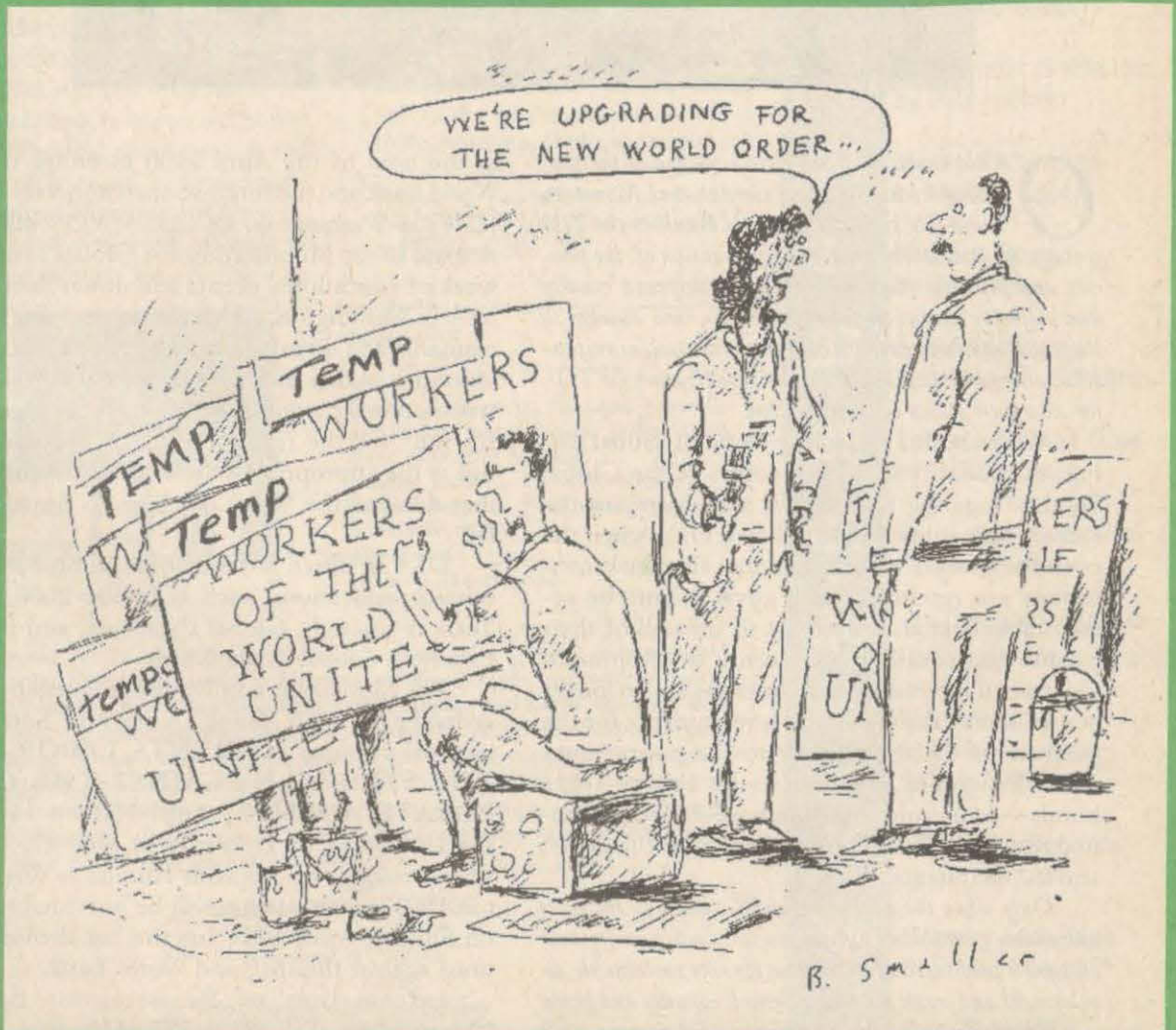


DEMOCRATIC

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In the New Century

ENDORSEMENT



On the occasion of the first meetings of the governing bodies of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank in the 21st century, we call for the immediate suspension of the policies and practices that have caused widespread poverty and suffering among the world's peoples, and damage to the global environment. We hold these institutions responsible, along with the World Trade Organization (WTO), for an unjust global economic system.

We issue this call in the name of global justice, in solidarity with the peoples of the Global South struggling for survival and dignity in the face of unjust economic policies. Only when the coercive powers of international financial institutions are rescinded shall governments be accountable first and foremost to the will of their people for equitable economic development. Only when international institutions are no longer controlled by the wealthiest governments for the purpose of dictating policy to the poorer ones shall all peoples and nations be able to forge bonds—economic and otherwise—based on mutual respect and the common needs of the planet and its inhabitants.

Only when the well-being of all, including the most vulnerable people and ecosystems, is given priority over corporate profits, shall we achieve genuine sustainable development and create a world of justice, equality and peace.

DSA, Democratic Socialists of America, and its youth wing, Young Democratic Socialists, endorses this statement and call for its expression

at the time of the April 2000 meetings of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in Washington, DC. DSA/YDS will participate in the Mobilization for Global Justice, a week of educational events and nonviolent protests in Washington, which aim to promote more equitable and democratically operated global institutions in this time of sharp inequality. Large transnational corporations have gotten together. It's time for the rest of us. DSA believes that this is the appropriate follow-up to the protests that derailed the WTO meetings in Seattle last fall.

DSA is joined in this mobilization by many other organizations, such as Jubilee 2000, Fifty Years is Enough, Global Exchange, and Public Citizens's Global Trade Watch.

The Mobilization in Washington will be preceded by the DSA Young Democratic Socialists national meeting: **STUDENTS, LABOR AND THE STRUGGLE AGAINST THE CORPORATE AGENDA**, April 13th to 15th, at the University of Delaware in Newark, Delaware—roughly on the same latitude as Washington DC. Transportation will be provided to DC on Sunday, April 16th, for the big demonstrations against the IMF and World Bank.

Information or Registration: daraka@dsausa.org, Tel: (212) 727.8610, Fax: (212) 727.8616

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Welcome to Part Two of our *Democratic Left* Millennium Edition, *Ideas for the New Century*. As Democratic Socialists confront the contradictory political landscape of economic boom for some, and mass poverty for others—here and abroad—we hope to make a modest contribution to the theoretical and practical debates about how to make things better. After all, we wouldn't be dues-paying members of an explicitly democratic socialist organization if we thought that the triumph of the much-mentioned T-I-N-A, "There Is No Alternative," wasn't subject to challenge. How can the present global economic and social arrangements be the sum total of human aspiration? How can the presence of human and animal misery still be glossed over by the powerful and self-satisfied?

Rent-seeking, to use an old phrase from neo-classical economics, is still a feature of modern corporate life. Large for-profit institutions have no problem buying elected officials to steer policy to their benefit. Nor do

these companies have any beef with direct subsidies or tax deductions that accrue to their benefit—no matter the social cost. Perhaps the best that can be said for socialism now is that it is about rent-seeking for the majority—greatest good for the greatest number, subject to as much democracy as practicable. Not a bad aspiration. There *are* alternatives.

—THE EDITORS

SPECIAL NOTE

In the years ahead, we want to ensure that our members and subscribers have more input in future issues of *Democratic Left*. Articles submitted by members and subscribers will receive serious consideration. In addition, preference for book reviews will be given to DSA members and subscribers, particularly if the author is willing to give us an interview. We would also like DSA members and subscribers to submit photos, letters to the editor, and notices of births, marriages, deaths, and important birthdays, to: *Democratic Left*, Editor, 180 Varick Street, 12th Floor, New York, NY 10014; or e-mail us at dsa@dsausa.org.

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DEMOCRATIC

LEFT

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Democratic Socialists of America share a vision of a humane international social order based on equitable distribution of resources, meaningful work, a healthy environment, sustainable growth, gender and racial equality, and non-oppressive relationships. Equality, solidarity, and democracy can only be achieved through international political and social cooperation aimed at ensuring that economic institutions benefit all people. We are dedicated to building truly international social movements—of unionists, environmentalists, feminists, and people of color—which together can elevate global justice over brutalizing global competition.

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DSA and the Socialist International

By JOHN G. MASON

“Ah! The Ghost of Michael Harrington!” said Neil Kinnock of the British Labour Party as the DSA delegation passed by to take their seats at the recent Socialist International (SI) World Congress in Paris. Kinnock’s witty aside unsettled a few of our six delegates, but I was touched that Kinnock—in his own backhanded way—had cared to acknowledge how important Michael Harrington had been for the SI during the Seventies and Eighties. At that time, Harrington was the SI’s leading American spokesperson and a valued advisor and strategist for the SI’s ruling triumvirate of Olaf Palme, Willy Brandt and Francois Mitterrand. For over a decade, DSA’s marginality at home was offset within SI councils by Harrington’s brilliance as an essayist, and his energy and insight as a socialist strategist. But this also meant that DSA’s connection to the SI was largely a one-man show. Since Michael’s death in 1989—and with the disappearance of the generation of European leaders who had welcomed him into their ranks—the relationship between DSA and the SI has never been the same.

In the era of Tony Blair, Gerhard Schroder and Massimo D’Alema—Europeans whose American policy often seems limited to the pursuit of photo-ops with Bill and Hillary and closer ties to the Democratic Leadership Council—one quickly gets the impression that DSA’s status as a member organization has turned into something of an embarrassing legacy

for the current SI Secretariat in London, when it is not overlooked altogether. This was sadly in evidence during the July session of the Gonzalez Commission on Global Progress, with Clinton Administration officials and NYU economists in Washington last summer. Inexplicably, DSA was not notified of this first major SI meeting to be held in the States since the World Congress at the UN in 1996.

This change in our standing could also be felt in Paris, where without Bogdan Denitch (a DSA delegate since 1991, whose expertise on Eastern European issues is widely respected) to head our delegation and to take the floor in our name, we kept a low profile. Although our delegates did good work networking with the international press and other delegations in the corridors, our lack of visibility points up the difficulties of DSA’s position within the SI. We are a “full member party” and, along with the Social Democrats USA, are the lonely representatives of democratic socialism/social democracy in the world’s superpower. Unfortunately, neither group measures up to the three criteria for organizational relevance established by the departing SI President, Pierre Mauroy.

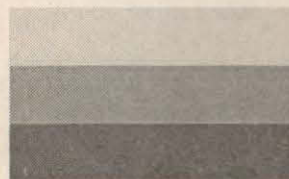
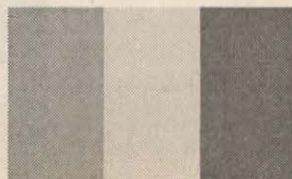
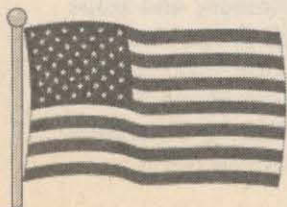
A Davos for the Poor?

In his last official speech in Paris, Mauroy claimed that in the Nineties, the Socialist International had become “the leading political organization in the world, if we take the only two

criteria which matter: the geographical area which it covers and the political forces which it represents.” Over the past twenty-five years, the SI has expanded its membership from forty parties when Willy Brandt assumed its Presidency in 1976, to nearly one hundred and fifty member parties today. Its membership roster translates into a significant Socialist presence in Europe, the Middle East and Mediterranean, Sub-Saharan Africa, India and the Pacific Rim and Latin America.

Mauroy’s second criteria was the SI’s political “weight”—here defined by the size of electoral representation of its member parties with their “hundreds of millions of voters worldwide,” and by the fifty or so that are parties of government on “all the world’s continents.” And as if to underline the point, the podium was crowded with the assembled leadership of the thirteen European Union countries plus elected leaders from Eastern Europe, the new president of Argentina, and the new delegate of the African National Congress. This impressive display of worldwide political influence was further demonstrated the next day by the comradesly embrace exchanged by Yasser Arafat and Shimon Peres, which was tumultuously applauded by the one thousand delegates.

To these criteria Mauroy added yet another: “ideological modernity.” He saw the SI string of electoral successes as evidence that the Right in the Nineties had been driven from power worldwide mainly because of the



democratic Left's capacity for ideological and programmatic innovation. Mauroy then concluded, "it's true that we have changed. And it is precisely because Social Democracy has known how to adapt to change that we are the leading organized political force in the world today." For Mauroy the programmatic shift came from the fact that the SI "no longer limits its ambitions to the simple redistribution of wealth but also includes its creation," a comment that echoed Tony Blair's remark that everywhere the debate about the future of the Left is centered on the issue of "whether we can stand for fairness and enterprise together."

Needless to say, a DSA which is not really a party with identifiable elected representatives and which fields no political candidates in its name, will be hard put to meet the test of electoral relevance that would allow it to fit comfortably into the existing SI club. Nor can it easily pass the ideological test of "modernity." In particular, DSA's ideological program of opposition to global corporate capitalism places it on the outer fringe of the SI today. In the eyes of European leaders like Blair or D'Alema, who equate "modernization" with the market based reform of the welfare state, our refusal to buy into the neo-liberal agenda makes us a "conservative organization" and a political adversary. Our criticisms of the American "model" and market-led globalization will be ignored by them, and the DSA could find itself marginalized within the SI—along with the rest of the hard-left opposition to "centrist" policies which operate within the limits set by global capital markets.

Debates Over Blair's "Third Way"

For the British Prime Minister, the "debate today is no longer about whether we modernize but how, and how fast. In history the Left always wins when it is not just about justice but about the future too... We must take on the forces of conservatism, Left and Right, who resist change, whether it's the Right who believe the

knowledge economy is a just a passing fad or those parts of the Left defending the status quo, promoting tax and spend or yielding up the territory of law and order to the Right. Because make no mistake: If we don't become the reformers, the Right will step in and take our place."

Blair for one had no doubts that we could marry capitalist enterprise to social fairness, but his French hosts did not share his enthusiasm for the neo-liberal policy consensus. Francois Holland, General Secretary of the French Socialist Party, was prepared only to say "yes to the market economy, but not to a market society." French Premier Lionel Jospin shared Holland's skepticism about market reforms and declared: "In itself, the market creates neither meaning, nor direction, nor project. For us the market—even regulated, even controlled—does not eliminate the need for the social contract... We refuse the commodification of societies."

Jospin even found a place in his remarks for a favorable reference to Karl Marx's critical analysis of capitalism and our continuing need to "think through capitalism in order to challenge it, to control it, and to reform it." One conclusion he drew from this was that the Left had to "reflect on the reasons that have led us to allow the return of stagnation and massive unemployment." For Jospin, "our first priority today as socialists is to work for full employment." His second priority was to demand the regulation of capitalist globalization—rejecting Blair's description of it as a raw, uncontrollable force that sets the limits within which socialists must work. "Globalization must not be based on unilateralism." Jospin declared. "On the contrary, it must encourage the emergence of a balanced and multi-polar world. The world needs rules... for this century has shown us that socialism without liberty does not exist. But socialism without equality becomes meaningless."

In contrast, Blair summed up the Congress debate in these terms: "Some will talk of social democracy,

some of democratic socialism. Some of the centre-left, some just of the Left. I do not minimize the real and genuine debate that underpins these terms. I simply say it is the debate itself that is important, not the labels." In a sense he was right, but also disingenuous. What he left out of his description was the rejection by the SI leadership of his proposals for the reform of the SI itself. Last spring, Blair suggested that the SI should be dissolved into a larger "centre-left" association which would include Clinton's New Democrats alongside New Labour. Then shortly before the Congress, he proposed that the SI could drop the "S-word" from its name in favor of a more neutral centre-left label. None of these proposals were accepted, but clearly show that right before the Congress opened, Mr. Blair took the issue of labels very seriously indeed.

All of these maneuvers were brushed aside in Mauroy's blunt declaration in favor of "a Socialist International which is more international without being less socialist," a preference endorsed by "the great majority of our member parties, for whom the political struggle is still structured around the Left/Right divide between progressive and conservative forces." In a clear rebuke to Blair, Mauroy added that "for myself" as well as for "the Socialist International, the 'third way' is still located in between capitalism and communism." In short, the Paris Congress represented a thinly disguised defeat for the European advocates of the Third Way, notwithstanding their November meeting with Clinton and his entourage of hundreds in Florence, Italy.

It came as no surprise then that the one continent which SI General Secretary Luis Ayala passed over in his official report turned out to be North America. Neither the renewal of the AFL-CIO, the victory of the Mexican PRD in Mexico City, or the work of the Canadian NDP were deemed worthy of mention in his remarks—although the Gonzalez Commission's meeting with New Democrats in Washington was singled



Antonio Guterrez, who formally committed himself to seeking out American partners with whom the SI could collaborate. This settled the question of whether the SI will seek contact with American Democrats and progressives, but left open the issue of how and when. More to the point, Guterrez did not touch on the vital question of *which* Democrats.

out for praise. The same silence was observed in the plenary speeches made by Jospin, Schroder and Blair. The one notable exception came in a plea made by Italian Premier Massimo D'Alema to the delegates to recognize that "dialogue with the American Democrats is fundamental to the process of strengthening ties between Europe and the other continents, and will allow socialist forces in Europe to have a direct relationship with other democratic and progressive cultures acting in the world."

D'Alema's speech only hints at the problems for the SI that flow from its weak ties with American political organizations and personalities. For how can one claim to be the world's leading political organization when Russia, China and the United States are all but absent from its ranks? More particularly, how can one deal with the global impact of U.S. "unilateralism" in the absence of a working relationship with America's Democratic Party? This practical issue in many ways was the central question hanging over the theoretical debates between Lionel Jospin and Tony Blair."

