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Beyond P.C.



David VitarImpact Visuals

Multiculturalism and the Left

Ehrenreich ■ Sleeper ■ West

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EDITORIAL

FREEDOM AND CHOICE

On May 23, the U.S. Supreme Court handed down *Rust v. Sullivan*, the "gag rule" decision. By a 5-4 vote, the Court upheld a set of Reagan-era regulations that prohibit any mention of abortion at family planning clinics receiving a portion of their funds through the federal Title X program. Very few of the 4,000 U.S. clinics receiving Title X funding perform abortions, but all counsel women about their options in the case of an unplanned pregnancy. Almost five million women depend on Title X funded clinics -- many of them teens and low-income. Eighty percent of the clients at Title X funded clinics have incomes below the poverty line.

Democratic socialists have long argued that the fight for reproductive freedom must be about more than the legal right to choose an abortion; it must be about access to abortion and other reproductive health services. According to Supreme Court justice Harry Blackmun in his dissenting opinion on the gag rule case, "if a right is found to be unenforceable, . . . then it ceases to be a right at all." DSA's relationship to the recently revived pro-choice movement has been an uneasy one as a result of our discomfort with its exclusive focus on legal rights. However, with the gag rule decision -- along with a series of other attacks on access to reproductive health services -- the focus of the pro-choice movement has shifted dramatically to access.

Since the Court handed down the *Webster* decision in 1989, anti-choice organizations and legislators have worked to chip away at the right to choose or to completely dismantle it.

They have attacked the most vulnerable women first: rural women, young women, low-income women and women of color. The most important battles for the pro-choice movement in the last 18 months have been against mandatory parental involvement laws for young women seeking abortions, for Medicaid funding for abortions, and for access to clinics in rural areas.

The gag rule decision is the latest in a series of policy and legal decisions that decrease the power of women in this country to control our lives. Low-income women and many women of color in this country do not have reproductive freedom. Medicaid funding for abortions is only available in thirteen states. Native American women, Puerto Rican women and Chicana women are still sterilized against their will or without their consent. The reality that the legal right to an abortion is not the issue for most women is now becoming clear to the broader pro-choice movement.

In response to the Supreme Court's gag rule decision, pro-choice organizations such as Planned Parenthood and NARAL have launched an Emergency Campaign to Overturn the Gag Rule. The goal of the Campaign is to pass legislation through Congress that would reverse the impact of the regulations. Congress must act within 90 days of the decision in order to block the regulations from going into effect. DSA locals can become part of state-based efforts to lobby members of Congress who are swing votes on this

issue. (See action alert, page 8.)

DSA has joined the growing coalition of organizations working to overturn the gag rule and restore access to reproductive health services for all women, regardless of income. The gag rule decision is proof that we can no longer count on the Supreme Court to defend even our most basic rights. Our response must be a political one. In every part of the country, we need to elect representatives who are committed to the fight for economic justice and to defending our rights; and then hold them accountable to us. Our access to reproductive health services will not be guaranteed until then.

--by Elissa McBride

Elissa McBride has just finished a two-year stint as national organizer for the NARAL Campus Project. She served as DSA's Youth Organizer from 1987-1989.

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The Challenge For the Left

by Barbara Ehrenreich

When Communism collapsed in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, I knew there would have to be a replacement for it -- because the American right needs an ideological enemy which it can feel victimized by. And so I waited, wondering what would replace the international Communist conspiracy.

An answer came with the media assault on multiculturalism. It started with a Newsweek cover story which used words like "totalitarianism" and "new fundamentalism". *New York Magazine*, *Time*, and many others, have all devoted major attention to the issue of multiculturalism -- which I believe most of their readers had never heard of until they read it in the magazines.

The attack on multiculturalism originated in places like *Commentary*, *Partisan Review*, and *The New Republic*, which is increasingly a journal of the right. The U.S. right itself, in its less intellectual manifestations, has been going through a subtle shift away from the pro-family focus of the '80s toward a greater focus on race, immigration, and ethnic diversity. This shift is reflected in the English-only movement and in the relative success of David Duke -- who did not play up issues like abortion, but stuck to "white empowerment." Even Jesse Helms, whose successful campaign has been attributed mostly to his anti-affirmative action commercial, banked on the race issue more than traditional issues of school prayer and abortion.

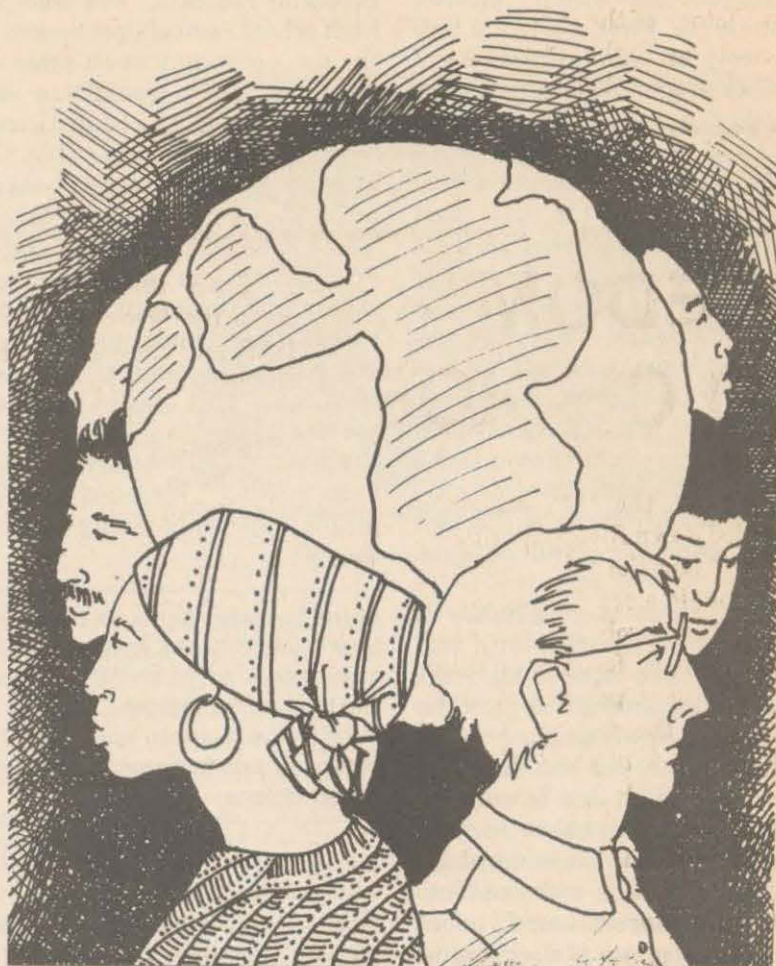
The American new right is becoming more and more like the new right in Europe -- which has always focused on nativist and racist issues. This is a predictable sort of response to the internationalization of capital and labor -- a racist, nativist backlash. The drive against multiculturalism in education is ultimately only the intellectual ex-

pression of this ugly development.

