces structures of oppression to class exploitation, thereby ignoring or minimizing sexism, racism, and homophobia. While it is certainly true that historical materialism places relations of production at the foundation of society, there is nothing simple or reductive about how these relations structure oppression. Rather, historical materialist analyses, instead of examining only one form of oppression…would explore the way they all function within the overarching system of class domination in determining women's and men's life choices. Sweatshop workers in New York City, for example, experience sexism and racism in quantitatively and qualitatively different ways than do middle class women. The racism directed at poor African-American youths occurs in a different context than that directed at African-American women in the academy…by situating both forms [of oppression] within the material context and historical framework in which they occur, we can highlight the variable discriminatory mechanisms that are central to capitalism as a system."

In the end, not only is Foucault's critique of Marxism a failure, but his "reduction" of all inequalities to the concept of power is not a reduction at all, but a mystification. It cannot explain the reasons for power without reference to power. And unlike Marx, Foucault does not offer an alternative to the relationship of oppressors and oppressed.

Conclusion

The postmodernist attack on Marxism conflates the crudities of "Marxism-Leninism" with the thought of Marx himself. Its critique of Enlightenment rationality fails on its own terms, but it also fails to discern Marx's break with his Enlightenment forebearers. Marx's goal — the emancipation of the human individual from need and the flowering of "rich individuality" — is not that of rationalism, Hegelianism or classical political economy. It is not assured by the rationality and all-knowing totality of the theoretical system, but can only be accomplished through struggle.

It was chiefly the (anti-Stalinist) Marxist Left that actively opposed the truly reactionary "metanarratives" of the 20th century: Social Darwinism, national chauvinism, fascism, Cold War liberalism, even Stalinism. Marxism provides a more lucid critique of "metanarratives" where they serve as justification for oppression than does postmodernism, including where — as in the case of Stalinism — that "metanarrative" is a degeneration originating in the Marxist movement itself. Whether the world's workers fulfill what Marx had hoped was their "historic destiny" — to overthrow capitalism and usher in communism — remains to be seen. The teleological aspects of Marxism are open to critique. But Marx's work still provides, simultaneously, the only coherent critique of Enlightenment rationality with the notion that the Enlightenment was, in fact, a good thing. ¶

a footnoted version of this piece appears online at jacobinmag.com

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what kind of labor renewal?

It was hard not to be inspired by the mass demonstrations in Wisconsin, Indiana, Ohio, and elsewhere against attempts by right-wing governors and state legislatures to strip public sector workers of their collective bargaining rights. It appeared as if organized labor in the U.S. would finally begin a counteroffensive to 30 years of unrelenting attack and reverse its long, painful decline. Popular opinion during the Wisconsin struggle strongly supported collective bargaining rights, providing evidence for AFL-CIO president Rich Trumka's claims that "We've never seen the incredible solidarity that we're seeing right now…People are giving us another look. They're saying, 'We support collective bargaining.' "

Even though the Wisconsin legislature passed the bill anyway, the fight to protect collective bargaining doesn't show any sign of going away. Last week, a county judge issued a restraining order blocking implementation of the law, and recall efforts against all the state legislators that supported it – and eventually, Gov. Walker himself – are underway throughout the state.

But prophecies foretelling the revival of organized labor in the U.S. have become commonplace in recent decades. John Sweeney's ascendancy to the AFL-CIO presidency in 1995 was supposed to stop labor's slide – but it didn't. The 2005 split in the AFL-CIO and the establishment of the rival Change to Win federation was supposed to be the harbinger of labor's new dawn – but it wasn't. Even though organized labor has, to a significant extent, gotten past its long-standing and self-defeating aversion to organizing women, people of color, and immigrants, the decline continues unabated.

Even if the fightback in Wisconsin and elsewhere emerges victorious, a renewal of U.S. organized labor as it currently exists is highly unlikely. The problems that plague the labor movement are structural. They are much deeper than many people in and around the movement want to admit and go to the very heart of the movement's current institutional configuration. I don't want to write off the possibility of reviving the actually existing labor movement entirely, but what we are likely witnessing is the death throes of an old movement rather than the birth pangs of a new one.

In his excellent new book *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class*, labor historian Jefferson Cowie tells the story of how the organized New Deal working class came undone in that decisive decade. While recognizing the ferocity of capital's anti-union's offensive, Cowie argues that the causes of labor's unraveling were at least as much internally generated as externally imposed. As he makes clear, the New Deal industrial order was a bargain in which labor received some of the benefits of postwar economic growth in return for recognizing capital's right to retain its management prerogatives. The collective bargaining process became the focus of this order, and as Cowie argues it represented "both sources of power as well as systems of constraint on the future fortunes of the American working class."

Perhaps the biggest constraint that emerged from the collective bargaining paradigm was the creation of a private welfare state for union members that routed what should have been universalized social goods (health insurance, pensions, vacations, etc.) through participation in the formal labor market. As Cowie bluntly puts it in a recent interview at *Salon*, "This system of employer-based benefits is the problem, not the solution."

"As we've seen in recent decades, that means the system is vulnerable to piecemeal attack and long-term erosion until there is nothing left. We can turn the entire paradigm on its head: Do people with good benefits see that their future is tied to those who do not have, say, health insurance? Recall the 'Cadillac' healthcare controversy [during last year's healthcare reform debate], in which those with good policies, often achieved through collective bargaining, were hesitant to accept any constraints on their policies in order that others might get healthcare. We really need to shift the struggle toward universalism, which also might resonate with the American political tradition of pursuing the interests of "the people" rather than 'the workers' as a class."

Pitch perfect (though I'm not comfortable with substituting the language of populism for the language of class). But the problems contributing to organized labor's long-term decline go beyond the contradictions of collective bargaining. As the recently departed Bob Fitch argued for years (not that many people seemed to listen), the institutional features of unions in the U.S. – compulsory membership, exclusive bargaining, automatic dues checkoff, the fragmentation produced by tens of thousands of autonomous local unions and the lack of a central labor body with any kind of real power – are what pose the biggest threat to the survival of unions in the U.S. Of all these factors, the last two might be most important because it touches on the widely neglected question of scope:

"The aim of the Right is always to restrict the scope of class conflict — to bring it down to as low a level as possible. The smaller and more local the political unit, the easier it is to run it oligarchically. Frank Capra's picture in A Wonderful Life of Bedford Falls under the domination of Mr. Potter illustrates the way small town politics usually works. The aim of conservative urban politics is to create small towns in the big city: the local patronage machines run by the Floyd Flakes and the Pedro Espadas.

The genuine Left, of course, seeks exactly the opposite. Not to democratize the machines from within but to defeat them by extending scope of conflict: breaking down local boundaries; nationalizing and even internationalizing class action and union representation. As political scientist E.E. Schattschneider wrote a generation ago: "The scope of labor conflict is close to the essence of the controversy." What were the battles about industrial and craft unionism; industry wide bargaining sympathy strikes, he asked, but efforts to determine "Who can get into the fight and who is excluded?"

With less than 12 percent of the overall U.S. workforce and less than 7 percent of the private sector workforce in unions, there are plenty of opportunities for workers in the 21st century to give a better answer to that question.

— Chris Maisano

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