DSA and the SI: American Challenge

Ironically at the turn of a new century, everything from the global reach of the Internet and American dominated global media culture to dramatic street protests in Seattle against the WTO poses the riddle of what America's political "exceptionalism" means. Even as U.S. corporate giants in global communications and infor-

mation technology like Microsoft and AOL/Time-Warner rework economies and cultures around the world, our political elites remain largely divorced from policy debates which bring the rest of the world's democratic leaders to forums like the UN or the SI World Congress. Despite close collaboration between American and transnational non-governmental organizations which was so much in evidence in Seattle this November, the institutional and cultural isolation of our two national parties remains almost complete.

The Democratic Party, for instance, belongs to none of the existing Internationals, although it sends observers to three: the Liberal, Christian Democratic and Socialist Internationals. At the Paris Congress, they were represented by one guy from the National Democratic Institute who turned out to be Canadian. Similarly, the American media presence was limited to the local stringer from UPI who kept asking me whether "there was really a story here worth covering." In short, our cultural dynamism and national self-absorption both fascinates and repels the outside world—a world that is often much more interested in us than we are by it. This gap in political awareness raises the issue of when and how Americans can be brought into the global conversation about transnational problems and on what terms.

The American challenge to the SI was confronted head-on in the maiden speech of newly elected SI President, Portuguese Prime Minister

Will the SI's contacts be limited to Clinton's New Democrats or will the Progressive Caucus in Congress also be included in the international dialogue? How this is worked out is a strategic concern for DSA, for it may determine how much space exists for us to become a player in the coming conversation between the SI parties and American labor and progressive NGOs over globalization.

Given the current configuration of forces within the SI, our space is limited. At best DSA today finds itself closest to Jospin's Socialists. At worst we risk isolation by being identified by Blair's "Centre Left" with the marginal Left Group within the European Parliament—made up of parties like the French Communists, who are the Socialists' coalition partners in France, Italy, and Germany, but still outside the ideological mainstream of European Socialism. If Third Way advocates ultimately succeed in promoting the ideological "re-centering" of the SI—as they tried to do with Felipe Gonzalez's Commission on Global Change—DSA's contrary message about the reality of U.S. neoliberalism low unionization rates, millions without health coverage, injured cities, polluted air and water, sharp income differentials—the whole, real picture will never be heard in the higher councils of the SI.

John G. Mason teaches at William Paterson University and is writing a book on French nuclear policy.

A Feminist Perspective on Welfare "Reform"

BY MIMI ABRAMOVITZ

In a 1972 article in *MS Magazine*, Johnnie Tillmon, president of the National Welfare Rights Organization, explained why she saw welfare as a women's issue. Linking the lives of poor and middle class women, she declared:

There are lots of lies that male society tells about welfare mothers: that AFDC mothers are immoral, lazy, misuse their welfare checks and spend it all on booze and are stupid and incompetent. If people are willing to believe these lies, its partly because they are just special versions of the lies that society tells about all women.... [These negative stereotypes are just] a way of rationalizing the male policy of keeping women as domestic slaves or saying that all women are likely to become whores unless they are kept under control by men and marriage.

Speaking at the height of the women's movement, Tillmon saw that the treatment of women on welfare reflected public anxieties about women's demand for economic independence, personal autonomy, and social justice. Reflecting on past attacks on welfare, Tillmon knew that welfare "reformers" typically won public support for cutting benefits both by stigmatizing single mothers for departing from prescribed wife and mother roles, and by playing the race card. The racial stereotypes of women of color as matriarchal, hypersexed and promiscuous have always lurked below the surface of these attacks.

Tillmon understood the underpinnings of welfare reform better than most. Unfortunately, few policy makers, politicians or advocates listened to her then or remembered her words in the early 1990s—when welfare

once again became a political target. After Clinton found that he could win votes by promising to "end welfare as we know it," some feminists tried to draw attention to welfare as a women's issue—but to little avail. Conservatives blamed feminism for the decline of family values. Liberals believed that any job was better than welfare and optimistically expected Congress to make childcare, health services, real child support, and educational options part of the package. The Left, which only occasionally brought women into their otherwise important analyses, also marginalized feminists. Tillmon's message, however, was not lost on women on welfare who to this day demand the rights of motherhood and womanhood as well as jobs with a living wage.

Now that Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) has been all but scrapped across the country, it is all too clear why recipients and feminists think of welfare as a women's issue. The first version of this article, published by *Democratic Left* in 1995, could only speculate on what welfare "reform" would actually bring, for the law had not yet passed. Unfortunately, recent research findings show that the outcome of welfare reform has exceeded our worst fears by far.

The welfare program that supported single mothers and their children for more than sixty years has virtually disappeared. When Congress converted welfare from an entitlement program to a state-run block grant, it effectively ended the federal government's longstanding commitment—however meager—to the downtrodden. This historic shift canceled automatic funding so that in the year 2002, for the first time in its history, welfare will be directly under the Congressional budget ax. Less than three years after Congress enacted the

Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act, the national welfare caseload has plummeted by almost 50 percent from its peak—with more stunning declines in many states. In three states, the rolls fell by more than 80 percent. In seven others, the decline was more than 60 percent. Only one state—Rhode Island—showed a decline of less than 20 percent.

The shrunken welfare rolls have elicited cheers of success from nearly every politician, policymaker, and presidential candidate. If reduction was the main goal of welfare reform, then reformers can rightfully claim victory. But if welfare reform was meant to improve the lives of women, something has gone dangerously awry. Few observers have noticed—or seem to care—that welfare reform regulates the lives of women, uses the strong arm of the state to try to modify their behavior, and undercuts reproductive freedom, caretaking supports, and protection from male violence, as well as their ability to secure jobs with decent pay. Welfare reform falls hardest and most painfully on poor women. Yet as Johnnie Tillmon recognized more than a quarter of a century ago, when it comes to public policy, an injury to one woman is an injury to all.

Can't Make Ends Meet

The most well known target of welfare reform was women's work behavior. By placing a five year lifetime cap on welfare eligibility (22 states have even shorter limits), the 1996 welfare law transformed AFDC into a temporary and transitional work program. The law increased the numbers of hours that women on welfare must work, penalized states with too few recipients in work programs, forced those lacking jobs to work-off their benefits in menial public and private sector jobs, and otherwise

This article was excerpted from the forthcoming new edition of *Under Attack, Fighting Back: Women and Welfare in the United States*, by Mimi Abramovitz, Monthly Review Press, 1999. An earlier version of this article appeared in *In These Times*, November 18, 1999.

stiffened already tough work rules. In turn, local welfare departments cut benefits or closed cases for the slightest infraction of the many new rules, such as missing an appointment with a job counselor.

Many women forced off welfare found work—as they always do when a booming economy creates enough jobs. Even so, large numbers of former recipients now report that they cannot make ends meet. Low wages, part-time work, costly childcare, transportation, and work expenses have left many women worse off than when they received welfare. In South Carolina, for example, a study by the National Council of State Legislatures found that 50 percent of the women kicked off welfare fell behind in rent or utility payments compared to 39 percent while on welfare. Fourteen percent said they now could not afford medical care versus three percent before. In Kentucky some 70 percent of the former recipients ended up worse or no better off than when on welfare. In state after state—having also lost Food Stamps, Medicaid, and subsidized housing—many women have turned to food pantries, homeless shelters, and social service agencies. Increasingly, women find themselves braiding hair, selling fruit by the roadside, providing in-home childcare or resorting to prostitution so that their children can eat. This grim picture—which does not include the presumably worse-off women whom the researchers never found—can only become darker in 2002 when welfare's five-year lifetime limit on benefits goes into effect in every state.

Welfare reform threatens the economic security of poor women first and foremost. However, working and middle-class women cannot rest easy given that welfare time limits, stiff work rules, and punitive sanctions help to keep wages low for many women (and men). Welfare reform helps to lower wages by flooding the labor market with thousands of additional workers. Even under today's more robust economic conditions, an increased supply of labor makes it easier for employers to press wages

down for all workers and harder for unions to negotiate good contracts. To the extent that welfare reform has fueled deep cuts in other social programs it also cost some women (and men) the public sector jobs that lifted them into the middle-class.

Restoring the Traditional Family

Putting women on welfare to work has captured the most public attention. Under the rubric of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), this AFDC successor explicitly calls for discouraging single motherhood in favor of two-parent families. The "reformers" described single motherhood as the nation's number one social problem—responsible for drug dealing, drive-by shootings and the deficit. In the name of maintaining family values, welfare reform revived once discredited moralistic behavioral standards that punish single mothers by regulating their childbearing and parenting choices.

Federal law now allows state governments to impose a child exclusion or family cap rule which denies aid to children born while their mother is receiving welfare. As of March 1999 about half the states adopted this provision even though *the average welfare family includes only two children, the same as the national average—and despite seven straight years of declining birth rates for teens of all races*. A few states experimented with the child exclusion before 1996. But Arkansas, for example, found no difference in birth rates between women subject to the child exclusion and those who weren't. The New Jersey experiment led to lower birth rates for women on and off welfare but most of it reflected more abortions by women on welfare—at a time when abortion rates in the state and nation had fallen.

TANF includes an "illegitimacy" bonus of \$20 to \$25 million per year for three years to be shared by the five states that lower birth rates among all unmarried women the most—without increasing their statewide abortion rates above 1995 levels. The law also earmarks \$250 million in matching funds for states that run "abstinence

only" programs in the public schools. By March 1999, every state except California had accepted these funds for programs which stress postponing sex until marriage.

Once the government wins the right to control the childbearing choices of poor women, it becomes that much easier to tamper with the reproductive rights of all women. The effort to limit reproductive freedoms for all women by using poor women as a wedge started with the Hyde Amendment, which allowed states to deny Medicaid dollars for abortions. Since then, the courts and legislatures have eroded abortion rights for millions of women from all walks of life. Now welfare rules threaten the childbearing choices of women on and off welfare. For example, the "illegitimacy" bonus is based on the number of births to all unmarried women in a state. The calculation of changes in the abortion rate is not limited to women on welfare. The abstinence-only programs determine the content of sex education programs available to all children in the nation's public schools, not just those on welfare.

To many women, welfare reform seemed to trade off the rights of all women to ease the "moral panic" among those who think that the rise of working wives, single mothers, divorced couples, gay parents, interracial marriages, test-tube babies, legalized abortion, and birth control have imperiled the "traditional" family. In the name of personal responsibility, welfare policy enforces outdated values by disciplining those who do not marry, who raise kids on their own, or who otherwise step out of their "proper" role. Since any woman can be tarred and feathered in this way, welfare reform simultaneously regulates the lives



of poor women and sends a message to the rest of us about what happens to women viewed as "not playing by the rules."

Parenting

On the untested belief that financial deprivation will motivate "responsible" parenting, many states penalize women who deviate from prescribed behaviors by docking some or all of their benefits. Twenty-one states sanction women if they do not cooperate with paternity identification and child support rules; seventeen states dock the check of mothers with truant children (Learnfare) and lower the grant of mothers whose children do not get their immunization shots on time (Healthfare). Eight states reduce the grant for missed pediatric health visits while five states penalize women for not obtaining family planning services. Such sanctions portray women on welfare as "irresponsible" parents—a distrust that must seem odd to the poor women hired to take care of children in middle-class homes. They also blatantly ignore the deterioration of underfunded public schools, the shortage of medical services in poor neighborhoods, and the often chaotic nature of life in poverty. Few supporters of welfare reform know—or even ask—how women forced to leave welfare cope with sickness, unpaid bills, kids wanting brand-name sneakers, men who do not pay child support, and the shame of having to repeatedly ask friends and relatives for time and money.

"Concern" about parental responsibility has not translated into policies that help women care for their children. TANF's strict work requirements make it harder for poor women to supervise their children, especially when the women face substandard housing, overpriced food, unsafe neighborhoods, and lack of childcare services. Child welfare advocates fear that the combination of deeper poverty, mounting stress, and the greater willingness of officials to remove children from their homes will eventually create a tremendous burden for the relatives of poor single

mothers and the nation's foster care system.

By insisting that women on welfare must go to work in order to receive aid, welfare reform downplays the value of the caretaking performed by all women at home. The job of balancing work and family responsibilities has been worsened for poor and non-poor women alike by years of cutting housing, health care, childcare, elder care, and other social programs. These cuts shift both the cost and burden of caretaking from the government back to the home. The limits of the Family and Medical Leave Act—unpaid and limited to firms with 50 or more workers—and the most recent efforts to privatize Social Security and Medicare also undercut basic supports for women at home.

Violence Against Women

Among women on public assistance, fifty to sixty-five percent have experienced sexual or physical abuse as adults, usually at the hand of a spouse or a boyfriend. Between three and four million women nationwide are battered by men at some point in their lives. Regardless of their class, many women deal with abuse by trying to leave. But fears of economic deprivation often frustrate their efforts, as does the failure of courts and the police to enforce orders of protection. Welfare has been one program that made it possible for women to escape dangerous relationships—no matter their income. For many women, welfare is like life or accident insurance. They hope they will never have to use it but are glad that it is there when they fall on hard times.

To protect women's safety, feminist groups won the Family Violence Option in the 1996 welfare law. This requires states to screen for battering, provide services, and waive work and paternity requirements so that the loss of welfare benefits does not force desperate women to accept support from abusive partners. However, many states have failed to enforce the family violence option. In some cases they argue that that women will feign having been battered to exempt them-

selves from welfare's rules.

In the final analysis, we must conclude that the attack on women and welfare is neither accidental nor simply mean-spirited. Rather it and the entire drive to reform welfare is better understood as part of the economic strategy launched by President Reagan and continued by Presidents Bush and Clinton. The well-known plan variously referred to as Reaganomics, trickle-down, or supply-side economics, sought to promote economic growth by lowering the cost of labor, strengthening the two-parent family, shrinking the welfare state, discrediting the regulatory powers of the federal government, and undermining the power of popular movements best positioned to fight back. The failures of welfare reform help to accomplish each of these five goals.

The good news is that poor women on welfare are organizing. The Directory of Low-Income Organizations Working on Welfare Issues published by The Welfare Law Center in New York City lists 189 groups in 44 states and six in Canada. Many call for higher welfare benefits, guaranteed annual income, and a living wage. These grassroots actions are critical, for the historical record shows that the powers-that-be rarely act and social change rarely occurs unless there is pressure from below. The TANF legislation expires in 2002. This, combined with the strong economy and the media reports that public opinion may be drifting toward a more liberal policy agenda, creates a window of opportunity. Instead of patching up welfare reform, why not insist that the nation's leaders replace it with an adequate income support system, respect for caretaking work, full employment, and jobs at a living wage. Unless we join forces and let the powers that be know we mean business, they will not budge.

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Barbara Ehrenreich: Feminism in the New Century



DL: *How does the Women's Movement compares to other social movements of the 20th Century?*

BE: The women's movement has been one of the most important social developments of our time. Two hundred years ago women didn't even have the right to own property if they were married. One hundred years ago they still couldn't vote. Fifty years ago they were restricted to a few occupations and strongly discouraged from working outside the home. Women have emerged from being non-citizens—even chattel—to being full participants in our society. Just think of the changes in my own lifetime: we have fought our way into occupations formerly considered male-only, from medicine to the military. We have won the right to legal abortion and freedom from sexual harassment. Rape victims are no longer treated like criminals. And so forth. None of these changes were handed to us; we had to organize, agitate and demonstrate every step of the way.

But we haven't achieved women's "liberation" yet, not by a long shot. My concern is with the economically disadvantaged women for whom the

opening up of the professions has so far meant very little. These women remain locked in stereotypically feminine occupations—usually low-paid and dead-end—yet more and more women, especially women of color, are single mothers, trying to raise and support children on their own. This doesn't represent a "failure" of feminism—just something we haven't accomplished yet. A major challenge for feminism in the new century is to address the economic needs of *all* women, and this is where feminism has to make common cause with the democratic socialist economic justice agenda.

DL: *How you think the Women's Movement will differ in the next century from the last?*

BE: I can remember in 1972 about twenty of us gathering in somebody's living room for our weekly "women's support group" meeting. We were all associated, one way or another, with a small public college catering mostly to "non-traditional" students, meaning those who are older, poorer and/or more likely to be black and Latina than typical college students in this suburb. Among us almost every level of the college hierarchy was represented—students of all ages, clerical workers, junior faculty members and even one or two full professors. There were acknowledged differences of race and sexual preference among us, which we examined eagerly and a little anxiously. But we were comfortable together, and excited to have a chance to discuss everything from the administration's sexist policies to our personal struggles with husbands and lovers. Whatever divided us, we were all women, and we understood this to be one of the great defining qualities of our lives and politics.

Could a group so diverse in class and occupation happily convene to-

day? Please let me know if you can offer a present-day parallel, but I tend to suspect the answer is very seldom or not at all. Perhaps the biggest social and economic trend of the last thirty years has been class polarization—the expanding inequality in income and wealth. As United for a Fair Economy's excellent little book, *Shifting Fortunes: The Perils of the American Wealth Gap* points out, the most glaring polarization has occurred between those at the very top of the income distribution—the upper 1-5 percent—and those in the bottom 30-40 percent. Less striking, but more ominous for the future of feminism, is the growing gap between those in the top 40 percent of the income distribution and those in the bottom 40 percent. One chart in *Shifting Fortunes* shows that the net worth of the households in the bottom group declined by nearly 80 percent between 1983 and 1995. Except for the top one percent, the top 40 percent lost ground too—but they lost much less. Households in the 60th percentile lost only 6.5 percent of their net worth in the same time period. Today's college teacher, if she is not an adjunct, occupies that relatively lucky top-40 group, while today's clerical worker is in the rapidly sinking bottom-40. Could they still gather comfortably in each other's living rooms to discuss common issues? Do they still have common issues to discuss?