People on the left should defend multiculturalism from the right's campaign. The most pragmatic defense is that, in the face of an increasingly global economy, in the face of our own society, which is now more than 20% so called minorities, the old *monocultural* education will not do. Monoculturalism represents a retreat into parochialism, and in a practical sense, is not a good preparation for living in this world. I should explain that when I say multiculturalism, I do not mean African American students studying only African American subjects; I mean African Americans studying Shakespeare (perhaps taught by African American professors). I mean Caucasian students studying African American history, Asian American

history, and so on. That is my idea of a genuine multicultural education.

However, we're not going to be able to defend multiculturalism without addressing the vulnerable edge of it -- its silly and obnoxious side, the phenomenon of political correctness. I have seen p.c. culture on college campuses, chiefly among relatively elite college students and on relatively elite college campuses. It amounts to a form of snobbery that it is easily made fun of by the right and even by students who are not on the right. P.C. culture, as far as I can tell, is a limited phenomenon. The major problems on American campuses are racial and sexual harassment, alcoholism, and the anti-intellectualism of young white Republican males. Interestingly, there were no cover stories about the wave



of racist incidents that occurred on college campuses a couple of years ago. The emphasis in the media is all wrong here: P.C.-ness has been blown out of all proportion.

Nevertheless, it is worth talking about some problems with p.c. culture among students. First, there's a tendency to rely on administration-enforced rules to stop offensive speech and to enforce a new, and quite admirable, kind of civility. It's not just a matter of the abstract principle of freedom of speech -- the fact is, rules don't work. If you outlaw the use of the term "girl" instead of "woman," you're not going to do a thing about the sexist attitudes underneath. Changing sexist, racist, and homophobic attitudes is a challenge for those of us who believe in a multicultural, just, and equal world. It is not a problem you turn over to the police, to the administration, or anybody else. The only route is through persuasion, education, and organizing.

Secondly, there is a tendency to confuse verbal purification with real social change. I've noticed students that I would characterize as p.c. who get very worked up about imagined or real verbal slights, but you don't see them running en masse to support campus workers when they're organizing or striking. I've sat in meetings in the last few months with students who agonized at great length about the way they were going to work against the war, and agonized about the coalition they would need to get together, and about how they couldn't possibly make a move until they had every one of 16 different constituencies involved. All this agonizing was a lot easier than getting out in the community and going door to door, or whatever it takes, to talk to as many citizens as possible about the terrible things that were being done in our name in the Middle East.

Now, I'm all for verbal uplift. I like being called Ms. I don't want people saying "man" when they mean me, too. I'm willing to make an issue of these things. But I know that even when all women are Ms., we'll still get 65 cents for every dollar earned by a man. Minorities by any other name -- people of color, or whatever -- will still bear a huge burden of poverty, discrimina-

tion, and racial harassment. The left needs to remind a lot of people that verbal uplift is not the revolution.

Finally, I worry about the paralysis of the p.c. subculture on some campuses, and its unattractiveness to potential radicals. I've seen former high school radicals get turned off by the p.c. environment on some college campuses. Why would you want to join a group just to be criticized and "corrected"? Remember that the expression "politically correct" was crafted by people on the left, some time in the '70s, I believe, as a form of self-mockery. We have to regain that sense of humor and perspective. I don't think we can defend multiculturalism without criticizing some of the silly p.c. stuff, small as it may be in the overall scheme of things. We have to make the distinction that the media has not been making. We want to draw p.c. people, especially young people, into the left.

At the Socialist Scholars Conference in New York City on April 6, 1991, DSA organized a panel on "Multiculturalism and the Left." It featured Barbara Ehrenreich, Jim Sleeper and Cornel West. DEMOCRATIC LEFT is pleased to publish their presentations.

To return to multiculturalism: I am alarmed that there has been so little response to the media fuss over multiculturalism from intellectuals of the left. In our defense, we should not make the mistake that many conservatives make of confusing multiculturalism with the left. First, for the somewhat embarrassing reason that the left is not sufficiently multicultural to deserve being confused with multiculturalism, at least not yet. The left is very Balkanized. There's an African American left, there are feminist lefts and so forth. In most quarters, multiculturalism would be a big step upward on the left, something to strive for.

Second, multiculturalism does not, so far as I can see, and I stand ready to be corrected on this, define a moral or political outlook. It is at best pluralism, which is a big step up from *mon-ism*. Too often, however, it leads to the notion of politics as a list. Political "theory" becomes a list of all the

groups, issues, and concerns that you must remember to check off lest you offend somebody. Nothing connects those items, no larger coherent perspective connects them, just a list that gets longer all the time. A list does not define a political outlook.

Multiculturalism as pluralism leads to a moral slackness, the slackness of cultural relativism. As an example, consider the arguments that some of us had during the Gulf crisis, about how to criticize gender relations in Saudi Arabia. One of the positions was that you can't criticize gender relations in Saudi Arabia, because that's "their" culture. But I'm not comfortable with a political outlook that says I can't criticize what looks to me like gender apartheid. As Cornel West has said, there has to be some way that all of these perspectives can begin to interpenetrate, so that in a debate like this for example, I can learn something about Arab culture, but I can also make my criticism of its gender relations.

At a deeper level, though, any possibility of a moral perspective gets erased by a position fashionable among some of our post-modernist academics, that there can be no absolutes, no truths, and hence, no grounds for moral judgments. There can't be a left if there's no basis for moral judgment, including judgments that will cut across group or gender or ethnic lines. There can be no left where the only politics is a politics of identity, the narrow politics of group identity. We have to defend multiculturalism, and I urge everybody to defend multiculturalism against the racist right wing in this country, and in the face of what is a still dominant monoculturalism throughout the academy. But let's remember always that at its intellectual and moral core, the left isn't multi-anything. Yes, the left should be diverse in its representation and its constituencies, but the left always has to be primarily an attempt to find in all the rich diversity of the human world, some point of moral unity that brings us all together. ♦

Barbara Ehrenreich, DSA Honorary Chair, is author of Worst Years of Our Lives and is a columnist for Time magazine.

A Political Paradox

by Jim Sleeper

With the collapse of Communism and a public faith in a universal new socialist man or woman who transcends ancient racial and ethnic and nationalist origins, one of the only remaining truly multicultural international experiments on the globe is the United States. The United States, by an accident of history, did not grow out of a primal myth of blood and soil: "being a Frenchman is a fact, being an American is a matter of belief." There were certain premises on which the country was supposedly founded which are real to a certain extent.

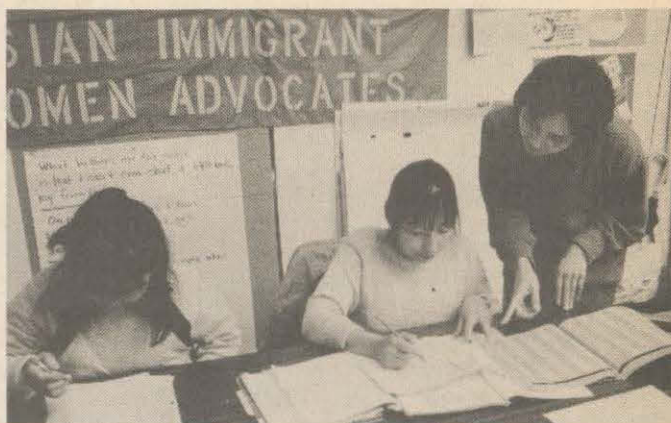
One can go on and on about the fact that Thomas Jefferson held slaves and never gave the rights of women a thought when he wrote the Declaration of Independence. Or one can argue that through an accident of history, he and his "white, patriarchal" male colleagues created a framework that contains the seeds of its own transcendence, and which has been redeemed through the courage and efforts of countless men and women of color in the intervening years.

If you want to take multiculturalism seriously, you could pose this paradox: why is it only in the belly of this "white, patriarchal" male culture that multiculturalism itself is on the table? If you take multiculturalism seriously and study the culture of Japan or of Iran, or what's going on in central Africa, ask yourself, are minorities breathing there, do women have a chance to breath there? We have to explore this paradox, this framework created as an accident of history, this American experiment. With all its phoniness and its pretensions to universality, and all of its hypocrisy, built on capitalist exploitation, nevertheless it conquered certain beachheads in history, made certain historical gains during its moment on the center stage. As the U.S.

moves off the stage as a Eurocentric phenomenon, maybe some of the legacy, some of the so called bourgeois accomplishments of that historical accident are worth fighting for, worth preserving and worth incorporating into a socialist or any other vision of the future.

For example, it is the somewhat unique contention, coming down from the Scottish and French enlightenments, in all their hypocrisy, that we establish a liberal institutional arena -- juries, public schools -- in which different ethnic and social groups agree to abide provisionally by certain truths that are accepted for the good of the society as a whole. That is a remarkable achievement, it is what makes this society different from Beirut and from the Hindu/Moslem, or the Sunni/Shiite kind of contention. There is an assumption that there is enshrined in our political system a space for critical disagreement, for resolutions of disputes that admittedly don't tap the mythic wellsprings and don't satisfy the deepest yearnings of all parties. Each racial and ethnic group agrees to put to the side provisionally its mythic and national and cultural truth in order to agree on certain provisional truths.

That is a historic human gain, and those checks and balances that the constitutional system developed out of this so called Eurocentric tradition are not just a bunch of snares imposed on us by capitalists who want to prevent us from achieving true solidarity. Human life is more complex than that, and especially to the extent that the United States is to be



Asian immigrant garment workers learn English.

a multicultural, international human experiment, we have to redouble our efforts to talk about what those common bonds are, and what those provisional truths are. Therefore, if you're talking about Afrocentric education in the public schools, somebody has got to ask the question, what are the common bonds that public school teaches us that we have? If you're talking about New York City's wonderful mosaic of different ethnic and racial groups, somebody's got to ask, what is the bonding agent of the mosaic? We play those two roles, we have our ethnic experiences, our presuppositions; we also look after and care for the glue, for that space in between. And mere ethnic or national self-assertion without reference to this incomplete but very essential pluralistic context is a failure.

Excluding the three major groups, Native Americans, Puerto Ricans, and African Americans, who were involuntarily incorporated into the American situation in very exploitative ways, many who came as immigrants from the old country, whatever that old country was, were very anxious to escape the ancient cobwebs, the ancient ethnic feuds, the narrow parochialisms of Europe, and indeed of other places as well. Breaking with the past is a resilient and enduring aspect of the American experience. It hurts us in the sense that it some-

Marvin Collins/Impact Visuals

Choosing Democracy

We live in a three-quarters society. Most of the people in the United States are well-fed, reasonably well educated, employed and prosperous. Then there is the other 25 percent. One quarter of our society lives on the edge of crisis; over 15 percent live in abject poverty.

The current debate on educational reform has produced books and commission reports analyzing the crisis in our schools. But there are several crises in our schools, not just one. There is the crisis of the three-quarters society that has been repeatedly examined. Then there is the crisis of the other 25 percent.

This crisis is located where it has always been, in the bottom layers of a multi-tiered system, in our failure to provide even minimal levels of quality to the school population that is working class and poor. This crisis can be measured -- by some stark statistics -- 50 to 80 percent of all inner-city teenagers drop out of high school, one million teenagers cannot read above the third grade level, 13 percent of all 17-year-olds are functionally illiterate. These children come from the

families of the poor and working poor. Many are cultural and linguistic minorities. They come from families of economic crisis and the schools contribute to the crisis.

Part of the answer must involve democratic multicultural educational opportunity for the children of the bottom one quarter of the society -- those who are presently marginalized and failed by the schools. By seeking a truly multicultural education, our schools can contribute to building a community where all members prosper. The creativity, dignity and individuality of each person can best be developed in schools that embody the values of liberty, equality and community. Teachers and future teachers share a moral imperative to seek an alternative direction, to work toward democracy and justice. If we are to solve the educational crisis, our schools must provide cultural, social and economic necessities for all children. --by Duane E. Campbell

Duane E. Campbell, chair of the DSA Anti-Racism Commission, teaches at California State University at Sacramento.

times makes us naive about the legacy of the brutality of racism, for example. We want to be able to act as if, oh well, with our eternal American optimism, we can forget that legacy and move on. That's what they always say at the White House: "Put it behind us."

But the American experiment has to be regarded as a window from the European, the Eurocentric accident of history that produced the constitutional framework, which I argue is very valuable, it's a window forward into the larger universal culture. If this is really a Eurocentric culture, that doesn't explain why Asian students are now scoring higher on the SAT than whites, or why the Japanese are gaining increasing economic leverage in this country. I know half a dozen white American males who now work in the employ of Asian employers. It doesn't explain a lot of things, including the fact that my boss at *New York Newsday*, the editorial page editor of *New York Newsday*, is an African American. There are a lot of things about the critical space that the American experiment has afforded that we have to seize upon, develop and expand, and not simply reduce this culture to being an insidious Eurocentric plot. It's not. It's something to be worked with.

Multiculturalism must not become

a means of escaping our duty to continue fighting about contested truths, as in what is freedom, what ought gender relations to be. These questions are in essence political questions, and they don't necessarily have compatible answers among different cultures. The relationship of a cultural assertion to a political project is very problematic. For example, during the *Daily News* strike, many of the unions that were going on strike had a long history of racist exclusion, they were father/son unions, and some black journalists at the *Daily News* said, look, this is not our fight. We're going to cross the line, we're going to keep working, we're not going to stand out there in the street with these racist exclusionary unions. Jesse Jackson came into town and said, no, there's an overriding issue here, and that is the issue of union busting, and we have to understand the ways in which we have a stake in the preservation of unions, and we can combat the racism in tandem with preserving the union. Jackson further went on to say, in a discussion I had with him about this, "when I go to a group of white workers and raise these issues, the fact of my blackness, of my representing to them black militancy, it raises and disposes of the question of racism, because they have to come to terms with the

fact that I am the other, that I am culturally alien, that in some of their imagery I'm a threat. They have to reach the conclusion that I'm actually on their side, decide to make common cause," and so the issue of racism is very nicely raised and to some extent disposed of in the common struggle. The program for the common struggle was not culturally defined, from an African American wellspring, or for that matter, from a Eurocentric wellspring, it was a transcultural political project.