Numbers don't begin to tell the story though. The 80s brought a sharp lifestyle demarcation between the lower 40 percent, which is roughly what we call the working class, and the upper 20-30, which is populated by professors, administrators, executives, doctors, lawyers, etc. "Mass markets" became "segmented markets," with different consumer options signaling differences in status. In 1972, a junior faculty member's living room

A version of this interview appeared in the November 28, 1999 issue of *In These Times*.

looked much like that of a departmental secretary—only, in most cases, messier. Today, the secretary is likely to accessorize her home at Kmart; the professor at Pottery Barn. Three decades ago, we all consumed the same foods and enjoyed sugary, refined-flour treats at our meetings (not to mention Maxwell House coffee and cigarettes!). Today, the upper middle class grinds their own beans, insists on whole grain organic snacks, and vehemently eschews hot dogs and meatloaf. In the 70s, conspicuous, or even just overly enthusiastic, consumption was considered gauche—and not only by leftists and feminists. Today, professors, including quite liberal ones, are likely to have made a deep emotional investment in their houses, furniture, pewter cooking ware, etc. It shows how tasteful they are, meaning—when we cut through the garbage about aesthetics—how distinct they are from the “lower” classes.

DL: *But weren't there always big class differences between women?*

BE: There were always class differences, of course. Even before polarization set in, some of us lived on the statistical hilltops, others deep in the valleys. But, to continue the topographical metaphor, today we are distributed on what looks less like a mountain range and more like a cliff-face. Can feminism or, for that matter, any cross-class social movement, survive as class polarization spreads Americans further and further apart? Gender, race, and sexual preference still define compelling commonalities, but the sense of a shared condition necessarily weakens as we separate into buppies on the one hand and low-paid black workers on the other, or into frequent-flying female executives on the one hand vs. airport cleaning women on the other.

In the case of women, there is an additional factor compounding the division wrought by class polarization. In the 1960s, only about 30 percent of American women worked outside their homes; today, the proportion is reversed, with over 70 percent of women in the workforce. This repre-



sents a great advance, since women who earn their own way are of course more able to avoid male domination in their personal lives. But women's influx into the workforce also means that fewer and fewer women share the common occupational experience once defined by the word “housewife.” I don't want to exaggerate this commonality as it existed in the 1960s or 1970s; obviously the stay-at-home wife of an executive led a very different life from that of the stay-at-home wife of a blue-collar man. But they did perform similar kinds of daily tasks—housecleaning, childcare, shopping, cooking. Today, in contrast, the majority of women fan out every morning to face vastly different work experiences, from manual labor to positions of power and command. Like men, women are now spread throughout the occupational hierarchy (though not at the very top), where they encounter each other daily as unequals—givers of orders vs. those who are ordered around, providers of all the invisible services daily life depends on, such as office cleaning or data entry, vs. consumers of those services.

DL: *You seem to imply that the Women's Movement may have actually exacerbated class divisions between women.*

BE: For all the ardent egalitarianism of the early movement, feminism

did, in fact, have the unforeseen consequence of heightening the class differences between women in two ways. First, it was educated, middle class women who most successfully used feminist ideology and solidarity to advance themselves professionally. Feminism has played a role in working class women's struggles too—for example, in the union organizing drives of university clerical workers—but probably its greatest single economic effect was to open up formerly male-dominated professions to women. Between the 70s and the 90s, the percentage of female students in business, medical and law schools shot up from less than 10 percent to 40 or more percent. There have been, however, no comparable gains for young women who cannot afford higher degrees, and most of these women remain in the same low-paid occupations that have traditionally been “women's work” for decades. All in all, feminism has had little impact on the status or pay of traditional female occupations like clerical, retail, health care and light assembly line work. While middle class women gained MBAs, working class women won the right not to be called “honey”—and not a whole lot more than that.

Secondly, since people tend to marry within their own class, the gains made by women in the professions added to the growing economic gap

between the working class and the professional-managerial class. Working class families gained too, as wives went to work. But, as I argued in *Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class*, the most striking gains have accrued to couples consisting of two well-paid professionals or managers. The doctor/lawyer household zoomed well ahead of the truck driver/ typist combination.

DL: How has class polarization affected issues of greatest concern to the Women's Movement?

BE: Here are some brief and sketchy observations:

- **Welfare.** This has to be the most tragic case. In the 70s, feminists hewed to the slogan, "Every woman is just one man away from welfare." This was an exaggeration of course; even then, there were plenty of self-supporting and independently wealthy women. But it was true enough to resonate with the large numbers of women who worked outside their homes part-time or not at all. We recognized our commonality as homemakers and mothers and we considered this kind of work to be important enough to be paid for—even when there was no husband on the scene. Welfare, in other words, was potentially every woman's concern. Flash forward to 1996, when Clinton signed the odious Republican welfare reform bill, and you find only the weakest token protests from groups bearing the label "feminist." The core problem, as pro-welfare advocates found, was that many middle and upper-middle class women could no longer see why a woman should be subsidized to raise her children. "Well, I work and raise my kids—why shouldn't they?" was a common response, as if poor women could command wages that would enable them to purchase reliable childcare. As for that other classic feminist slogan—"every mother is a working mother"—no one seems to remember it any more.

- **Health Care:** Our bodies, after all, are what we have most in common as women, and the women's health

movement of the 70s and early 80s probably brought together as diverse a constituency—at least in terms of class—as any other component of feminism. We worked to legalize abortion and to stop the involuntary sterilization of poor women of color, to challenge the sexism

faced by all female consumers of medical care and to expand low-income women's access to care. In many ways, we were successful: Abortion is legal, if not always accessible; the kinds of health information once available only in underground publications like the original *Our Bodies, Ourselves* can now be found in *Mademoiselle*; the medical profession is no longer an all-male bastion of patriarchy. We were not so successful, however, in increasing low-income women's access to health care—in fact, the number of the uninsured is far larger than it used to be, and poor women still get second-class health care when they get any at all. Yet the only women's health issue that seems to generate any kind of broad, trans-class participation today is breast cancer, at least if wearing a pink ribbon counts as "participation," and very little of the emphasis there is on the dreadful inequities in medical care for cancer patients or anyone else. In fact, even the nature of medical care is increasingly different for women of different classes. While lower-income women worry about paying for abortions or for their children's care, many in the upper middle class are far more concerned with such medical luxuries as high-tech infertility treatments and cosmetic surgery. Young college women get bulimia; less affluent young women are more likely to suffer from toxemia of pregnancy, which is basically a consequence of malnutrition.

- **Housework:** In the 70s, housework was a hot feminist issue and major



theme of consciousness-raising groups. After all, whatever else women did, we did housework; it was the universal (or nearly universal) female occupation. We debated Pat Mainardi's famous essay on *The Politics of Housework*, which focused on the private struggles to get men to pick up their own socks, etc. We argued bitterly about the "wages for housework" movement's proposal that women should continue to do it, but that they should be paid for their labor by the state. We studied the Cuban legal code, with its intriguing provision that males do their share or face possible jail-time.

Thirty years later, the feminist silence on the issues of housework is nearly absolute. Not, I think, because men are at last doing their share, but because so many women of the upper middle class now pay other women to do their housework for them. Bring up the subject among affluent feminists today, and you get a guilty silence, followed by defensive patter about how well they pay (and treat) their cleaning women. In fact, the low hourly wages earned by "freelance" maids is not so generous at all, when you consider that it has to cover cleaning equipment, transportation to various cleaning sites throughout the day, and any benefits like health insurance the cleaning person should manage to purchase for herself. Fast-growing corporate cleaning services like Merry Maids and The Maids International are far worse, offering—in northeastern urban ar-

eas—their workers below-minimum wages of \$5 to \$7 an hour. In a bitter irony, many of the women employed by the corporate cleaning services are former welfare recipients bumped off the rolls by the welfare reform bill so feebly resisted by organized feminists. One could conclude, if one was in a very bad mood, that it is not in the interests of affluent feminists to see the wages of working class women improve. As for the prospects of “sisterhood” between affluent women and the women who scrub their toilets for them—forget about it, even at a “generous” \$15 per hour.

DL: Are there any issues of concern to the Women's Movement that have not been hurt by class polarization?

BE: The issues that have most successfully weathered class polarization are sexual harassment and male violence against women. These may be the last concerns that potentially unite all women; and they are of course crucial. But there is a danger in letting these issues virtually define feminism, as seems to be the case in some campus women's centers today. Poor and working class women (and men) face forms of harassment and violence on the job that are *not* sexual or even clearly gender-related. Being reamed out repeatedly by an obnoxious supervisor of either sex can lead to depression and stress-related disorders. Being forced to work long hours of overtime, or under ergonomically or chemically hazardous conditions, can make a person physically sick. Yet feminism has yet to recognize such routine workplace experiences as forms of “violence against women.”

DL: Can the Women's Movement surmount the obstacles created by class polarization?

BE: When posing this question to middle class feminist acquaintances, I sometimes get the response: “Well, you're right. We have to confront our classism.” But the problem is not classism, the problem is class itself: the existence of grave inequalities among women, as well as between women and men. We should recall that the

original radical—and yes, utopian—feminist vision was of a society without hierarchies of any kind. This of course means equality among the races and the genders, but class is different: There can be no such thing as “equality among the classes.” The abolition of hierarchy demands not only racial and gender equality, but the *abolition* of class. For a start, let's put that outrageous aim back into the long-range feminist agenda, and mention it as loudly and often as we can.

In the shorter term, there's plenty to do, and the burden necessarily falls on the more privileged among us: to support working class women's workplace struggles, to advocate for expanded social services for all women, to push for greater educational access for low-income women, to make our gatherings financially and culturally accessible to all women, and so on. I'm not telling you anything new here, sisters—you know what to do.

But there's something else, too, in the spirit of another ancient slogan which is usually either forgotten or misinterpreted today: “The personal is the political.” Those of us who are fortunate enough to have assets and income beyond our immediate needs,

should take a hard look at how we're spending our money. New furniture—and, please, I don't want to hear about how tastefully funky or antique-y it is—or a donation to a homeless shelter? A new outfit—or a check written to an organization fighting sweatshop conditions in the garment industry? A cleaning person—or a contribution to a clinic serving low-income women? If we can make sharing stylish again and excess consumption look as ugly as it actually is, we're that much more ahead. Better yet, as many DSAers do, give some of your time and your energy. But if all you can do is write a check, that's fine: until Congress redistributes wealth equitably, we may just have to do it ourselves.

*Barbara Ehrenreich is
Honorary Chair of DSA.*

Barbara personally lobbied members of Congress with other activists in an attempt to prevent the so-called “Personal Responsibility and Opportunity Act” from being enacted into law. We thank her and other DSA members for their valiant efforts on Capital Hill in support of basic entitlements for families.—THE EDITORS.

DSA Feminist Commission Revitalized

Last month a group of NY DSA women, including Lynn Chancer, Judith Lorber, Rosamond March, and Tequila Minsky met at Ruth Spitz's apartment for the purpose of reconstituting the Feminist Commission. The Feminist Commission was started in the early 1970s to explore theoretical issues and related action-oriented programs to move a strong socialist-feminist agenda in the U.S. We would like to revitalize this project of the American Left, which was a focus of activity after the merger between DSA's predecessor organizations, the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC) and New American Movement (NAM). We wish to discuss and act on issues of poverty and its relationship to gender and race, and the need for public provision of childcare in the U.S. today.

The newly reformed Feminist Commission will be meeting in New York City on Sunday, March 26th to discuss future plans and activities. Please attend if you are in the New York area. In the meantime, we encourage interested members to attend the World March of Women in Washington DC which will be taking place in October 2000. For more information about the Feminist Commission meeting or the World March of Women, contact Ruth Spitz (ruthspitzny@yahoo.com) or Lynn Chancer (lchancer@barnard.columbia.edu), or the DSA National Office.

Rational Hope

BY DAVID SCHWEICKART

“A spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of Communism.” So wrote Marx and Engels in 1848. They were right. Europe, indeed the world, was haunted by “Communism” for nearly a century and a half. Now, at least for the time being, that ghost has been exorcised. In its place has appeared the conquering spirit—the spectre of globalized capitalism. I would propose that humanity’s project for the twenty-first century is to exorcise this ghost, the very real spectre which is in fact our own creation.

Humanity’s project—let us call it a counter-project, since it stands in opposition to the ongoing project of globalizing capital—will of necessity be a vast and complicated affair, involving millions of people. It is an all-embracing project for human emancipation. It is the project to alter all the attitudes, practices and structures that circumscribe unnecessarily the possibilities of human happiness. It will have a practical dimension—the organization and mobilization of large numbers of people locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. It will also have a theoretical dimension.

This theoretical dimension will itself be complex. It must be in the tradition of the great oppositional, anti-capitalist movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the other profoundly emancipatory movements struggling for gender equality, for racial equality, against homophobia, for preservation of natural environments, against nuclear madness, and for genuine peace. All of these struggles will be seen as part of the huge, global effort to end oppression and to ensure every human being a fair chance at self-realization and human

happiness.

In most quarters this counter-project will likely be called “socialist” or “communist,” because if it is anti-capitalist—which it must be if it is to be a movement for complete human emancipation—it will be so labeled by its well-financed enemies. As Marx and Engels wrote a century and a half ago, “Where is the party in opposition that has not been decried as communistic by its opponents in power?” It is pointless to contest that label, which can in fact be worn proudly, drawing on the rich intellectual legacy of the socialist tradition. It will draw moral sustenance from the many heroic struggles waged under the socialist banner—without denying the failures, perversions, and atrocities of parties and governments that have called themselves “socialist.”

Since we can’t immediately transform the existing order, wipe everything out and start over, we have to create a new order that preserves what is good in the present while mitigating the irrational and evil. It can’t be what Marx denounced as “crude communism,” animated by envy. Instead, it must be a world that builds on the material and cultural accomplishments of past centuries, embraces the political ideals of liberty, democracy and the rule of law, and promotes such values as generosity, solidarity and human creativity, self-discipline, personal responsibility, and hard work. It will not sneer at these latter values as “bourgeois values.” They will be acknowledged to be indispensable to the construction of a new world.

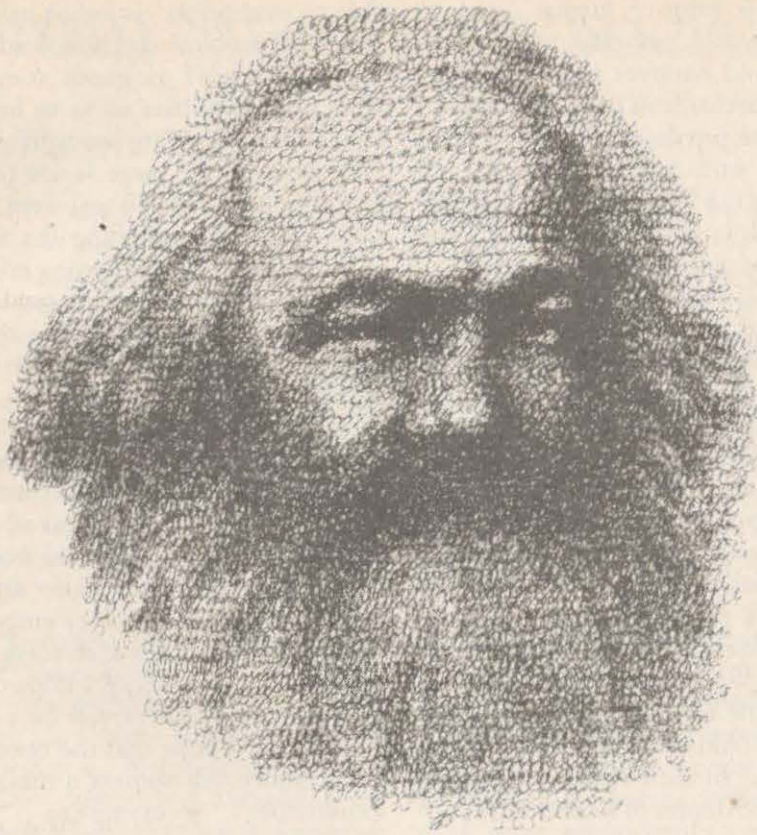
We should not claim—because it is not true—that the struggle against the power of capital is more fundamental than, for example, the struggle against patriarchy or against

the deep and bloody oppressions sanctioned by racism. We should not say—because it is not true—that the dispositions and structures that sustain sexism, racism and homophobia are less deeply rooted than those that sustain capitalism or are less in need of being rooted out. If we are to have a truly emancipatory socialism, we must work for more than socialism.

The Next System

Such an undertaking is lacking among the “practical Left” today—those people engaged in concrete struggles against concrete oppression. Virtually all of the many anti-systemic struggles being waged at present are proceeding within the horizon of capitalism. In the advanced industrial parts of the world, these struggles are largely defensive. Students and workers have gone on strike and have taken to the streets in Italy, France and elsewhere to block government rollbacks of hard-won gains, justified in the name of “global competition.” In poorer countries workers, peasants, students, and women continue to fight for the gains already won in most rich countries: human rights, democracy, labor rights, gender equality, and rights for indigenous people. In some instances movements are pushing to extend further what has already been achieved under social democracy. But in none of these struggles do we find an articulated conception of a new mode of production.