We need to continue to raise the questions of economic injustice. Cultural wellsprings are what sensitize us to the moral focus on human suffering. That doesn't come from nowhere, it doesn't come from a political seminar, it doesn't come from deconstructionism, it is our cultural wellsprings that sensitizes us to moral suffering. We have to make the political leap to hold both the right and the p.c. people's feet to the fire: what about human suffering and economic injustice? ♦

Jim Sleeper, an editorial writer at New York Newsday, is the author of The Closest of Strangers: Liberalism and the Politics of Race in New York, to be released in paperback by W.W. Norton in September.

Diverse New World

By Cornel West

We are grappling with the repercussions and implications of what it means to live now 46 years after the end of the age of Europe. This age began in 1492, with the encounter between Europeans and those who were in the new world, with the massive expulsion of Jews in Spain, and with the publication of the first Indo-European grammar books in 1492. It continued through World War II, the concentration camps, and the shaking of the then fragile European maritime empires. Forty-six years later is not a long time for that kind of fundamental glacier shift in civilizations that once dominated the world.

Analyzing multiculturalism from a contemporary philosophical perspective, and looking at its roots especially among the professional managerial strata, in museums, in galleries, in universities and so forth, it is an attempt to come to terms with how we think of universality when it has been used as a smokescreen for a particular group. How do we preserve notions of universality given the fact that various other particularities -- traditions, heritages, communities, voices and what have you -- are moving closer to the center of the historical stage, pushing off those few voices which had served as the centering voices between 1492 and 1945.

The United States has become the land of hybridity, heterogeneity, and ambiguity. It lacks the ability to generate national identity and has an inferiority complex vis-a-vis Europe, and the U.S. must deal with indigenous people's culture, including the scars and the dead bodies left from its history. Expansion across the American continent trampled the culture and heritages of degraded, hated, haunted, despised African peoples, upon whose backs would constitute one fundamen-



City Reiman/Impact Visuals

Fifth grade students teach each other English and Spanish.

tal pillar for the building of the United States and for the larger industrializing processes in Europe.

Within the multiculturalist debate, leading Afro-centric and Africanist thinkers, Leonard Jeffries and Molefi Asante, articulate a critical perspective that says they are tired of the degradation of things African. As critics, they're absolutely right. However, they don't have a subtle enough sense of history, so they can't recognize ambiguous legacies of traditions and civilizations. They refuse to recognize the thoroughly hybrid culture of almost every culture we have ever discovered.

We need to see history as in part the cross-fertilization of a variety of different cultures, usually under conditions of hierarchy. That's thoroughly so for the U.S. For example, jazz is the great symbol of American culture, but there's no jazz without European instruments or African polyrhythms. To talk about hybrid culture means you give up all quest for pure traditions and pristine heritages.

Yes, black folk must come up with means of affirming black humanity. Don't just read Voltaire's great essays on the light of reason -- read the "People's of America," in which he compares indigenous peoples and Africans to dogs and cattle. Don't read just Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*,

read the moments in *The Observations of the Sublime*, in which he refers to Negroes as inherently stupid. It's not a trashing of Kant. It's situating of Kant within 18th century Germany, at a time of rampant xenophobia, along with tremendous breakthroughs in other spheres. An effective multicultural critique recognizes both the crimes against humanity and the contributions to humanity from the particular cultures in Europe.

We have to demystify this notion of Europe and Eurocentrism. Europe has always been multicultural. Shakespeare borrowed from Italian narratives and pre-European narratives. When we think of multiculturalism, we're so deeply shaped by the American discourse of positively valued whiteness and negatively valued blackness, that somehow it's only when black and white folk interact that real multiculturalism's going on. The gradation of hybridity and heterogeneity is not the same between the Italians and the British, and the West Africans and the British. But "Europe" is an ideological construct. It doesn't exist other than in the minds of elites who tried to constitute a homogeneous tradition that could bring together heterogeneous populations -- that's all it is.

In looking at history with a subtle

continued page 12

GOINGS ON

◆ The DSA Religion and Socialism Commission sponsored a highly successful conference June 2-3 in Washington DC. The conference, "New Visions for the Religious Left," attracted over 50 of the best thinkers and activists on the religious left. The theme provoked new, thoughtful and vigorous dialogue. The Commission also elected new leadership: a 12-member steering committee and two co-chairs, Rev. Judith Deutsch and Andrew Hammer.

◆ The DSA Labor Commission held its annual national meeting in Chicago in May. Members of the New Democratic Party in Canada joined DSA'ers to discuss free trade and its effects on organized labor in North America.

BE THERE

◆ The DSA Convention, the broadest policy-making body of the organization will meet in Chicago November 8-11. Join an extraordinary group of activists to decide DSA's upcoming course. Join Cornel West, Irving Howe, Barbara Ehrenreich and over 100 of the best thinkers and activists of the democratic left. If you would like to be a delegate, contact your DSA local.

◆ The 16th annual Summer Youth Conference will meet at Cleveland State University, August 22-25. The conference is a time to meet socialist student and youth activists from across the country who share common concerns about racism, access to education, the environment, and feminism. For information call Tom Ellett at (212) 962-0390.

ACTION ALERT

◆ Demand freedom of speech and reproductive freedom. Please contact your members of Congress and ask them to support legislation to overturn the gag rule (*Rust v. Sullivan*) without amendments. For more information about the gag rule, see page 2, Editorial. Congressional switch board: (202) 224-3121. Call your local NARAL to get involved.

RESOURCES

◆ *EcoSocialist Review* serves as a critical link between DSA and the environmental movement. It is the newsletter of the DSA Environmental Commission. To subscribe send a check \$8 (one year) or \$15 (one-year supporter) to *EcoSocialist Review*, 1608 N. Milwaukee, #403, Chicago, IL 60647. Checks payable to "Chicago DSA." For more information call (312) 752-3562.

◆ *Religious Socialism* is the newsletter of the DSA Religion and Socialism Commission. For a subscription, send \$7.50 (regular); \$15 (sustainer) to Religion and Socialism Commission, P.O. Box 80, Camp Hill, PA 17001.

◆ *Not Far Enough*, the newsletter of the DSA Feminist Commission was recently published. If you did not receive a copy -- subscribe now! Coverage includes attempts to overturn the gag rule and the impact of choice on the 1990 elections. Send \$10 to the Feminist Commission, c/o Chris Riddiough, 5123 5th St. NW, Washington, DC 20011. For information call (202) 829-6155.

NOW AVAILABLE FROM DSA!

Health Care For A Nation In Need, by Victor W. Sidel, M.D. Published by the Institute for Democratic Socialism. \$5.

Socialism and Activism: First Steps for the 1990s: Reader of the 1991 National Leadership Retreat. \$12.

Reclaiming Our Future, by DSA Honorary Chair William W. Winpisinger, edited by DSA'er John Logue, with a foreword by Senator Edward Kennedy. \$9.95

Organizing for Social Change: A Manual for Activists in the 1990s, by DSA'er Steve Max, Jackie Kendall and Kim Bobo of the Midwest Academy. \$19.95.

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DSA Locals Demand Jobs With Justice

The Call Goes Out For National Health Care

by Susan Smith

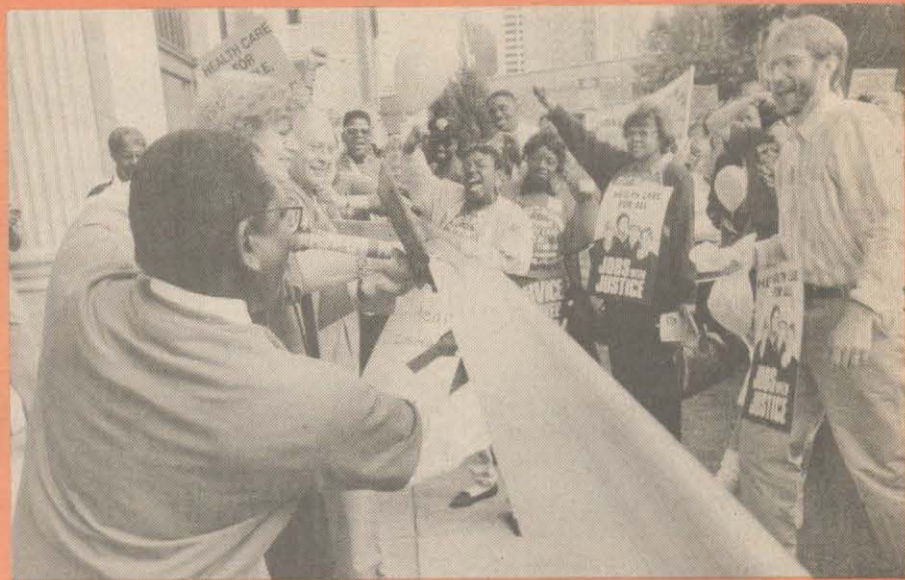
DSA locals across the country took to the streets demanding comprehensive national health care during the Jobs with Justice National Health Care Action Week, June 3-9.

"The Jobs with Justice coalition was an attempt at the broadest possible unity between labor unions and progressive groups on the health care issue," said Harris Gruman, of Baltimore DSA. "DSA's presence was felt and our message heard."

The coalition planned demonstrations in every state on June 6 to call for a national health plan. DSA'ers organized for demonstrations in Sacramento, Philadelphia, Baltimore, DC, Cleveland, Columbus, New York City, Boston, Chicago, St. Louis and other cities.

"Demonstrations took place all over Ohio," said Bob Fitrakis, co-chair of Central Ohio DSA. "Here in Columbus, we turned out 30 local students for a rally for the UHIO bill at Nationwide's world headquarters in downtown Columbus. The UHIO bill -- Universal Health Care for Ohio -- is a single, publicly financed statewide program that will provide comprehensive health insurance service for Ohio residents."

The coalition, which included trade unionists, DSA'ers and Citizen Action members, tried to wrap a 50-foot red ribbon around the building in order to symbolize the "red tape" of insurance coverage," said Fitrakis, "but the ribbon and the chants of 'Nationwide's not on your side' upset the Nationwide officials



Craig Daniels

Baltimore DSA activists join in cutting symbolic red tape.

and they turned their own security forces on us, sending out six squad cars. We made the front page of the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* and we really reopened the issue."

Over 50 Baltimore DSA'ers joined 300 others for a demonstration in front of the state insurance commissioner's office in downtown Baltimore. "We wrapped a red ribbon around the building and then cut through it," said Gruman.

The demonstration drew a lot of public interest and support. "We had a lot of people driving by, honking their horns, giving us a thumbs up. We also got a lot of positive feedback during our phonathon."

"Through the coalition we were able to identify those who were in support of DSA's platform on health care," he said. "We learned who is ready to go all the way to a Canadian-style health system -- more people and organizations want it than we thought."

Fitrakis said that the broad pub-

lic support, from groups as diverse and unexpected as hospital associations and Ohio county governments has made the insurance companies retreat from their tough stance. "Now they're talking about guaranteed access to insurance, which they didn't talk about before," he said.

The D.C. rally -- outside the Health and Human Services building in downtown Washington -- was well received, according to Bill Mosley, activist in the Metro D.C. local.

"There were 300 people overall at the demonstration," said Mosley. "We accomplished a lot of internal education about DSA within the groups involved, including the unions and Citizen Action. Federal workers nearby and passersby also became more aware of the problem."

Susan Smith is a student at Ohio University and a member of the OU DSA chapter. She is interning at the DSA National Office this summer

ON THE LEFT



by Harry Fleischman

ILLINOIS

More than 700 people attended the **Chicago DSA's** Debs-Thomas-Harrington dinner in May, honoring **Stephen M. Culen**, executive director of AFSCME District Council 31 and **Kathleen Devine**, coordinator of the Illinois Labor Network Against Apartheid.

University of Chicago DSA'ers are campaigning for right to strike legislation.

MARYLAND

Michael Lighty, DSA National Director, spoke recently to **Baltimore DSA** on national health care. **Bernie Sanders**, Independent Socialist Congressman from Vermont, spoke May 7 under the auspices of Baltimore DSA and other local groups. DSA'ers reported that the event was very successful -- attracting over 200 people.

MASSACHUSETTS

The **Boston DSA** Debs-Thomas-Harrington dinner May 15 honored those who defeated Question 3, a plan to slash government services. A DSA forum on legislative solutions to the health care crisis brought a standing room only crowd with speakers involved in state government, the labor movement, and Physicians for a National Health Program.

NEW YORK

Ithaca DSA hosted a forum on "Does Being A Socialist Make a Difference?" with Ithaca Mayor **Ben Nichols**, a DSA member.

The **Long Island Progressive Coalition** is organizing unemployed workers backing Congressman **Tom Downey's** bill to extend the number of benefit weeks for unemployed workers in states with 6% or more unemployment. More than 2,000 signatures have been collected. LIPC's Center for Workers' Rights sponsored training workshops on "Your Rights in the Workplace."

New York City DSA held its annual bash honoring **Frank Barbaro** and **Penelope Pi-Sunyer**. Speakers included **Frank Llewellyn**, DSA Vice Chair **Steve Max** and Manhattan Borough President **Ruth Messinger**. New York DSA'ers

are organizing for several city council races, working to create a more progressive council.

PENNSYLVANIA

Representatives from **Central PA DSA**, **Pittsburgh DSA**, **Philadelphia DSA** and **Reading DSA** attended the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania DSA meeting. Participants discussed histories, present status and activities of locals in Pennsylvania. Fighting state budget cuts and researching the history of the left were proposed as organizing strategies.