The Left, to sustain its core identity, must be able to conceive a successor-system to capitalism. This is because the collapse of the Soviet Union has been so demoralizing to many Leftists—the vast majority, I dare say—even though they did not



Internationalist. Moralist. Materialist. Left details to us.

view the Soviet Union as the embodiment of the socialist vision. Whatever its failings, the Soviet Union represented an alternative to capitalism. It was, if far from perfect, a successor-system. Capitalism was not, as it now seems to be, the only game in town. I think appearances are misleading here, and that capitalism is not the only game in town. But without a theory of a successor-system, we can only view the world through the lens of capital.

I contend that we now have at our disposal sufficient theoretical and empirical resources to develop a powerful alternative model. We are vastly better situated than Marx or even Lenin, since we have behind us a century of socio-economic experimentation. We also have access to data and to theoretical tools that were unavailable to the founding theoreticians of socialism. We can say now with more confidence than they ever could what will work, what won't, and why. There is a certain irony here. At precisely the moment when capi-

talism appears strongest and most hegemonic, it is possible to assert with more evidence-backed conviction than ever before that an efficient socialist alternative to capitalism is indeed possible.

As everyone who has studied Marx knows, the specifics of a socialist society are never mapped out. Virtually no attention is given to the institutional structures that should replace those of capitalism and thus define a genuinely superior economic order, better able to take advantage of the technical possibilities opened up by capital. When socialism descended from theory to practice, it had to confront this gap. Lenin, writing on the eve of the Russian Revolution, thought it would be a simple matter to replace capitalism with something better—but he soon learned otherwise. Since there was nothing in the works of Marx to provide much guidance, the Bolsheviks had to improvise—a very radical War Communism; then Lenin's quite moderate New Economic Policy;

then, following Lenin's death, agriculture was collectivized—at terrible human cost—all means of production were nationalized, and an immense central planning apparatus was put into place to coordinate the economy. What we now think of as “the Soviet economic model” came into being.

For a long while, it looked like this radically new way of organizing an economy was the wave of the future. The Soviet Union industrialized while the West collapsed into Depression—as Marx had predicted it would. The Soviet Union survived the German invasion, broke the back of the German military machine, and then, without any Western help, rebuilt its war-ravaged economy. Numerous Western economists looked at relative growth rates and nervously plotted the point at which the Soviet economy would surpass that of the United States. Meanwhile, the fire of Communist revolution took hold in China, Korea, Cuba, and Vietnam, and seemed about to sweep the Third World.

Historical Materialism

But, as we all know, a funny thing happened on the way to the future. In the 1980s Soviet economic growth ground to a halt. The economy didn't collapse (that would come only with the attempted capitalist restoration), but the Soviet model hit its limits. It began to lag badly in technological development, particularly in the hot, new, politically sensitive areas of information processing. So, as historical materialists would expect, with existing relations of production inadequate to new forces of production, there occurred a decisive shift in class power, and in Marx's words, “the whole vast superstructure was more or less rapidly transformed.” The West did not sit idly by during this historical upheaval, but intervened as best it could and with considerable success to ensure that the forces it favored—those committed to restoring capitalism—came out on top.

The collapse of the Soviet

model, not only in Russia but throughout Eastern Europe, is widely believed to have proven that Marx's historical materialism and conception of socialist succession was wrong. But this conclusion follows only if it is assumed that every attempt at constructing a successor-system to a given order must necessarily succeed. In Marxian terms, historical materialism sees the human species as a practical species groping to solve the problems presented to it. There is no reason to expect success right away. It is far more probable to see only partial successes at first or outright failures, with subsequent attempts informed by those experiences. Neither I nor anyone else can prove that historical materialism is a correct theory of history. It is a hopeful, optimistic theory. It aims to be "scientific," but it clearly embodies elements that do not lend themselves to scientific validation.

Any successor-system theory should delineate an economic model in sufficient detail so that it can be cogently defended, to professional economists and elsewhere, as being both economically and ethically superior to capitalism. The theory should orient our understanding so as to enable us to make sense of the numerous and diverse economic experiments of this century, particularly those of the post-World War II period. If the human species is indeed groping toward a post-capitalist economic order, socialists have a responsibility to assist in that. Politically, the concrete reforms that progressive parties and movements are currently struggling for should be suggestive of additional reform possibilities. Historical materialism sees the institutions of new societies developing within the old. Successor-system theory should help us locate the seeds and sprouts of what could become a new economic order so that we may protect and nourish them.

Economic Democracy

I am convinced that what I have for some years been calling Economic Democracy is the appropriate

model, a form of market socialism that extends democracy to the workplace and removes society's investment mechanisms from the hands of a private, privileged capitalist class. It breaks with free trade dogma and engages in a "socialist protectionism" that aids both domestic workers and those of poorer countries.

These institutional changes correspond to felt discontents within contemporary capitalism. Why should democracy stop at the factory gates or the entrance to wherever else you might work? Why should the stability and quality of an economy be held hostage to the greed of a class of people whose decisions as to where to invest, and in what, profoundly affect the general citizenry? Why should workers of the world compete to see who will settle for the lowest wages, and why should poor countries devote so many of their resources to satisfying the desires of rich-country consumers?

The first problem can be solved by allowing workers, not absentee owners, to control enterprises. The second can be solved by generating a societal investment fund, not from private savings, but from a capital assets tax. All of the revenues would then go back to regions and communities on a per capita basis, and

then to enterprises via public banks. The third problem can be solved by imposing a tariff on goods coming from poor countries so as to bring their selling prices into line with what they would be if wage levels (and environmental regulations) were the same—and then rebating the collected tariffs to the exporting countries. This would force rich countries to pay fair market prices for their imports rather than free market prices.

Would it work? I think so. I have elaborated and defended in detail these institutions in *Against Capitalism*. I present an updated version of the argument in my forthcoming book, *After Capitalism*, where I also argue that Economic Democracy embodies the multiple criteria of an adequate successor system theory. I hope that conscientious readers will be convinced. I also hope that the twenty-first century will witness a massive expansion everywhere of emancipatory successor-systems to capitalism. I don't think this is an irrational hope.

David Schweickart teaches at Loyola University in Chicago. His writings are used by the DSA Economics of Socialism Working Group.

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From Sweden to Socialism

BY JOANNE BARKAN

Almost a decade ago, two eminent leftists, economist Robert Heilbroner and social critic Irving Howe, posed a pair of questions that all democratic socialists needed to answer. Those questions seem just as meaningful to me today, so I'll re-pose them in my own words.

Visualize a vibrant, left-wing social democracy that we'll call Slightly-Imaginary-Sweden (SIS). How much would that place have to change, and in what ways would it have to change, in order to become an unmistakably socialist, not capitalist, country? And given so advanced and attractive a welfare state as SIS, why would a democratic socialist wish to move beyond it?

Since the time when Heilbroner and Howe asked these ques-

tions, the current version of the global economy has put intense pressure on the European social democracies and our weak equivalent in the United States. Some of the pressure is real in economic terms; some is politically generated. Everyone is supposed to scale back the welfare state and deregulate the economy in order to compete in the global market. In response, most socialists are trying to defend and rebuild what remains of social democracy. From my point of view, that doesn't make Heilbroner's and Howe's questions irrelevant. On the contrary, people who call themselves socialists need to explain what the label could possibly mean today; the old definitions sound obsolete. Here's a slightly revised version of how I once answered Heilbroner and Howe:

Looking around Slightly-Imaginary-Sweden, even the skeptical socialist is impressed. The labor movement is powerful and democratic. A solidaristic wage policy—centralized bargaining to achieve equal pay for equal work nationwide—forces unproductive enterprises to shape up or go under. This boosts overall economic efficiency. Strong tax incentives pull profits into reinvestment, rather than speculation. This further raises productivity and creates jobs. Intelligent labor market policies (job training and placement, subsidies for worker relocation, and so on) keep unemployment low.

Because the transition to new jobs is eased, the labor movement cooperates in industrial rationalization, once again increasing efficiency and growth. Surplus from this dynamic economy is used to protect the environment. The surplus also supports a system of universal, high quality social welfare programs that are decentralized enough to be user-friendly. Good education builds a skilled work force. Progressive tax policies shrink income inequalities, which keeps the market from listing too heavily toward luxury goods. Public agencies with good ac-

countability oversee the immense pension funds, thereby exercising some democratic control over investment.

National legislation prevents arbitrary firings, requires worker representation on the boards of directors of all firms, allows workers to halt production if they find unsafe conditions, and obliges employers to negotiate with local unions before implementing major changes.

After living under this system for some decades, most SIS citizens hold dear the values of equality, social justice, solidarity, democracy, and freedom. Images of poverty in rich countries like the United States shock them. They pressure their government to increase aid to the Third World. They point with pride to the fact that the overall health of SIS children in the bottom ten percent income group is identical to that in the top ten percent. During their six weeks of vacation each year, SISers love to travel abroad. But they return convinced that their system best implements basic values.

Life is sweet in SIS. Why go beyond? The socialist points out that because most industry is privately owned, the system is vulnerable. The left government and unions try endlessly to accommodate private capital. Not only must profits be high, private owners and investors must be persuaded that they will benefit more

by staying in SIS than by moving. This gives them excessive economic power and political leverage. But no matter how well the SIS system performs, private capital will defect if it perceives significant advantage elsewhere. National loyalty is a myth. The gains made in SIS remain precarious.

The socialist has other reasons for wanting to move beyond SIS. First, she would like to break up concentrations of wealth and power in order to promote democracy. Second, she believes that people can have substantial control over their work life only if the workplace belongs to them. Third, although SIS wins high marks for equalizing life opportunity, redistributing wealth, and fostering fine (socialist) values, the socialist thinks even more could be done.

What structural changes does the socialist propose? The innovations must do more than upgrade SIS—more than, say, improve day care or make taxes more steeply progressive; they must transform capitalist SIS into a socialist country. Forms of ownership must change, and the scope of markets be reduced.

The socialist recommends enlarging SIS's small socialized sector. Under the new system, the state would own enterprises in key industries as well as natural monopolies. Socialization would keep concentrations of power and wealth out of private

The original version of this essay first appeared in the winter 1991 issue of *Dissent*. It was reprinted in *Why Market Socialism?* (Roosevelt and Belkin, editors; M.E. Sharpe, 1994).

hands, give the government and labor movement more control over the economy, and prevent capital flight.

But the skeptical socialist acknowledges serious problems. The inevitable oversight agencies can undermine freedom of initiative for the managers of socialized firms. Assessment of responsibility becomes difficult. Politicians feel compelled to pour money into failing businesses rather than risk their careers by shutting them down. Even if a good managerial culture develops in the socialized sector, the entrepreneurial function, essential to a dynamic economy, may be lost. The socialist doesn't value efficiency, competitiveness, and economic growth for themselves, but rather wants enough of these to fund the institutions that make social justice and equality possible. No socialist party wins a free election advocating a state-controlled economy.

So the socialist suggests an alternative form of ownership—workers' cooperatives. Cooperatives, too, break up concentrations of power and wealth and prevent capital flight. They give people the greatest control over their work life, eliminate unearned income, and encourage participation. The decision is made to expand SIS's existing cooperative sector until co-ops are the dominant form of ownership.

Unfortunately, new difficulties develop. Co-ops within the same industry can compete ruthlessly. Some knock out others, leading to new concentrations of wealth and power. Some worker/members may resort to extreme self-exploitation to survive. The socialist proposes laws to counter monopolization and to protect workers from themselves. But more serious imbalances emerge: cooperatives resist taking in new members in order to keep profits per member as high as possible. Labor mobility decreases throughout the economy. Co-ops also resist labor-saving technology; members don't want to lay themselves off. This undermines overall efficiency.

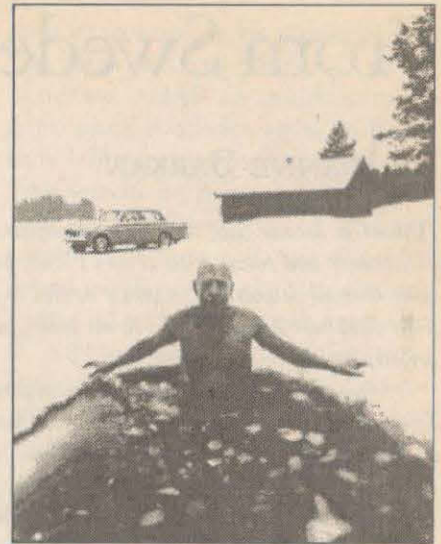
Then Co-op A decides to invest its surplus in Co-op B, turning Co-

op A members into capitalists. Co-op A has the possibility of becoming a powerful conglomerate. Laws are passed to prevent one co-op from investing in another. But this immobilizes capital, and the economy loses its dynamism. Finally, an economy dominated by cooperatives doesn't have labor unions uniting workers both industry-wide and throughout the economy. There is no solidaristic wage policy and therefore none of its far-reaching benefits.

Needing respite from the ownership question, the socialist considers the market and its noncapitalist alternative, planning. Comprehensive planning—including price setting, production quotas, and the allocation of capital, raw materials, and intermediate goods between firms—is firmly rejected. No one can fathom how to make such a system work, with its built-in inefficiencies, shortages, impossible data requirements, arbitrary prices, and inadequate criteria for evaluation. Mythic schemes that put billions of citizens in front of computer terminals in order to decide which sneaker styles to adopt and how many shoelaces to produce have no appeal whatsoever.

The socialist advocates a much lighter touch. The government will shape economic development by phasing out declining industries and promoting new ones with tax credits, discounted interest rates, and direct subsidies. The socialist keeps in mind that too much intervention will undercut market discipline and the economy will be dragged down by inefficient firms that don't cover their costs.

Until convinced that something else will work, the socialist opts for a level of planning and an economy of mixed ownership that resembles more than anything else Slightly Imaginary Sweden. The socialized sector has been enlarged a little to ensure socially useful production that the market neglects or provides only for the rich. Rigorous legislation promotes small businesses and disperses large concentrations of economic power. The co-op sector might be somewhat



Only slightly imaginary.

larger. And perhaps ways are found to root socialist values more deeply.

Our socialist is anything but satisfied. The fundamental contradiction of the system hasn't been resolved. Improved SIS is still vulnerable to capital flight. Investors might cut out anytime for places where the wages are lower, the regulations fewer, and the ethos less egalitarian, thus confirming the dictum that it's difficult to maintain SIS in just one country. The only solution is to operate in an international market where SIS conditions predominate. What SIS needs is Very-Imaginary-Europe (VIE). And in order to flourish, VIE probably needs the Very-Imaginary-Globe (VIG).

So the socialist joins the movement to build VIE and VIG. Yet all the while she's plagued by doubt: if an ever-improved SIS depends on the dynamism of private enterprise, how can the system ever be called socialism? The response for now is another question: if the system is equally characterized by the decommodification of human needs, market regulation, and the redistribution of wealth and power, can it still be called capitalism?

Joanne Barkan is a New York-based writer of politics and economics for adults and fiction for children. She belongs to the editorial board of Dissent magazine.

Revitalizing Democratic Socialism In the 21st Century

BY PAUL BERMAN

In my own supremely vague definition, socialism can only mean this: the well-being of society as a whole, and not just of a part. Socialism's prospects, from that supremely vague point of view, are reasonably good, in spite of every terrible thing that is said. Wealth and technology are increasing today—although they are not benefiting everyone equally, and are benefiting some people not at all. Democracy is spreading around the world—although not to every country, and very shakily in some countries, and sometimes a bit shakily in our own nation.

A spirit of democratic solidarity is spreading, too, in the form of what is called the humanitarian movement. It is the kind of spirit that causes large numbers of hardy individuals and sometimes even governments to come to the rescue of people in distress in other countries. But, as everyone has noticed, the spirit of solidarity has remained inconsistent and inefficient and sometimes hypocritical. In short, several trends around the world are pointing in directions that might very well lead to the well-being of all; and every one of those several admirable trends is also pointing the other way. From my perspective, the prospects for socialism are looking reasonably healthy in either case. For socialism is not just an idea that seeks the good of society as a whole. Socialism is a protest movement, too. At least, it's supposed to be. And the field for protest is not disappearing any time soon.

My great worry about socialism and its prospects in America rests on a different ground. The socialist movement arose in the nineteenth century, and it is still encumbered by all kinds of vines and weeds that sprouted in that long-ago time, and

have never been cut away. Will we be able to identify what is old and dead in our own ideas, and rid ourselves of those things? It won't be easy. It's always much simpler to go attack someone else than to sit down and try to rethink one's own ideas. The socialist movement ought to be a radical movement, which is to say, an imaginative movement. But for a long time now, and in America especially, socialism has been, in certain respects, a movement of deep conservatism, in its own fashion—a movement unwilling to alter its deepest ideas and habits, a movement pickled in nostalgia for a bygone age of heavy industry and giant bureaucracies and red radicalism.

I would like to propose a modest method for rethinking our own ideas. It is this: to take the traditional vocabulary of the socialist left and, as an experiment, forswear using it for a good long period. We might begin with the word "socialism" itself, together with its putative opposite, "capitalism." Each time we are tempted to use one of those weighty terms, let us push ourselves to find a more detailed, more precise explanation of exactly what we mean.

When we speak of "capitalism" or "corporate rule" or "corporate domination" let us ask ourselves: exactly which economic policies and practices do we have in mind? Let us learn to say that we oppose certain policies and practices—and be able to identify other aspects of modern economic life that we admire. If we want to talk about U.S. imperialism, let us push ourselves to define exactly what we mean, to



specify the policies, and why the term imperialism ought to apply. That particular exercise might help us distinguish between an authentic imperialism and an equally authentic humanitarian impulse to intervene here and there around the world—two very

different things that can sometimes look oddly similar. Do this throughout the traditional left-wing vocabulary.