WASHINGTON

Seattle DSA'ers heard **David Schreck**, New Democratic Party condidate for the British Columbia legislature explore the reasons behind the success of the NDP in Ontario and elsewhere.

DSA'ers Rally 'Round Russo

We came one step closer to winning the fight for a Canadian-style national health insurance when Rep. Marty Russo (D-IL) introduced a bill into the U.S. House of Representatives calling for a single, universal, publicly-administered health care program. The Russo Bill is attracting the support of many progressive organizations -- including DSA.

The key to the success of the Russo Bill is that in addition to providing health care for everyone, it saves the nation \$40 billion a year in bureaucratic waste. That means health care providers can spend their time taking care of patients, rather than filling out forms. And it means that even in this time of fiscal crisis, we can afford to take care of everyone.

Despite its progressive nature the Russo Bill does have several problems. For example, it would allow for-profit HMOs. Private insurance companies would likely reorganize themselves as HMOs -- preserving their for-profit-oriented approach to coverage.

The program would be funded by a payroll tax on employers, increases in corporate and personal income taxes, premiums on senior citizens, and state and federal contributions.

Supporters are currently pushing for the Russo Bill to reach the floor of the House for a vote. Activists should contact their representatives to encourage their support. Contact your local to find out what other DSA'ers are doing to support the Russo Bill.

Lesbian and Gay Rights in Ontario

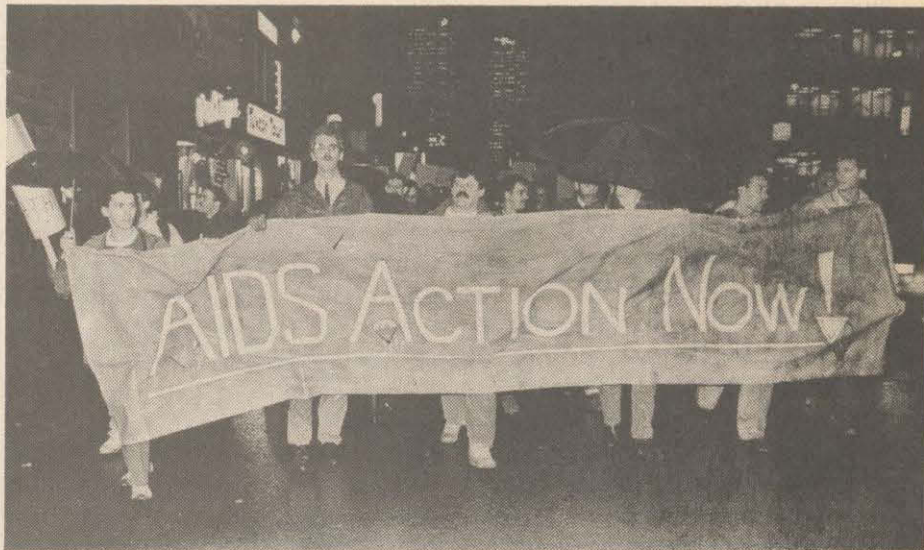
by Robert Hinde

Lesbian, gay and bisexual people in Ontario had good reason to celebrate the September 1990 landslide victory of Ontario's New Democratic Party (NDP). The NDP ran on a strongly pro-gay platform and won 74 of the 130 seats in the provincial parliament, permitting it to form a provincial government headed by Prime Minister Bob Rae. Within its first two months in office, this government took steps to secure equal rights for same-sex couples in Ontario, helping keep Ontario one of Canada's most pro-gay provinces and helping to maintain the NDP's reputation as the most pro-gay of Canada's major political parties.

Ontario's Human Rights Code -- a province-level equivalent of the federal Charter of Rights and Freedom -- is much clearer in its protections than the federal document. In 1986, the Human Rights Code was amended to explicitly prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation; this amendment was originally proposed by NDP legislators and was supported by the Liberal and Conservative Parties as well.

This change in the Human Rights Code opened the door for a wave of activity on the part of gays and lesbians to secure domestic partnership benefits for same-sex couples. Although most of the larger cities in Ontario approved local nondiscrimination ordinances protecting lesbians and gay men during the 1970s and 1980s, only since the 1986 amendment of the Human Rights Code have municipal employees in these cities begun to consistently win domestic partnership benefits for their same-sex partners.

In December of 1990, the new NDP provincial government issued



Dave Hartman/Impact Visuals

Activists march for AIDS funding in Toronto, Ontario.

an administrative decree extending domestic partnership rights to all employees of the provincial government. This move has set the NDP provincial government head-to-head against the federal government, which has threatened to invalidate Ontario's provincial pension plan unless the administrative decree is withdrawn. In response, the provincial government is considering suing the federal government to force it to extend domestic partnership benefits to federal employees.

The Ontario NDP has had a long history of pro-gay initiatives and activity. In 1987, it was the first major party to nominate openly gay candidates for Ontario's provincial legislature, and during this year's local elections in Toronto -- home to Ontario's largest gay community -- the NDP is running three openly gay candidates for city and metropolitan offices. Ontario voters seem to appreciate the NDP's efforts to secure equality for gay, lesbian, and bisexual people; in a February poll of Ontario citizens, the provincial government's domestic

partnership initiative received high marks, and was actually ranked more favorably than the government's rent control or nuclear power policies.

However, some Ontario AIDS activists have expressed dissatisfaction over the provincial government's progress on AIDS-related issues. Ontario's provincial health insurance system has been faulted for its handling of the AIDS epidemic, in part because there are not enough AIDS specialists in Ontario to treat the growing number of people with AIDS and HIV infection. This is largely a result of the fee structure that does not fairly compensate doctors for the extra time and paperwork (to obtain drugs) involved in treating people with AIDS and HIV.

Because the fee structure is determined through negotiations between the provincial government and the Ontario Medical Association, some activists have accused the government of not devoting enough money to AIDS. In reality, though, the government's hands are somewhat tied in this matter. There is more than a little homophobia within the medical associa-

tion, and so AIDS and HIV treatment often are underfunded in the fee schedule proposed by the medical association. Furthermore, because of the ongoing recession, the provincial government is reluctant to increase the fraction of the health budget devoted to AIDS treatment without making cuts elsewhere in the health budget. Hence, since doctors within the medical association are competing for a fixed amount of money, AIDS specialists (who are few in number) often get shortchanged.

Overall, though, the NDP provincial government has compiled a better record on AIDS issues than the previous Liberal government. The NDP government has promised to establish and fund a number of centers around Ontario for anonymous HIV testing; currently, there is only one such center in all of Ontario -- the privately-run Hassle-Free Clinic in Toronto's gay neighborhood. In addition, the general tenor of AIDS policy making is much more progressive under the NDP than under the Liberal government; proposals such as

quarantine of HIV-infected persons or mandatory HIV testing of people perceived to be at high risk for HIV infection, are now scoffed at as ideas from the lunatic fringe.

As part of its program to democratize public commissions by appointing members of underrepresented minorities to these bodies, the government has appointed several openly gay and lesbian people to commissions ranging from the police commission to the human rights commission. In addition, most of the offices of members of the NDP cabinet include at least one openly lesbian or gay staffer.

Much of the credit for the Ontario NDP's strongly pro-gay stance should go to the party's lesbian and gay caucus, which since 1974 has functioned as a network for gay and lesbian people in the party and has provided a mechanism for advocating gay-positive policy initiatives at party conventions. Recently, the Ontario NDP established official advisory committees for racial and ethnic minorities and for disabled people. The party's lesbian and gay caucus is confident that the party will

approve a similar committee for gay, lesbian, and bisexual people at the party's next convention, once the caucus decides on the appropriate structure for such a committee.

Now that the initial excitement of the September victory has faded, the party's challenge is to offer a progressive and effective provincial government that can maintain the NDP majority among Ontario voters. The NDP already receives generally favorable marks from voters in Canada's western provinces, which are more sparsely populated than Ontario; but because Ontario is Canada's most populous and prosperous province, if the party can maintain high approval ratings among Ontario voters, there is a real possibility that a federal NDP government could be elected in the future. Then the NDP's strong pro-gay stance could be translated into expanded rights and protections for gay, lesbian, and bisexual people throughout all of Canada. ♦

R.J. Hinde is the co-chair of the DSA Lesbian / Gay / Bisexual Commission.

West *from page 12*

historical sense, I also have in mind the fundamental question: what do we have in common? By history, I mean the human responses to a variety of different processes over time and space -- various social structures that all human beings must respond to. In responding to these circumstances, the problem has been that most of us function by a kind of self-referential altruism, in which we're altruistic to those nearest to us, and those more distant, we tend to view as pictures rather than human beings. Yet, as historical beings, as fallen and fallible historical beings, we do have a common humanity. We must not forget our long historical backdrop. The present is history -- that continues to inform and shape and mold our perceptions and orientations.

On the political level, multiculturalism has much to do with our present-day racial polarization -- which is in many ways gender polarization, especially given the vicious violence

against women, and sexual-orientation polarization with increased attacks on gays and lesbians. These conflicts, mediated or not mediated, reverberate within bureaucratic structures, and within the larger society.

Certain varieties of multiculturalism do have a politics. Afrocentrism is an academic instance of a longer black nationalist tradition, and it does have a politics and a history. Black nationalism is not monolithic -- there's a variety of different versions of black nationalism. In so many slices of the black community, with the escalation of the discourse of whiteness and blackness, racism escalates, both in terms of the life of the mind as well as in practices. We're getting a mentality of closing of ranks. This has happened many, many times in the black community; and it takes a nationalist form in terms of its politics. Black nationalism politics is something that has to be called for what it is, understood symptomatically, and criticized openly. It's a question of, if you're really interested in black free-

dom, I am too -- will your black nationalist view in education, will your black nationalist view in politics deliver the black freedom that you and I are interested in? You're upset with racism in western scholarship, I am too, and some white folk are too.

As democratic socialists, we have to look at society in a way that cuts across race, gender, region, and nation. For most people in the world, their backs are against the wall. When your back is against the wall, you're looking for weaponry: intellectual and existential weaponry to sustain yourself and your self-confidence and your self-affirmation in conditions that seemingly undermine your sense of possibility; political weaponry to organize, mobilize, to bring your power to bear on the status quo.

If you're Afro-American and you're a victim of the rule of capital, and a European Jewish figure who was born in the Catholic Rhineland and grew up as a Lutheran, by the name of Karl Marx, provides certain analytical tools, then you go there. You can't find too

Forging A Unique Culture

Excerpts From An Interview With Michele Wallace -- By Jim Drobnick

I consider multiculturalism to be a bourgeois, academic phenomenon. It would have to be. For the most part anything originating from a white perspective that uses the same kind of knowledge to look at Afro-Americans as well as Koreans or Puerto Ricans in this country, without an acknowledgement of class, gender, how long they have been here, whether their immigration was illegal or legal, I have to call profoundly anti-historical and anti-materialist and probably racist to boot. I'm not opposed to theorizing multiculturalism. [But] it can only be useful if it is an opportunity to theorize the multiple theoretical positions of minorities in First World countries and the problems of Third World peoples in Third World countries....There is always a need to ask economic and material questions of one's multicultural ideas.

When you get to the position of multiculturalism you have already put together a lot of other critiques. And generally the people who make the critiques don't put them together. Let me point out that there is incredible separatism among ethnic minorities in this country. Native Americans feel no desire to be lumped together with Black Americans, Black Americans with Asian

Americans, and so forth. These people don't know anything more about each other than white people know about each of us. A potential struggle exists between these minorities because we have different disabilities and different problems. . . I think we can draw together around some issues and we should.

To me the trap is this: there are many people in the world and most of them are not white. White male culture dominates all the others. That dominance includes theory and epistemology, as well as culture. Multiculturalism rebuts that by saying everything once thought to have only one version now has many versions. There is no one location for the truth. But multiculturalism still suggests that there is one way of providing an overview of all the "Others." It has yet to deconstruct itself as a category. It has yet to be a process that undermines its own authority.

Michele Wallace is a critic, novelist and essayist who teaches literature at City College of New York. Her books include Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman. She has a forthcoming book to be published in September.

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many insightful formulations in Marx about what it is to be black; you don't go to Marx for that. You go to Marx to keep track of the rule of capital, interlocking elites, political, banking, financial, that's one crucial source of your weaponry. You don't care where you get it from, you just want to get people off of your back.

If you want to know what it means to be black, to be African in Western civilization and to deal with issues of identity, with bombardment of degrading images, you go to the blues, you go to literature, you go to Du Bois's analysis of race, you go to Anna Julia Cooper's analysis of race. For what it means to be politically marginalized, you go to a particular tradition that deals with that.

To gain a universal perspective, the left must have a moral focus on suffering. Once you lose that focus, then you're presupposing a certain level of luxury that is all too common among the professional managerial strata in their debates. Their debates begin to focus on who's going to get what slice of what bureaucratic turf

for their bid for the mainstream, for middle class status. Now, that for me is one slice of the struggle, but it's just a slice. The center of the struggle is a deeper intellectual and political set of issues: understanding the larger historical scope, the post-European age, the struggles of Third World persons as they attempt to deal with their identity, their sense economic and political victimization. We need to not only understand but also to assist people trying to forge some kinds of more democratic regimes, which is so thoroughly difficult.

Let's not package the debate in static categories that predetermine the conclusion that reinforces polarization -- that's the worst thing that could happen. Polarization paralyzes all of us -- and we go on our middle class ways, and the folk we're concerned about continue to go down the drain.

The political challenge is to articulate universality in a way that is not a mere smokescreen for someone else's particularity. We must preserve the possibility of universal connec-

tion. That's the fundamental challenge. Let's dig deep enough within our heritage to make that connection to others.