It used to be said that socialism required a state-owned economy. Or else it was said, more attractively, that an authentically socialist society would require a collective economy under decentralized workers' rule—a republic of workers' councils. Neither of those ideas will get us anywhere today. People may go on using those old phrases, but it's impossible to imagine how the old phrases might apply to any real-life society of today or tomorrow.

In my opinion, we should be happy to concede that socialism is a word like *freedom*, which refers to something that can never entirely exist. There can always be more freedom, or less freedom, but freedom itself will never entirely exist; and likewise socialism. Freedom always requires new forms and new approaches; likewise socialism.

Let us not put ourselves in a position where other people are always proposing changes, and we are resisting them. Let us propose changes of our own. We should say: we are enthusiastically in favor of increasing global trade—and we have a proposal for how to achieve such an increase, and how to do it in a form that will lead to attractive conse-

quences at home and abroad. We are enthusiastically in favor of the computer revolution, and other technical innovations, too—and we have some proposals for how to advance those innovations in ways that will avoid dividing society into cyber-haves and cyber-have-nots.

In that manner we should reaffirm one other legacy of the socialist tradition: a legacy of utopian thought. Only, we should promise ourselves not to reproduce the failed and sometimes harmful utopias of the past, nor even the attractive utopias of the past. We need far-reaching but also plausible, proposals that might actually turn into policies.

We socialists have a long tradition of social service—of calling on our comrades to devote themselves to careers in the labor movement, in the social service professions, and in humanitarian movements. That is one tradition we should go on affirming. We should say that, as socialists, we don't pretend to have a single economic or political formula for all the world. But we do have a few ideas about what is a good way to live. We know that we admire people who actually produce things—people who do productive work. We admire people whose work is useful to their fellow citizens. We measure the value of labor by other standards than the dollar. We should be able to say: the socialist movement is not just a movement with a set of practical and imaginative ideas for the future, and not just a protest against conditions of the present. It is a movement with a set of values for everyday life. There is nothing very unusual or arcane about those ideas and impulses. Any number of people are conducting their own lives right now precisely according to the best socialist values. We should proclaim those people our heroes. No one else is going to do that—not in today's world of money-madness and glitz.

Paul Berman is the author of A Tale of Two Utopias: The Political Journey of the Generation of 1968.

On the Stump



DSA National Directory Horace Small spoke to our California locals in March.

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Left In: Martin Duberman's Defense of "Identity Politics"

In recent years there has been a mounting attack on "identity politics," on political groupings that push agendas based on race, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation. Such a politics, it is being argued, hardens boundaries between oppressed groups and prevents them from mobilizing collectively around "transcendent" issues of class and economic inequality.

The basic argument in Michael Tomasky's seminal *Left for Dead*, as well as recent works by the estimable Todd Gitlin and Eric Hobsbawm, run along these lines. No substantial or unified Left exists today. Instead, there are "several small Lefts," disconnected shards "sometimes agreeing on things, sometimes not." Among these fragments are remnants of the 1960s civil rights movement, some segments of organized labor, some environmentalists, and various activists for the disabled, aged and homeless. But towering above all these—"the vanguard, without question," in Tomasky's view—are ideologically driven "identity movements" based on race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation.

The problem with this, Tomasky tells us, is that the Left has "no analysis of what unites people." "Enlightenment universalism," to Tomasky, is the linking glue, the ideas of Locke, Hume, Voltaire, Jefferson, and Paine which he says bind countries together and animate their sense of mission and progress. Throughout this

analysis, "class" is simply assumed to be the transcendent category, and issues relating to gender, race and sexuality are marginalized as comparatively insignificant. But "class" is inherently a cultural issue. Solidarity based on economic issues can never come about until divisions based on gender, race and sexuality are recognized—if not resolved—as central to achieving such a goal.

Certainly, Tomasky, et al are right in deploring the Left's inattention in recent years to class-based oppression and to the mounting insecurities and resentments of blue collar life. And true, every time you push an anti-racist, pro-feminist or gay agenda you are likely to harden the opposition. This is necessarily so because polarization is how social progress takes place. The alternative, however—sometimes elevated as "pragmatic politics"—is to avoid giving offense by avoiding full-scale discussions of controversial public issues, which all but guarantees the preservation of the status quo. A non-disrupted civic culture is one where the outs have failed to make their grievances known, or have been successfully silenced. Putting primary emphasis on the placation of anger and the avoidance of offense is a prescription for social stagnation. The ideas being generated on the multicultural Left are not "supposedly" oppositional; they are fundamentally so. And they have everything to do with that "larger concern for common humanity."

An Interview with Martin Duberman

BY MICHAEL LIGHTY

DL: The concluding essay in your recent book, *Left Out*, is a provocative critique of a book by Michael Tomasky and of similar ideas put forward by others. Their position, you argue, boils down to: "Hey, the left has failed and it's the fault of identity politics." Why do you think they're saying that?

MD: Because, like most straight people—and perhaps especially straight white men—they don't want their own patterns of behavior or their own value structure challenged in any significant way. I think the underlying assumption is that their lifestyle is the preferred one, the desirable one, the normal one. They're

willing to understand that women have had a hard time, and gays and lesbians have had a hard time, and so forth. But beyond that, they really don't want to hear the details because they might affect how they view their own lives and internal narratives.

DL: At the same time, don't you think the GLBT movement has its own difficulties with radicalism, especially class analysis? In a recent issue of *Out* magazine, Pat Califia talked about class distinctions in the gay community, which is unacknowledged between predominantly male upper-class constituencies and ordinary gays. She had really felt a great deal of class oppression within the community.

MD: I feel close to her line of analysis and argument. I am not convinced that our community, even if we restrict it to the younger generation, is sufficiently class and race and gender conscious. If we talk about the national gay organizations, I see a notable absence of anything like class consciousness, or even race con-

sciousness. I think our national organizations are doing better now than they used to in terms of minority representation and women actually heading up some of the major organizations, but the value structure of these organizations seems to me so desperately middle class.

DL: I wonder what lessons you do draw from your work as a historian of the African-American liberation movement.

MD: The Black struggle was certainly formative for me personally in opening my eyes to a lot of inequities. I mean, in the fifties, I was your typical smug middle-class white boy. I don't think I was ever particularly smug, actually, only because I felt so rotten about who I was—namely, gay. But I was certainly a middle-class white kid who was not at all interested in politics, nor was my family. So it was the Black movement that opened up my eyes. Particularly important for me and for lots of other people was when the more radical

wing of the Black movement said that "Black is beautiful." Being different is beautiful. Not only that but, in many ways, because we've had a different historic experience and developed a different set of values and perspectives, there's a lot about us that—pardon me—is "superior" to the way the mainstream views things, particularly in how people relate to each other. So not only was it okay to be different, but we have something of importance to say to those mainstreamers who at their best have learned toleration.

DL: Do you think there is any lesson in how Paul Robeson navigated these issues?

MD: What so intrigued Robeson when he went to Russia was that, at least officially, the Soviet Union was encouraging minority cultures within its boundaries to preserve their unique heritages, and at the same time was offering all the rights and privileges of first class citizenship. And to Robeson, that was the ideal combination. He was not attracted to the melting pot—at least, by the 1930s. He understood the value of differentness and he wanted Black people to preserve their culture, and not try to make themselves into imitative little Anglo-Saxons.

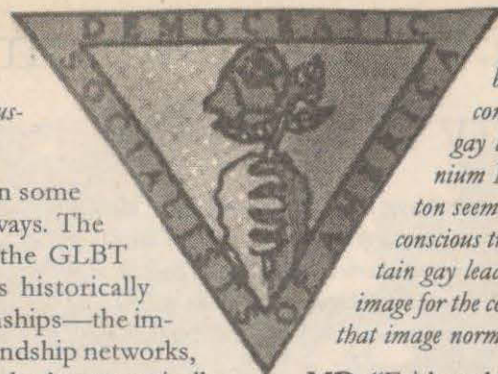
DL: You really argue for the inclusion of

difference as a way to strengthen the culture and promote justice.

MD: Yes, and in some very concrete ways. The way in which the GLBT community has historically formed relationships—the importance of friendship networks, the fact that we don't automatically buy into monogamous lifetime pair bonding as being the maximum road to human happiness; though I must say alarming numbers in our community do seem to buy into it. But this is a part of the larger problem: that Gay Americans *are* Americans. And most of them are mainstream in their values and they're not at all sympathetic to a Robeson, or to me, or to you.

I do think, however, that we GLBTers are doing a better job in dealing with issues of inclusiveness than the male straight left has done. There is much more pro forma acceptance of differentness that's coupled to a deep refusal to actually digest what that differentness means.

DL: Yet gay conservatives such as Bruce Bauer and Andrew Sullivan have an extraordinary currency. No longer are the radical voices necessarily the most promi-



nent ones representing gay and lesbian people. The upcoming spring national gay and lesbian Millennium March in Washington seems to be symbolic of a conscious transformation by certain gay leaders to project a new image for the community and make that image normative.

MD: "Faith and Family" is the announced theme of the march. Our leading institution is the Metropolitan Community Church. That has far and away more members than the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. I mean, gigantically more. When you look at our community—at its publications, at how it chooses to spend its money, at its seeming indifference to most political issues—it gets pretty depressing. It's like we don't have any troops. It's not just the straight Left. It's the gay Left. We don't have any troops either.

DL: Haven't the elected representatives of the gay community fit a more "normal" stereotype of masculinity?

MD: Oh, definitely. In fact, until recently the national leaders who would end up heading our organizations would be people like Tom Stoddard, who was a lovely guy and a dear friend, but the personification of the all-American boy. Nice-looking, blond, perky, smart, cheerful—the Boy Scout Oath. I think that has changed somewhat, especially since AIDS. Before, you just didn't see people of color in our movement—except the occasional person—let alone in positions of leadership. Now I think you see more, especially within AIDS organizations. But not many.

DL: And then there's the "anti-identity politics" crowd. If they allow for gays, it's normal gays basically, those who are most like them, yes?

MD: Oh yeah. Tomasky's very clear on that. He needs someone indistinguishable from him in



values and behavior, except for this trivial little matter of who they happen to find erotically exciting.

DL: Do radical GLBTers have a unique critique or different analysis of capitalism? If so, how might you articulate it?

MD: I don't think we have a different analysis. I mean, when I hear gay radicals speak about capitalism—which isn't often, because there aren't many of them—they tend to be saying pretty much the same things that the straight Left is saying. We usually bemoan (I include myself in this) the growing disparity in income and asset ownership. We talk about the fact that the jobs just aren't there any more for the unskilled or the semi-skilled.

Beyond that, I don't hear gay radicals coming up with either a new symptomology to describe what's wrong with capitalism, or anything like a new set of propositions as to how to either humanize it or ultimately get rid of it. That doesn't mean that there isn't within GLBT lifestyles some kind of implicit critique, which maybe needs to get better articulated. What kinds of non-economic relationships lead to the greatest amount of happiness? And what kind of sexual behavior? Is it serial monogamy? Lifetime monogamy? Is it having no primary partners, etc.? We have to discuss all those big, murky, and messy issues which people tend not to be talking about these days. They are to some extent in the gay world. But they aren't relating it concretely to how it might ultimately turn into a critique of capitalism.

DL: There was a critique, particularly in the 1970s, of capitalist patriarchy from a feminist perspective—which gay radicals adopted to some extent, and certainly lesbian radicals adopted. Do you feel that critique no longer has a presence in the community?

MD: I don't think it has a comparable presence to what it once did, and in any case, it was never very profound in my reading of it. I think up to the mid-1970s, as you say, many



lesbian feminists were saying we've got to look at this gender business very seriously because a lot of what we have taken for granted about what it means to be a man or a woman is nonsense. It's all based on social myth—not based on any kind of scientific findings though the scientific community likes to pretend that it is.

The re-definition of gender and the meaning of gender non-conformity is critical. We might talk—as Suzanne Kessler has—about the fact that we should not be performing surgery on intersexed infants—those kinds of issues. There is a vast range of what we're now calling genders. It isn't just that the binary doesn't capture it. It's just that five or six genders won't capture it either, and that any individual wanders back and forth—that we're full of all kinds of contradictory impulses and gestures and desires and feelings.

We must start to look at all that stuff—the horrible amounts of armor that we all wear in order to win some kind of credential or acceptance, and travel through life with a certain degree of comfort. We're all constantly repressing and constantly trying to push ourselves into shape so that we will be an acceptably certifiable male or female. And once you start breaking up all that stuff—which is why queer theory is so important—then I think everything else, conceivably anyway, could follow by

way of reconstruction. If our institutions as they currently stand are mostly serving patriarchal males, then once we've challenged and redone that notion of maleness, the institutions are clearly going to have to change accordingly.

DL: How?

MD: First of all, there won't be as many patriarchal males around who will need those institutional supports as desperately.

DL: Is the notion of identity politics—the notion of a singular coherent identity—meaningful?

MD: It isn't meaningful in the same way that race isn't truly meaningful from any kind of "scientific perspective." But to be of a certain color or a certain sexual orientation means that you have had a different experience. How different will depend on the individual we're talking about. But speaking of the group generally the experience has been different. And so this has created a legitimate subculture for a variety of groups, centered on ethnicity or race or gender or sexual orientation.

These identities, though, are very slippery because most of us have overlapping identities. Most of us will prioritize our varying identities differently at different periods in our lives. I can't speak for a black lesbian, but at some point her black-



ness may be overwhelmingly more important to her than her sexual orientation. And at yet another point, her class membership may be more important than either.

DL: *Do Tomasky and the other critics you write about want to unpack or even deal with the notion of overlapping identities?*

MD: No, he doesn't address all of that. As I say in the essay, he's not aware of all these arguments that take place within our community around these very issues of identity, and questions about how useful it is as a political organizing tool.

I think at the very least, GLBT identity is essential as an organizing tool. That doesn't mean that it should permanently determine the way in which we either define ourselves or organize politically. But if you go back to the 1960s, we had real grievances in common despite all of our other differences. Gay people were trying to connect with other gay people, and trying to find a social space where we could meet, have a drink, dance, or just congregate outside.

We knew we were being treated very badly and we wanted to do something about it. How else could we have organized in order, for example, to prevent police entrapment? We had to organize around our identity as "gay men." And the fact that we went to Gay Liberation Front

meetings doesn't mean that some of us were unaware of the fact that we sometimes found women attractive and/or slept with women, or whatever. And we had issues regarding race. We came to these meetings in order to deal with rather single-minded, uncomplicated questions of oppression.

DL: *Given the level of violence that still exists—and the threat of violence—one wonders how safe we are in public.*

MD: The need to organize around our sexual identities is still very much present. Which is exactly why we cannot do what the Tomaskys are asking us to do. We cannot now surrender our political involvement and identity politics and join him under this absurd banner he's proposing of universal enlightenment—whatever the hell that means—and all march forward into the civic sunset. What is he talking about? I mean, where is there any recognition of who we are on that banner, and where is there any programmatic articulation of what it will take to end our oppression specifically as gay people?

DL: *What's your evaluation of how "live" this attack on multi-culturalism and identity politics is among the straight Left?*

MD: I don't think it's diminished. I don't see any signs of that, but maybe I've simply missed some signs. It seems to me more and more books are coming out saying essentially the

same thing—identity politics has become a disservice to us all, including those minorities who have been involved in it.

I think this kind of exchange, however unfortunately angry it is, maybe has to happen—because Tomasky's book is extremely provoking. But having gotten through that initial stage of screaming at each other, what we really need to understand is that there's no necessary contradiction between arguing for a more economically equitable society, doing

justice and honoring the wide variety of human beings who exist in this country. I don't see any necessary contradiction. I think unless you're aware of both, in fact, you can't properly do either.

Unless you're aware that the class struggle is always inflected by issues relating to race and gender, how are you ever going to mobilize the working class, since this has been driven by racial hatred for centuries? And on the gay side, how are you ever going to get more gay people politically involved if you don't recognize that our national organizations do not have the kinds of agendas that are likely to mobilize people who live in small towns, who are paid badly, who have either no jobs or part-time jobs or lousy jobs? On all sides, we have to be aware of the dimensions of all these issues.

Martin Duberman is a Distinguished Professor of History at Lehman College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York and the founder of the CUNY Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies. Duberman's new book is Left Out: The Politics of Exclusion—Essays 1964-1999 (NY, Basic Books, 1999).

Michael Lighty is a former National Director of DSA.

The Exclusive DL Interview Richard Rorty

BY BILL DIXON

Richard Rorty is a professor of comparative literature at Stanford University and one of the most influential philosophers living today. Among political thinkers, Rorty is the leading proponent of pragmatism, a uniquely American school of philosophy associated with Charles Peirce, William James, and John Dewey, and more recently, Cornel West, who was once a student of Rorty's at Princeton. West recalls his studies with Rorty as "eye opening," "a major influence," and "music to my ears."

In his new book, *Achieving Our Country*, Richard Rorty argues that the time has come for the American Left to finally get down to the business of real-life political engagement. Recently, he fielded a few questions on this theme for *Democratic Left*.

DL: Here we are, the Republicans are on the retreat, and the Democrats seem poised to retake the House of Representatives. The Gingrich revolution is long gone and there's even some hopeful talk of a progressive/liberal revival. Are you optimistic?

RR: Certainly if we elect a substantial Democratic majority and a Democratic president we have the chance of some laws being passed that will lessen socio-economic inequality. But I am not sure that is likely. There is still a fear that Democrats will tax the suburban middle class for the benefit of the poor. And I would not be at all surprised by a victory for the junior Bush over Gore. If that happens, I would expect as little attention to the needs of the poor as we had under Reagan and the senior Bush. A Republican Senate and President would be quite enough to quash any progressive initiative.

Gingrich stupidly overplayed his

hand, but Trent Lott's more quiet, yet equally implacable, opposition to any help for the weak is just as devastating to the nation as Gingrich would have been had he continued in power.

DL: You sometimes make a distinction between movements and campaigns. Movements stay aloof from everyday developments and address themselves only to the big questions. Campaigns, by contrast, are defined by immediate, finite political goals. You argue that the Left would be better off leaving movement-building alone and instead learn how to throw in with a lot of campaigns. How would this specifically apply to socialist movements?

RR: I don't think there should be a socialist movement in the first world, just reforms in the interest of greater social justice—an attempt to make the U.S. more like Canada, France and Norway. In the rest of the world, I don't know. It now looks as if the attempt to create a standard capitalist marketplace is not working well in a lot of the former Communist countries, but I do not feel I understand the situation well enough to know why it works in Poland but not in the Ukraine. Maybe in some of those countries, and in parts of the Third World, something like a socialist movement would be a good idea.

It seems to me that in a lot of small countries which have attained a reasonable degree of social justice (Scandinavia, Holland, Ireland, etc.) there have simply been successive piecemeal reforms, stretched out over decades. As far as I can see, those reforms have accomplished as much as a great big movement might have done.

DL: But you are a lifetime member of

DSA, an organization firmly committed to building a socialist movement in the U.S. Isn't that a contradiction?

RR: I guess it depends on what you mean by a "socialist movement." If that includes movements for a living wage, for universal health insurance, for equal educational opportunity, etc., sure I support socialist movements. But I think we need to get rid of the distinction between "socialism" and "mere welfare-state liberalism," and say that the socialist idea is that the national product should be used to foster economic and social equality rather than being drained off by the rich. That can best be fostered by standard, reformist, welfare-statist measures.

DL: You write that you would like to see the line between liberalism and the Left become blurred, and that in place of the traditional opposition between radicals and reformists you would prefer to see a "reformist Left." Suppose such a thing was in operation right now. What sorts of things do you imagine it would be doing?

RR: It would pass all the laws that a majority of people now want passed—public financing of political campaigns, universal health insurance, gun control, etc.—and then go on to try to achieve a consensus on more controversial measures such as universal free day care, no more local financing of public schools, etc.

DL: Your agenda for the reformist Left doesn't seem much different than the agenda already being pushed by Clinton and Gore. What do you make of Clintonism? Do you think there's anything to his rhetoric of the Third Way?

RR: I don't think there is such a thing as Clintonism, and I think that the

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Evolutionary Capitalism

BY MICHAEL J. THOMPSON

New Year's Eve 1899 in Berlin saw a group of social democrats and socialists celebrating the arrival of the new century in grand style. Among them were Karl Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg and Eduard Bernstein. They looked with optimism to the arrival of the 20th century which they believed would usher in the fall of capitalism and the emergence of social democracy as the predominant political and economic system of the new age.

Capitalism would indeed undergo crises, both economic and political, throughout this past century. But as an economic system, capitalism has survived. In fact, it has done more than merely sustain itself; it has evolved and transformed. The concept of evolution does not, however, imply an ethical progression toward more democratic accountability of private interests, a more equitable distribution of wealth, or a more critical and reflective populace.

Marx theorized that every social system develops historically so that the internal contradictions within each system make way for an alternative to replace that system. Capitalism was, according to the classical Marxian theorems, supposed to produce unmanageable problems so that a successor would inevitably have to be introduced. This has not happened. Instead, there has been a tendency for capitalism to grow ever more entrenched in political, economic and social institutions both in the U.S. and globally.

The state of capitalism at the end of this century seems to defy the classic arguments for its inevitable demise. There is no real reason to assume, after all, that the system will collapse under its own weight. But this is because critiques of capitalism miss the mark. A critique of capitalism certainly must show the relation-

ship between the economy on the one hand and its political and legal institutions on the other. But it must also show how these links have evolved over time and the tensions between them.

Capitalism and democracy are not, by necessity, concepts which are dependent upon one another. Capitalism has historically given rise to the democratic impulses of working people. It has evolved into a less vio-

The realities of the capitalist economy, in any form, will constantly come into conflict with the ethical dimensions of a democratic society.

lent and somewhat less inegalitarian form as a result of the struggle between classes. But this evolution can never be complete: there can never be a true and total merging of democracy—with its ethical grounding of justice, equality and freedom—with a capitalist economic system which requires, as a precondition for further growth, the increase of economic inequality and the increased exploitation of those who lack the ownership and control of capital.

The realities of the capitalist economy, in any form, will constantly come into conflict with the ethical dimensions of a democratic society. The institutions of capitalism are not evolving in the direction of increased democratic participation. Instead, we have seen that within the United States increases in economic growth and activity have resulted in increases in economic inequality. Poverty remains at 13 percent nationwide—

using the modern conservative measurements for poverty—and it is almost double that rate within New York City, the financial epicenter of the recent economic boom. In addition, we are seeing the creation of permanent structures of inequality that are arising from the differences in basic educational opportunities between the upper, middle and lower classes. These structures of inequality are reproduced with each successive generation and are accentuated by policies that weaken the welfare state. Outside the United States, free market macroeconomic policies have contributed to an Asian crisis, have caused an economic meltdown in Russia and the former Soviet satellite states, and have raped Third World economies.

Capitalism cannot, therefore, evolve into anything resembling a democratic society, much less democratic socialism. Conflicts between capitalism and democracy will inevitably arise, and as public consciousness begins to sharpen, capitalism will begin to be critiqued and questioned in public debate. Those who control and employ capital both locally and globally will be forced to address forthright the cleavages that exist between rich and poor, within and between nations, and the power imbalances to which they give rise. DSAers must continue to offer alternative models of institutions that will show how wealth and public goods can be distributed equitably. Only in this way can the reality of democratic socialism cross from theory and idealism into concrete practice, and the realm of concrete freedom be made available to all.

Michael J. Thompson is a staff economist with the New York City Housing Authority and an editor of Democratic Left.

How Shaky Is the Ground?

BY MICHAEL R. EDELSTEIN

As I write this essay, a strange but horribly instructive tragedy unfolded on the airwaves. At least eleven Texas A&M University students died in the collapse of a forty-foot bonfire of logs on a football field. As a commentary on human enterprise at the end of the millennium, that pile of logs speaks volumes. To the shriek of chain saws, it originated on hillsides stripped bare, destroying habitats for thousands of creatures. Fuels had been expended to cut and move the logs to the flattened, filled and barren football field. The engineering of the pile was ill conceived, presumably not a concern because this was the ultimate short-term human activity—the pile needed to last only for a day or two. Safety was not considered, nor was the carbon spewing into an already choked atmosphere. The huge resulting pile of ash would also require disposal. Tradition, framed by sports rivalry, blinded all to the reality of what was being done. This was a true act of

hubris, human dominance and disregard.

The act could be dismissed as that of immature students or a careless institution. However, such a dismissal would neglect the fact that this disaster is a perfect analog for life on our planet at the dawn of a new century. The earth has been blighted by sprawling cities, fouled air, polluted and over-taxed water systems, depleted fisheries, species forced to extinction, soils squandered and foods grown in poisons, and massive population explosions of invader species, with perhaps humans being the worst. We have moved beyond Rachel Carson's clarion warning that the birds no longer sing to mark the spring to a loss of the seasons themselves. We have created major dead zones, and even many environments we inhabit daily are now assumed to be unhealthy.

American social democrats and liberals share many of the same notions about the need and desire to transform the earth to human purposes. But the fallacy of this approach is evident in the presumption that the earth can serve one species to the exclusion of others, or the belief that our transformative hubris does not ruin the very hospitality of a home that we seek to improve. We think in terms of buildings and roads rather than places; profits rather than enduring values; and air conditioning or water purification rather than protecting purity itself.

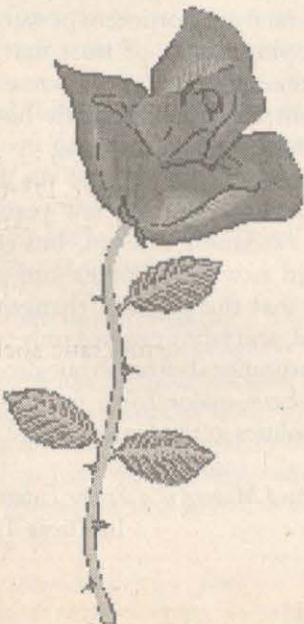
The questions we face today have to do with how to change our social paradigms to make little as well as big differences. Orienting buildings toward the sun for heat and to generate electricity. Using shade trees instead of air condition-

The questions we face today have to do with how to change our social paradigms to make little as well as big differences.

ing. Not building on flood plains or filling wetlands. Conserving water. Making buildings not only energy efficient but renewably based. Growing food organically and locally and using it locally. Minimizing consumption and waste while maximizing reuse and recycling. Reintroducing pedestrian life and revitalizing mass transit. Meshing human action to the cycles of nature.

Many social injustices reflect our underlying environmental alienation. Exploitation of laborers and of the land goes hand in hand. Reconsider the forty-foot high pile of logs. Do we grapple with how to pick up the messes we create, or do we just sit back and watch the whole thing go up in smoke?

Michael R. Edelstein is Professor of Environmental Psychology at Ramapo College of New Jersey and President, Orange Environment, Inc.



U.S. Labor's Modest Rise

BY DAVID MOBERG

The election of John Sweeney's modestly insurgent team to the leadership of the AFL-CIO has not yet turned around the American labor movement. It was hard to imagine that would be possible in four years, especially since most of the power to do things—organize members, strike, and contribute money and people to politics—rests with individual unions or even their locals. But it has made a difference that is important for both the labor movement and progressive politics.

First, there's been a change of psychology. After years of denying problems, then hunkering down and hoping they'd go away, the labor movement finally began to feel it was possible to take charge of its fate. The simple fact of a rare challenged election opened up the cobwebbed thinking, but there was also a growing willingness to try new tactics and to push them more systematically. A few organizers, most notably former AFL-CIO organizing director Richard Bensinger, pointed out that labor was declining not only because of employer opposition but because unions weren't really even trying to organize. Now the big problem is that labor can't find enough experienced organizers to lead the projects unions would like to undertake. The real change in mentality has only gripped a few national unions and within them only a small fraction of local unions, but it may be contagious.

Second, there's been a greater recognition of the need to mobilize members. More unions rely on their own members, either as paid or volunteer organizers, to recruit new workers to their ranks. Partly through the initiative of AFL-CIO director Steve Rosenthal, but also through the actions of individual unions, especially the Steelworkers, union members are once again more likely to be organized

to do political work both during elections and afterwards. The success in maintaining political operations outside of election time and of keeping members involved has been limited, but it's an important step forward. Also, the Union Cities initiative has encouraged local labor federations to be more active in their communities and to mobilize union members to help in each other's fights. That extends the already established labor-community work of the Jobs With Justice coalitions. The WTO demonstrations in Seattle were partly a tribute to the strong central labor council in the city and its leadership in the Union Cities initiative, as well as to the heightened sense of need for firing up the troops for battle. Again, this new sensibility is spotty, and in many cases there isn't enough effort to keep members involved and thoroughly educated on issues. But Steelworkers president George Becker brought more than 500 of his key "rapid response" team political activists to Seattle, not only to march in the big protest, but to spend a week in a wide range of actions and meetings that greatly deepened their understanding of the issues. The labor movement also has not given sufficient emphasis to the central importance of internal democracy for making mobilization of members—and unionism in general—work.

As part of mobilizing members, there's been a greater effort to coordinate activities. Often politics and organizing, for example, have been completely separated in the past. But through the Union Cities program, unions now are trying to make support for workers' right to organize a key criterion in endorsement and education of political candidates. And elected officials are asked not simply to make a pledge but to put their bodies on the line, coming out for

rallies or picket lines and protesting corporate misbehavior to executives. As part of the long-developing interest in corporate or coordinated campaigns, there's also increased effort to bring union pressure to bear on multiple fronts when there's a battle with a corporation over contracts, organizing or other issues.

Finally, labor is now much more willing to work in coalitions with other social movements. Equally important, the AFL-CIO and many unions are willing to work in coalitions that they don't control and which may even include groups that make some unions uncomfortable. The union summer program with young workers and students has proved especially fruitful, contributing to the emergence of the student anti-sweatshop campaign, which is turning into a national student movement against corporate power and abuse generally. The coalition work with religious groups is maturing rapidly, and there is a useful link with progressive academics. Through the fights over global economics in particular, labor and environmentalists are identifying a common enemy in corporate power, and developing bonds of trust that may help them work through some very difficult issues, particularly how to respond to global warming.

The development of the labor movement in the last few years has been extremely uneven, but it has opened new possibilities and given hope that the positive changes will spread, and labor can not only regain lost institutional strength but also once again be a major force for progressive politics in the United States.

David Moberg is a Senior Editor with In These Times.

Will Organized Labor Compute? Digerati-Do

BY ARTHUR B. SHOSTAK

Unions that invite me to help transform them into CyberUnions must first answer questions like these from an especially thoughtful federation of Canadian unions:

- What are the three most important things unions must do to survive—and thrive—in the brave new cyber-universe?
- If unions lacked the basic know-how and/or resources to get the job done before computers and the Web, how will these tools magically make them better?
- What can “logging on” do to overcome the undeniable disconnect between unions’ aspirations and what they actually achieve on a shopfloor-by-shopfloor, member-by-member basis?
- Do enough union members use the Web today? Is the Web the first, second or very last place workers are likely to look for help?
- In the near future of virtual corporations, could unions end up as nothing more than electronic hiring halls and central legal defense funds for feudal cottage-industry workers?
- Will the shift in the global economy from patterns of east-west, north-south trading blocks to digital patterns, force labor to look at building our own internal “Intranet” trading economy—i.e., pension fund control and investment, labor sponsored investment funds, union virtual banks, cooperative purchasing and housing and “green” industrial development?

The labor “digerati” who pose questions like these have lives steeped in Information Age technologies, and are living in a networked world of union boosters. These techno-savvy men and women have expectations concerning the renewal of organized labor that is

heartening.

When such activists envision the years ahead, they expect that computers will soon secure unprecedented access of everyone in labor to everyone else—officers to members, members to officers, unionists to non-unionists, and vice versa. They expect rapid polling of the membership, galvanizing of rallies or e-mail protests, spotlighting of societal models worth emulating and of wrongs for the righting. The labor digerati dream of entire libraries at a unionist’s beck and call, along with valuable arbitration, grievance, and mediation material. As if this was not enough, their vision includes unprecedented cooperation soon across national borders, an effective counter to transnational corporate behemoths.

The digerati, however, know full well that computerization cannot “save” labor. It is a complex, demanding, and often exasperating tool, only as reliable and effective as the humans in charge. It works best when part of a mix that includes old-fashioned labor militancy, political action, and one-on-one organizing. It works best when kept as an accessory and an aid, rather than allowed to become a confining and superordinating system. It cannot “rescue” labor, but unless labor makes the most creative possible use of computerization, it probably cannot be rescued at all.

My nearly 40 years of studying American unions has persuaded me that five years from now either unions will be ossified relics, or command respect as mature information-intensive power houses, fully the equal of anything in the business world.

Democratic socialists could help make a critical difference in helping unions and locals eager to compute in the 21st century. Labor’s high-stakes exploration of what computers make possible should receive more attention from the democratic Left. Coverage of labor, for example, in recent issues of

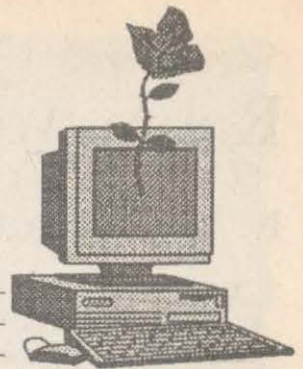
Challenge, Dis-sent, The Progressive, Working USA, Z, and other such publications have little to say about labor’s experiments with computerization.

Neglect may give way now to attention as the October 1999 bi-annual meeting of the AFL-CIO brought official word of the long-awaited full-scale entry of the labor federation into the Internet Age. Early in December, over 13 million members of the federation’s 68 affiliated unions were able for the first time to enter cyberspace through a labor portal featuring the homepage of their own particular international union. The site features news of labor matters here and abroad, and includes lists of labor-friendly and anti-labor companies. It offers invitations to share ideas with other unionists via e-mail, and features other aids to building an electronic solidarity community of union brothers and sisters—just the sort of vision many democratic socialists have long held for labor.

It is unclear how truly interactive the AFL-CIO’s system will prove to be. How much genuine two-way access will it offer to top leadership? Similarly, will it curb those brassy materialistic ads for goods and services, even at a loss to labor of needed revenue? And will chatrooms remain uncensored, despite the risks this poses to “big shots” as potential targets of rank-and-file barbs?

These reservations notwithstanding, labor is owed cheers for launching an exciting, venture, one that can only hasten the day when more internationals and locals will connect and seek members. The AFL-CIO’s entry into cyberspace may ensure that labor has a proactive place in the Information Age.

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This article is based on *CyberUnion: Empowering Labor through Computer Technology*, (M.E. Sharpe, 1999, Armonk, NY).

Robin Archer's *The Politics of Feasible Socialism*

BY RON BAIMAN

Why do we struggle for democratic socialism? Where do we get the inspiration and strength to endure hardship, marginalization, and sometimes persecution in order to press for a social goal that at times seems so unobtainable as to be laughable? Do we speak the truth? And if so, how do we actually make the name of our desire come true?