We're not naive, we know that argument and critical exchange is not the major means by which social change takes place in the world. But we recognize it has to have a role, has to have a function. Therefore, we will trash older notions of objectivity, and not act as if one group or community or one nation has a god's eye view of the world. Instead we will utilize forms of intersubjectivity that facilitate critical exchange even as we recognize none of us are free of presuppositions and prejudices. We will put our arguments on the table and allow them to be interrogated and contested. The quest for knowledge without presuppositions, the quest for certainty, the quest for dogmatism and orthodoxy and rigidity is over.

Cornel West, DSA Honorary Chair, is the author of The Ethical Dimensions of Marxism, recently published by Monthly Review Press.



Philip Decker/Impact Visuals

A Mexican worker hides from the U.S. border patrol en route to his job at a California farm.

WHOSE COUNTRY?

by Patrick Laceyfield

OUR COUNTRY: THE SHAPING OF AMERICA FROM ROOSEVELT TO REAGAN by Michael Barone, The Free Press, 1991.

Daniel Berrigan, in the early 1970s, observed ruefully that "America is hard to find." It was easier for Alexis de Toqueville some eight score years ago, perhaps, when our grand experiment in self-government was yet in its infancy. Since then the task has grown, well, more complicated.

Michael Barone's *Our Country* is one person's attempt to tackle the paradoxes and complexities of America's past six decades, beginning with the Depression and running through the election of George Bush. Eschewing what he sees as a trend "to see recent American political history as a tale of decline, the story of how a country suffused with pride betrayed its ideals," Barone offers instead a historical portrait "mostly of success and mostly of goodness."

Barone's thesis, which presumably owes something to his education at Harvard and Yale Law, is that U. S. politics more often "divides Americans along cultural rather than economic lines and that the politics of economic redistribution in the 20 years after Franklin Roosev-

elt's New Deal is an exception that proves the rule." Casting aside the notion that politics is largely a struggle of who gets what, when, where and how, he posits instead a warm, seductive American uniqueness -- albeit a messy, diverse singularity. This is, he argues, natural given that this is "a country which has always been affluent." In response to the doomsayers, Barone writes that "this country showed enough resilience in the 1980s to produce once again a growing economy and enough strength to win important (and unexpected) foreign policy victories."

If Barone's interpretation of 60 years of America is a bit off-line, then so too are some of his facts. Speaking of the 1930s, Barone boasts that "the seeds of bigotry and intolerance did not find as fertile soil here as they did in those same years in Europe." Well, he's right in one sense, quite wrong in another. After all Southern blacks -- in the words of Martin Luther King, Jr. -- had "no right to vote" and those in the North had "nothing for which to vote." In the 1944 election, Barone admits, Southern Democrats blocked Roosevelt's sweeping plan for absentee voting by soldiers because, quite frankly, they didn't want "nigger" votes to show up in their states' totals. Contrary to Barone's assertions, the Republicans had not "tried and failed to bring civil rights to the South 100 years before" during Reconstruction. Some Republicans tried, many died for it

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and the Republican party as a whole bartered black emancipation to the Democrats in return for Rutherford B. Hayes' election to the presidency in 1876. For the whole story, see Eric Foner's recent, monumental work *Reconstruction*. Twice, Barone tells us that Martin Luther King, Jr. believed that equality of the races depended on "some kind of socialism" as if in disbelief that significant economic hurdles remained after Jim Crow.

In criticizing Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society" and its mild call for grassroots participation of the poor in its programs, Barone bemoans that "so many sophisticated people accepted the idea that the poor would be good guides on how to get people out of poverty." This demonstrated "how deeply rooted was the idea, planted by the success of the civil rights movement, that American society was fundamentally flawed, that only the victims truly understood it, and that they had an unlimited moral claim on the resources of the society."

All too often, Barone, a senior writer for *U.S. News and World Report*, defines democracy merely as electoral trends. And, populism, for him is a dirty word. Against FDR, Barone approvingly quotes former New York governor Al Smith: "I will take off my coat and vest and fight to the end any candidate who persists in any demagogic appeal to the masses of the working people of this county to destroy themselves by setting class against class and rich against poor." He is on the money, however, in judging that Henry Wallace, by launching the 1948 Progressive Party fiasco instead of contesting Harry Truman in the Democratic primaries, proves "the opposite of what he wanted to. . . that there was no left-wing vote in America in the years after World War II."

In marking the rise of the anti-war movement, Barone whines that "the Berkeley demonstrators gave not a moment's notice to the American commitment in Vietnam; they mentioned the civil rights movement only to compare their own grievances, quite implausibly, with those of

Southern blacks. Their complaints reeked of adolescent angst. . . These were the cries of elite adolescents angry and bewildered that they had not yet, at 21, gained the powers of their elders, quite reached the top levels of their society." See Mark Kitchell's brilliant new documentary film, "Berkeley in the Sixties" for a rebuttal to the charge that Berkeley in the period had little or nothing to do with Vietnam, civil rights or free speech issues.

Barone, however, does not end there. He argues that the 1969 Vietnam Moratorium, which brought a million people into the streets of America in peaceful protest, was "profoundly undemocratic." The Moratorium, he said "was an attempt to bypass the electoral process and to make public policy by mass demonstration. The implications for anyone who remembered the history of Europe in the 1930s were chilling." In fact, Barone's analogies are out to sea. Where millions of Americans saw the peaceful expression of their constitutional right to redress grievances, Barone sees storm troopers. Politics, in his view, is elections -- nothing more.

Barone's excessively feel-good interpretation of history celebrates our undeniable strengths as a nation and the American exceptionalism that holds us together without adequately accounting for that never-ending struggle -- yes, here in America -- between the have-a-lots, the have-somethings and the have-nots. Just as the elite in this country regularly deny that there is any such creature, so too does Barone. Still, the the deepening recession, coupled with a corrosive cynicism and falling living standards may mean that class and questions of economic inequality will loom a good deal larger in America's future than they figure in Barone's interpretation of America's past. ♦

Patrick Lacefield, a DSA member, is associate director at the Commission on U.S.-Latin American Relations in Washington, DC.

JIMMY HIGGINS REPORTS

BEYOND CHOICE

In the early days of this country, fire departments were privatized, profit-making companies. People paid for services beforehand, insuring that a fire company would be there if you needed it. But if your house caught fire and you hadn't paid up, it burned to the ground. You'd think we would have learned by now -- but no. Just as the nation is coming to understand the horrors of a privatized, for-profit health care system, several "entrepreneurs" are introducing for-profit schools. Chris Whittle, the media fiend who introduced commercial television into our schools, now plans to make money off the education of our children -- with the help of George Bush's educational choice proposals. And what happens to the children who cannot afford to pay?

YOU'VE GOT A LONG WAY TO GO, BABY

The tobacco industry's despicable targetting of African Americans has gotten some press -- but we have yet to hear from the mainstream press about their targetting of other populations. A recent study by the Health Education Quarterly found that the tobacco industry places proportionally more ads in women's magazines than in any other type of magazine. Another study, by the University of Oregon finds that in the years 1983 to 1987 there were no articles about the hazards of smoking published in women's magazines that carry cigarette ads. According to *Extra!*, studies find that the tobacco pushers also heavily target young people.

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