What we need to do is map out a feasible politics which will allow us to—paraphrasing Marx—not only interpret the world in various ways, but to change it. Robin Archer may have succeeded in doing this in his recent book: *Economic Democracy: The Politics of Feasible Socialism* (New York: Oxford/Clarendon, 1998). In a nutshell, Archer believes that human beings are motivated by a desire for freedom, and that freedom can best be achieved by forging strong centralized labor movements that are willing to make “tradeoffs” for greater corporate control and democratic freedom within a democratic corporatist political and social framework.

Archer's advocacy of freedom as the core value of socialism is rooted in the core enlightenment values of *liberte, egalite, and fraternite*. Socialism is most often associated with equality rather than liberty, but, as Archer points out, freedom lies at the core of equity and solidarity. The concept of freedom must be extended beyond the liberal notion of “negative liberty” or “freedom from constraint,” to the socialist concept of “positive liberty” entailing the “availability of means.” This “principle of equal liberty” joins together the conditions of “lack of constraint” and “availability of means”—both necessary for freedom of choice and action.

To the “principle of equal liberty” Archer adds the “axiom of sociality,”

which stems from the recognition that we need other people to achieve some of our goals. In enlightenment terms, this implies that freedom requires fraternity. We therefore have to distinguish between personal freedom, which can be had when individual choices do not affect others, and democratic freedom, which requires association. Democratic freedom, or the principle of equal liberty applied to associations, leads in turn to the principle that “all individuals whose ability to make choices and act on them is affected by the decisions of an association, should share control over the process by which those decisions are made.” If this were not the case, then all persons affected by the social decisions of associations could not be equally free.

But this basic democratic principle clearly can only be applied if one can identify the affected individuals entitled to controlling shares of an organization. This is Archer's principle contribution. He notes that it is important to distinguish between control which can be exercised directly by making decisions in the face of constraints, and control which can be exercised indirectly by affecting the constraints. For example, the controlling shareholders of a firm can exercise direct control by setting company policy through their power on the board of directors, whereas in a market economy, consumers can only affect firm policy indirectly through their purchasing decisions. Archer defines the condition of being a subject of authority as the condition of having to comply with the decisions of those in authority. He then determines that direct control of an authority is the appropriate form of control for subjects of authority, whereas indirect control is appropriate for affected non-subjects.

The major critique of wage la-

bor under capitalism is that it offers no “direct control” to the worker even though the worker is the one who is directly subjected to the authority of the capitalist. Also, the worker is not free to exit the working class even though s/he may be able to exit a given firm. Only with regard to the greater limits on the authority of the capitalist, and in the ability of the worker to exit the firm, is wage labor an improvement over slavery. Archer concludes that in terms of freedom, capitalism is an intermediate form between slavery and socialism. The goal of economic democracy, and one of the central goals of democratic socialism, is to give workers direct control over firms.

How to Get There

After noting the dangers of destructive class collaboration, public involvement, and centralization, Archer makes a case for progressive corporatism. This includes the passage of strong constitutional guarantees for internal union democracy along with some measures protecting local autonomy to enhance membership motivation, and strong pro-labor public involvement by Social Democratic or Labor governments. Progressive corporatism also allows for “societal bargaining” through which unions can combine their power with that of the government, and negotiate benefits for the entire working class. Societal bargaining permits negotiation over broad tax, welfare, investment and other economic policies, goals over which unions would otherwise have no control. The outcome of these negotiations may strengthen labor and lead to income tradeoffs like wage constraints for tax cuts, growth and employment, and increased social security or pension funding.

Archer details the ways in which unions in other nations have been able to gain greater direct control and control "against ownership." For example, the metalworkers union in Germany gained some control over technological change in 1973 and 1978, and in 1973 Swedish safety stewards gained a temporary veto right over unsafe work situations. These limited initiatives were completed by the far-reaching 1976 German co-determination law which gave unions near-parity representation on all large company supervisory boards, and a 1976 Swedish co-determination law which gave unions the right to negotiate the outcome of decision-making at all levels of firm management. Alternatively, control can be obtained "through ownership" as in the famous case of the Swedish Meidner plan enacted in a watered-down version in 1983.

In periods of "stagflation," such as that from the mid 1970s to early 1980s, Archer provides evidence indicating that more corporatist societies have outperformed all others in reducing the "misery index" of inflation plus unemployment through wage and price restraining "incomes policies." Under stagflationary conditions, Archer claims that "control through ownership" tradeoffs, such as exchanging increased employer contributions to union-controlled pension funds in return for wage restraint, are most likely to succeed because they both increase union control of investment and increase worker benefits in the future. He notes that the Swedish unions had much less trouble setting up union-controlled pension funds in 1974, which unlike the three earlier pension funds, was allowed to purchase stock, than they had with the 1983 "wage earner funds." Similarly, in Denmark a worker-controlled cost-of-living fund resulting from a 1976 incomes-policy agreement was subsequently allowed to invest a certain percentage of its assets in shares. Finally, in Australia in 1983, the Labor government entered into an "Accord" with employers which—with an assist from a long tradition of centralized government wage-fixing

through an Arbitration Commission—led to a tradeoff of cost-of-living wages plus productivity increments in return for a shorter work week, price restraint, lower taxes, and other employment growth policies.

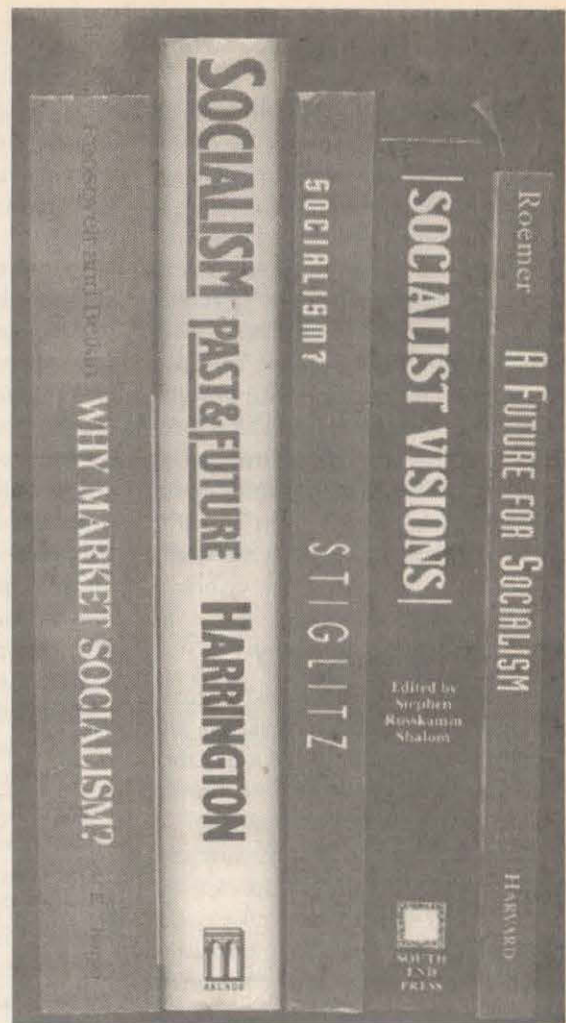
In the subsequent period of "structural adjustment" from the early to mid-1980s to the present, international pressures presented advanced national economies with a new and different problem of developing competitive export industries to solve job growth and international balance of payments problems. Archer argues that corporatist regimes offered a viable alternative to neo-liberal policies of cutting social wages and weakening union power. He notes that of the three key necessary reforms of wage flexibility, labor mobility, and training and work organization enhancement and flexibility, the most important "structural adjustment" goal is to facilitate labor mobility through skills training and productivity enhancement.

Contrary to received neo-liberal wisdom, centralized union power can foster increased labor mobility and economic efficiency and competitiveness by setting wage differentials across job categories rather than across firms or economic sectors. In countries where wage differentials are not based on job classification, highly paid workers—such as US steel workers—often have nowhere to go but down the pay scale. In this situation there will be strong resistance to structural adjustment as each union and group of workers fights for its own. Similarly, skill and training requirements can benefit from corporatist apprenticeship programs because of the well-known "free-rider" problem associated with individual firm-based

skills training. In the absence of negotiated corporatist agreements, productivity enhancements are also likely to face strong worker resistance because of fear of layoffs.

Extending the Vision

By confining his analysis to industrial relations, Archer is able to produce a compelling argument for a strategy for advanced country transition to a form of democratic socialism involving worker controlled firms within for-profit organized market economies. Missing from this book is an analysis of international and national economic policies that undermine this corporatist "high road" by continuously enhancing the power of capital, and reducing that of labor—and of the necessary macroeconomic policy responses. Corporatist facilitation of skill-based "wage flexibility" could undermine "freedom" by reducing



equal opportunity across workers if it is not offset by progressive income redistribution.

While I have no quibble with retaining important elements of a market economy, it appears clear that increased union power is necessary in order to achieve "socialist freedom." The influence of workers and citizens relative to capital should be increased through support for "fair trade" policies, low interest rates and selective credit targeting, public sector growth, direct development and social program funding, and other progressive policy measures. Without this parallel struggle for "extra-firm" public policy control, it seems to me that a corporatist transition is not viable.

Feasible Strategy

In the U.S. our task is most difficult because of the relative weakness and decentralized structure of our labor movement, and because we do not have a tradition of national wage arbitration beyond minimum wage and living wage laws. Archer, in fact, excludes the U.S. from his list of countries where a corporatist transition might succeed because a government dominated by a labor or social democratic party has never been in power

in the U.S. But it may be possible to find some signs of hope in the current political and economic climate in the U.S. In particular, the recent resurgence of "living wage" laws and increases in the minimum wage suggests growing political support for fair wages.

At this point the task of democratic socialists in the U.S. is *ideological*. It is extremely important that we uphold the banner of democratic socialism in the face of ridicule, rebuke, marginalization, and discrimination to let our compatriots know that serious people think that this is a viable political ideology. Working with students is absolutely crucial to maintaining and spreading democratic socialism as an idea. Efforts to reach out through publications, newsletters, presentations and conferences are also critical in this regard. *But we need to unite our ideological and activist goals.* To do this, our "ideological activism" should highlight the need for political control of markets and resource allocation by focusing on the fundamentally unjustifiable nature of capitalist "free market" income determination, and on the links between unregulated markets and environmental destruction.

At the national level, this takes the form of efforts to remove tax deductions for excessive CEO salaries and support for minimum (and maximum) wage laws, and other forms of taxation and redistribution. These kinds of efforts may contribute to a political wage-setting climate that would be more conducive to an Australian-style corporatist transition as described by Archer. At the international level, the campaign for Third World debt relief highlights the way in which the capitalist system places a higher priority on debt income for private rentiers in the advanced countries than on health, education, and economic development for the poorest humans on the planet.

Overall, Archer's book is a "must read" for those concerned with how to achieve democratic socialism. Archer has tackled difficult transition problems and outlined a closely argued and realistic strategy that should inspire us all to roll up our sleeves and get to work. It is a program that may or may not be viable, but we have our work cut out for us.

Ron Baiman teaches at Roosevelt University in Chicago, and is active in Chicago DSA.

Rorty Interview/ *continued from page 25*

Third Way stuff is so much hype. If Clinton had Democratic majorities in Congress to work with, I think he might well have gone down in history as a very good president. Whatever the defects of his health plan, it would have been better than what we have now, but the insurance lobbies bought enough TV ads to scuttle it. After the 1994 election, Clinton never had much of a chance to get an important initiative made into law. He seems to me basically a good guy—no more deceitful than FDR or LBJ, and with a good heart.

DL: You write that when people like Cornel West identify with Marxism, it doesn't seem like anything more than sentimentality. Do you think that Marxist theory is

best left as a thing of the past, or might it have a future in the age of globalization?

RR: There are still a lot of places in the world where things will probably only get better as a result of violent revolution. Because of historical lag, these revolutions will probably be led by people who think of themselves as "Marxists," but thinking of themselves that way may not (with luck) have much influence on what they actually do when they get into power. I'm one of those optimists who think that a shrewder and less up-tight U.S. government might have co-opted Ho Chi Minh back around 1950, and thereby have avoided a lot of bloodshed. So I would hope that the U.S. would try

to suggest to revolutionaries—in Third World countries where only revolution will do—that they might want to read less Marx and more Dewey.

DL: Of course, there are revolutionaries around the world—and not just in the Third World—who do not share your faith in the ability to change the system through dialogue and elections. It also seems unlikely that those who have suffered most from the injustices of capitalism will support such a middle-of-the-road approach to the struggle for justice.

RR: All I could say would be: "You know more about the situation in your country than I do. If you think

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Soul of a Citizen

BY ANETTE SASVARI AND SOLVEIG WILDER

DL: *In your latest book, Soul of a Citizen, you examine the personal and psychological aspects of activism. What made you choose that focus?*

PL: I saw the power of the movements that emerged in the sixties and then how some of them melted away. I realized that we may have wonderful stands on issues in the world, but unless we actually figure out how to get people involved we're not going to make much progress. When I did a book twenty years ago on atomic weapons workers, I looked at how people avoid grappling with large, complicated issues. It was also the theme of my book on peace activists. In *Generational Cross Roads*, a book on students, I compared a particular sector of young men and women who are both active and *IN*-active. Now with *Soul of a Citizen*, I am tying all those threads together and asking, "Why should we act on any of these issues?" and "What keeps us involved in the long run?"

DL: *Most theories of social movements emphasize political, economic, and social conditions that lead people to mobilize rather than personal and psychological factors. How do you feel about those theories?*

PL: If you take DSA as an example, where membership fees are collected in order to hire organizers to mobilize people, then obviously structural issues are important. But my sense is that a lot of those theories neglect the individual. I am not saying that social change occurs just through individual choices. But each person has to make an individual choice whether or not they are going to get involved. I honestly feel that the people on the Left generally tend to neglect that, and that they take it for granted that if people

understand the issues they are going to get involved because they realize the issues are urgent. I just don't think that is true. People need a sense of efficacy, they need a sense of possibility, and they need to see the issues, not only as abstractions, but in some way that they can put a face on. People can have all the resources available, all the clear information on issues available, and they will still not get involved.

DL: *You say that we are living in a time of cynicism.*

PL: We are getting messages from our culture that say: "Don't try to change anything because it is not going to do any good;" "People tried to change things thirty years ago and they just messed things up"; and "No one is going to listen to you anyway, so don't even start." There's also a sensibility in the media that says, "Don't look seriously at any of the issues that we have to face in this society. If you're fine you can slide by. You can be exempt." And these are things we have to challenge—as socialists and as human beings.

DL: *Can you elaborate?*

PL: I think the main reason for the increase of cynicism in our time is the absolute dominance of the market ethic, the notion that everything is for sale. At the base of democratic socialism is the ethic of humans having value as human beings and not just what they're worth on the labor market or as consumers. Twenty years of candidates running against the government has increased our cynicism, in some sense removing the notion of a common good. The impact of this is most pronounced in people's sense of helplessness to change anything on

the national scale, so they end up confining themselves to purely local ideas with damaging results. One of the things that disturbed me about welfare reform was the paucity of opposition, particularly from folks working with very immediate local projects in low-income communities.

DL: *You indicate that the failures of the Left have also contributed to the cynicism of our times, and that our inability to point to examples of what we are struggling for discourages many people from getting involved.*

PL: People don't feel that they have a "magnetic north." They want some model of an actual society, whether it be Sweden or Nicaragua, that they can point to. But what we are left with is instead this institution from this country and this institution from that country. We have pieces of a vision but we don't have a single blueprint, and I think that makes it hard for a lot of people.

DL: *I also got a sense from Soul of a Citizen that you feel technology is distorting our sense of cause and effect, and therefore erodes our sense of responsibility and increases cynicism.*

PL: I definitely recognize the value and potential of new technology. One group used e-mail during the Clinton impeachment charade, gathering three hundred thousand online signatures in three weeks at a cost of about eighty-five dollars to say: "Let's end this garbage, we have better things to do." They are continuing to use that same network of people, which is now about half a million, to try to plug into key Congressional campaigns. That's neat. That's something that could not have happened without new technology.

On the other hand, face to face connections to me are what build and sustain communities. I don't really believe that the Internet can substitute for that.

DL: Isn't our sense of connection to communities eroding in general?

PL: Robert Putnam shows that there has been a decline in participation in a number of traditional activities, including church services, club meetings, and even in the amount of time people spend going on picnics or going over to people's homes for dinner. Two things have taken up the slot: one is the increasing workweek, and the other is watching screens, either TV or computers.

DL: How do we counter that?

PL: So there is a fundamental isolation that has increased in the society. A good example is the commercial fisherman that I profile. He has done incredible work building alliances between commercial fishermen and environmentalists. But he began by first building a sense of community amongst the fishermen so that they were not isolated from each other, and then he connected them with environmental groups around issues like sustainability of the salmon run, with testimony at the Endangered Species Act hearings.

DL: Terms like "community" are often used by the Right to build support. How does the Left position on these issues differ?

PL: The example of the fishermen is instructive. The coalition that was built to support progressive political initiatives included Pentecostal churches—they literally had an Assembly of God preacher making an invocation against greed on the steps of the State Capital in Washington! I thought that was wonderful. I mean, obviously I have got profound differences with the Pentecostals on things like sexual politics, but to be able to draw them into a coalition that is challenging very

large corporate entities on the notion of environmental sustainability was terrific. I find when I deal with folks like that that there are a lot of points of potential alliance. I think we have our own stereotypes about certain groups of people that are very damaging because they prevent us from reaching out.

DL: What are some other ways that we can challenge the cynicism of our time and encourage people to get involved?

PL: Those that come of age nowadays aren't taught about the movements that have changed society. We know the names of movements, but we don't know much more than that. It has therefore become hard for most people to imagine what it means to take on the very complicated and difficult task of changing society.

The example I give is the Rosa Parks story, which everybody over twelve says that they know. But what they know is the version that says that one day this woman decided not to move to the back of the bus which then started the civil rights movement. It's as if it was out of nowhere. Instead, the real story is that Rosa Parks was involved for a dozen years with the local NAACP chapter, she took training sessions at the Highlander school and learned to think very strategically, and then one day decided not to move to the back of the bus. That's not out of nowhere. To me, the actual message is much more empowering than the media cliché of creating this perfect change in history out of nowhere. So part of our challenge is to recapture that history and communicate it to people getting involved for the first time.

But there are some who know the history of social movements and have lots of books on their shelves, but forget the real and powerful lessons. The folks in DSA who get burned out are more likely to be in this category. Given that this is not an easy time for progressive social change, we forget what it means to keep on for the duration. Our cul-

ture is so focused on the immediate, the momentary.

My favorite activist in *Soul of a Citizen* is a 101-year-old environmentalist. She started off in the thirties in the labor movement, and helped pass the first social security laws in Washington State. After a demoralizing electoral defeat, I was driving her home and said to her, "These are hard times." She laughed and said, "Ah, you should have seen the McCarthy era." I asked her how she manages to persevere. She said that you can't do everything, but you can do what you can, and then you can do some more, and you can do that your entire lifetime. She also said that you can go out, take a walk in the woods, see a river and look at a mountain, and then you can come back ready to take on Exxon.

DL: What other things distinguish those who get involved and stay involved from those who don't?

PL: They recognize the power of stories of injustice and stories of possibility. Often we are taught, particularly in academia, to think abstractly, and hear the numbers and statistics. Those things are certainly relevant, but it is different from really grasping what it means for somebody to live without health care, what it means for somebody to go to school where kids are afraid of getting shot, and so on. And it is stories like those that galvanize people.

I remember asking this group of burned-out activists about what got them involved originally, and they all talked about very specific events of moral outrage that impelled them to act. Suddenly, there was a little bit of optimism in their voices and I felt that they were connecting to what originally impelled them to act. And I think that the reconnection to those gut stories that made us want to be involved is very, very important for keeping us going. Otherwise, we can get lost in looking at the difficulty of the overwhelming scale of the problems that we try to tackle.

Those who get involved and stay involved are also able to live with uncertainty. I interviewed another group of burned-out activists who had at many points in their lives called themselves socialists, and they talked about their uncertainties after the collapse of the Eastern block model. Though they had profound criticisms of communism, they didn't want a capitalist, multi-national-dominated world either. They said things like, "I'm not quite sure what goes in its place. I see partial answers, but I don't have the complete answers that I thought at one point might emerge." They were striving for a "perfect standard." They felt that they needed to know every fact, figure and statistic, and had to be able to debate Henry Kissinger at the drop of a hat.

DL: *You write about the way social movements "surge and recede." When an emergency is over, movements slow down due to disappointments and burn-out. Can you talk more about the sustainability of activism and the role organizations such as DSA play?*

PL: When you fight a losing war in Vietnam, the movement grows, or when Reagan pushes us to the brink of nuclear cataclysm you see a huge movement. Part of our challenge is to be able to articulate the slow burning crisis. There are crises going on in our culture, but they are not ones that suddenly seem to threaten everybody. To some extent, people did that with the anti-apartheid movement. It is also happening somewhat with the sweatshop movement. You certainly saw that with the civil rights movement when

it surged in the mid-fifties. The crisis was there all along, but it wasn't perceived as a crisis by most Americans until the movement put it on the agenda.

As for DSA, I focus less on institution building in my book than I do on individual choices. But the institutions that we are part of are critical vehicles to be able to support continued activism—we don't act alone. Movements disappear when we have a bunch of disconnected radicals—people that want to see change in society but aren't part of any institutions that are actually working for it. They can watch the news and curse at the TV, but they end up being not really engaged. So DSA is a vehicle for people to continue their engagement in a culture that hides knowledge about the struggles and victories.

Desmond Tutu thanked American students recently: "We might have never had freedom without you." A very inspiring moment that you're never going to get from NBC or *The New York Times*. If you are part of a movement you are more likely to hear about it, to learn about it, to draw on it for sustenance. That's what we are supporting when we connect to DSA—the ability to retain and communicate the lessons of our common memory, to draw on common issues and work on them together. To find out about victories in one place that you would have never have heard about in another city.

DL: *What other things do you think that DSA and its journal, Democratic Left,*

can do in the next century to build and sustain activism?

PL: I have been a member of DSA for about seven or eight years. I have always liked *Democratic Left*, and I think it is a good magazine. It is not pretentious, and I really value that. The tone is not, "Hey, we know everything and we are going to tell you about it." The tone is more like, "Hey, you know we are in the soup together and here is what we're thinking. Let's work together through this." That is a much better tone from my perspective. DSA has an uphill road because we live in a time and in a country where the notion that there can be democratic socialism that actually works is so remote that it is hard to reclaim. So I think we need to concretize individual stories. They make connections vivid so that people can think about politics and change.

Paul Loeb is an associated scholar at Seattle's Center for Ethical Leadership, and is the author of Soul of a Citizen—Living with Conviction in a Cynical Time (St. Martin's Press).

Future DLs:

- Howard Sherman's *Free Goods*

Rorty Interview/continued from page 32

violence is necessary before things can get better, you are probably right." But I don't know whether the present oligarchs and kleptocrats will be worse than the revolutionary leaders. Sometimes the new ones are worse, sometimes they are better.

DL: *You describe John Dewey's philosophy as a question of what philosophy could do for the U.S. What do you hope intellectuals and academics might realistically do for the U.S. in the foreseeable future?*

RR: Just keep on dramatizing social injustice—keep on rubbing the

public's noses in the facts of poverty and intolerance, and reminding them of the success the rich are having at bribing politicians and keeping all the goodies for themselves.

"The Best Recruits"

By JOHN C. CORT

Irving Howe once told me that the best potential source of socialist recruits was in the religious community. I have often wondered why he thought so. It has not proven true so far, at least not in this country. Instead, the Christian Coalition has become a bulwark of the Republican Party. Nevertheless, Howe had reason for optimism, for religious socialism has a long and rich tradition.

Irving Howe was one of the best-read men in this country. He was surely familiar with the New Testament as well as the Old, and it seems a safe bet that his knowledge of the New Testament was one reason why he could say that the religious community was a major source for the recruitment of socialists.

The first Frenchman to use the word "socialism" was a Protestant theologian, Alexandre Vinet, in 1831. He used it to represent the opposite of individualism. Other French Christian socialists of the pre-Marxian period included Pierre Buchez, Victor Considerant, Etienne Cabet, and the German aristocrat who became a Catholic socialist bishop and an admirer of Ferdinand LaSalle, Wilhelm von Ketteler. The history of Christian socialism in England goes back to 1849, when John Ludlow, Charles Kingsley and Frederick Maurice, Anglican socialists, organized an association of worker cooperatives.

British Prime Minister Blair has been a member of the Christian Socialist Movement (CSM) since 1991, and about half of his cabinet are also CSM members, as well as 50 British MPs. Christian socialists are a major element in the Social Democratic Party of Sweden, and there are also Christian socialist organizations in Norway, Denmark, Finland, Austria, Switzerland, Germany, Holland, Lithuania, Slovenia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. Most of these organiza-

tions, as well as the Religion & Socialism Commission of DSA, belong to the International League of Religious Socialists (ILRS). Delegates from the R&S Commission have attended ILRS Congresses in Sweden, Nicaragua (as guests of the Sandinistas), England, and Finland.

Religious socialism in the United States also has a long history. Henry James, Sr., a Swedenborgian Christian, insisted in 1848 that the goals of Christianity and socialism are identical. Organizations and newspapers followed in 1872, culminating in the Christian Socialist Fellowship in 1906, which boasted 27 chapters and a newspaper, *The Christian Socialist*, with 5,000 subscribers. This paper endured from 1903 to 1922, the period when Eugene Debs, a Christ-like figure who revered but did not believe in Christ, was winning more votes than any American socialist before or since.

From 1931 to 1948 Reinhold Niebuhr presided over the Fellowship of Socialist Christians (FSC), which published *Radical Religion*, changing its name to *Christianity and Society* in 1940. By this time Niebuhr was voting for Roosevelt. Torn between a Socialist Party that was pacifist and "the nightmare of tyranny in Russia," Niebuhr led the move to dissolve the FSC into the Frontier Fellowship in 1948. He left behind such distinguished disciples and believers as John C. Bennett, Robert McAfee Brown, Georgia Harkness, Roger Shinn, James Luther Adams, and Paul Abrecht. Up to and during those years, religious socialism was an almost exclusively Protestant phenomenon.

DSA's Religion & Socialism Commission

Religious types continued to meet informally at conventions of the Socialist Party and DSOC. But it wasn't until

1977 when delegates to the DSOC convention in Chicago met and organized a Religion & Socialism Committee (later Commission) and decided to publish *Religious Socialism*.

Among early co-editors and contributors were Harvey Cox, Cornel West, Peter Steinfels, Jim Wallace, Sis-

In the religious community the challenge is to persuade Christians that the Christian Coalition has very little to do with Christianity.

ter Mary Emil Penet, Maxine Phillips, Rosemary Ruether, Arthur Waskow, Joe Holland, Jim Adams, and Gary Dorrien. In one interesting three-way exchange, Mike Harrington, Rosemary Ruether and the famous labor priest Monsignor George Higgins sparred over Mike's claim that "the political and social Judeo-Christian God of the West is dying"; Rosemary's claim that Mike did not appreciate the vitality of liberation Christianity in Poland and among the Sandinistas in Nicaragua; and Msgr. Higgins's claim that the Sandinistas were not all that great or that Brazilian bishops did not fit Rosemary's dismissal of the institutional church in Latin America. That same year Maxine Phillips, then organizational director of DSA, organized a successful Religion & Socialism conference in a Catholic retreat center. Most of those listed above spoke there, plus Dorothee Soelle, the German poet/theologian. About 140 attended, including a sizable Jewish contingent attracted by Arthur Waskow. There was high enthusiasm.

There has been a renewal lately, with a new editorial team at *Religious*

Socialism consisting of four co-editors: Phillips, Andrew Hammer, Rev. Norm Faramelli, and this writer, assisted by Cox, Cornel West (Charles West, the Princeton theologian, is also a contributor), Jack Clark, Rev. Judy Deutsch, David O'Brien, and Michael and Rev. Marcia Dyson. Grateful mention should also be made of Jack Spooner and Curt Sanders, who kept *Religious Socialism* alive from 1988 to 1998, with help the last few years from David Seymour and Lew Daly.

The future of religious socialism, like the future of DSA, would seem to depend largely on the hope that the people of this country can absorb the fact that socialism has nothing whatever to do with authoritarian Com-

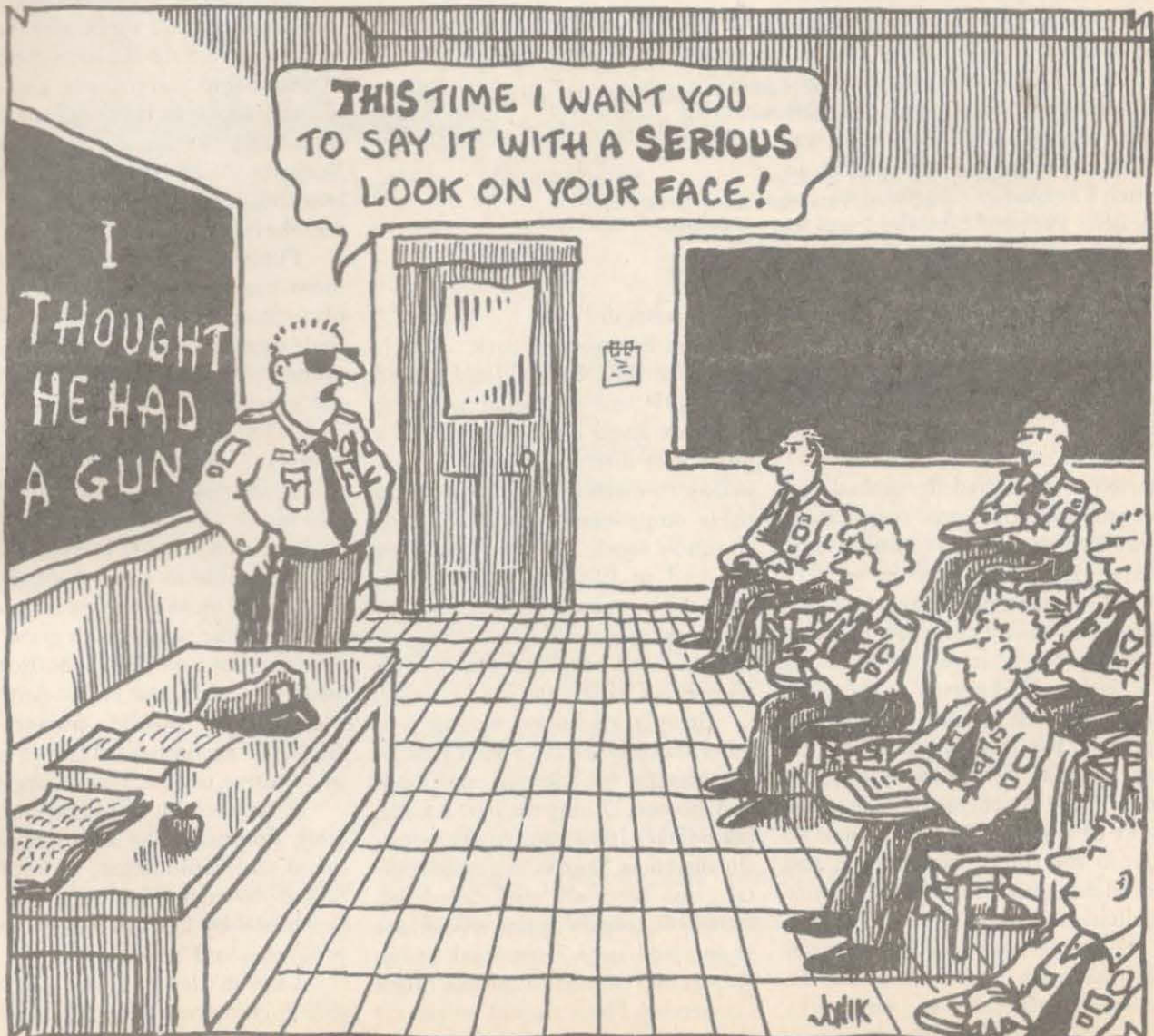
munism. In the religious community the challenge is to persuade Christians that the Christian Coalition has very little to do with Christianity.

The more knowledgeable Catholics might be encouraged to note that the social teachings of their Church bear a remarkable resemblance to the Stockholm Declaration of the Socialist International. Mike Harrington, recognized by his comrades in the SI as their best writer, had a lot to do with the writing of the Stockholm Declaration. Although Mike described himself as "a Catholic atheist," he was a graduate of the Catholic Worker movement and perhaps in some mysterious way his atheist Catholicism found its way into the Declaration. In

the histories of both socialism and religion, stranger things have happened.

John Cort has been a member of DSO and DSA since 1975. In addition to his duties as co-editor of Religious Socialism from 1977 to 1988 and from 1998 to the present, he is currently treasurer of the Religion & Socialism Commission.

New subscribers to *Religious Socialism* (\$10) get a free copy of John Cort's, *Christian Socialism*. (Make checks payable to *Religious Socialism*, 1 Maolis Road, Nahant, MA 01908).



A Socialist Veteran Remembers Memory and Hope

BY ERNEST MORGAN

In my autobiography, *Dealing Creatively with Life*, I offer dramatic memories of the pioneering family I was born into., my insurgent years as an Antioch student, my marriage to a wonderful woman with whom we raised a family, ran political campaigns and founded a school. I then tell the story of my business, begun on a shoestring in 1926, with a democratic structure and an emphasis on racial equality.

In the Great Depression, I helped organize a successful barter movement—an important factor in the survival of our family and our business. I also helped organize the unemployed. An active religious life with a strong social orientation was a factor in my political career, in which I served as Chairman of the Socialist Party of Ohio and was its candidate for Governor. Quite by accident I became a leader in the movement for death education and funeral reform. My book in this field, *Dealing Creatively with Death*, sold over a quarter of a million copies.

In the meantime, the business I started in 1926 had flourished and become a multinational corporation with 700 employees—and is employee-owned. So now in my 95th year, I am the retired president of a highly successful company living in comfortable retirement. But I do not wish to find myself in the position of the rich man in a sinking ship going to the bottom clutching his bag of gold. Our society desperately needs to correct maldistributions of ownership and income so that in the future my children and grandchildren will live in a more egalitarian society.

A more equitable distribution of ownership and income can be achieved in the following ways with-

out cramping or disrupting the workings of individual enterprise:

The Universal Stock Ownership Plan (USOP), as put forward by economist Stuart Speiser, is a procedure whereby a portion of the growth of net worth of major corporations would be transferred in the form of stock to the general public via an arrangement described

A technologically advanced society, dominated by a paradigm of greed and exploitation, is doomed to self-destruct.

as “superstock.”

The Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) is closely related to USOP and is a plan whereby firms are given tax exemption on a portion of their earnings if they are willing to distribute this portion to their employees in the form of common stock. My own company has had an ESOP plan for years, whereby its growth has been stimulated through reduced taxes on profits—and employees now own 63 percent of the stock.

Steeply graduated income and inheritance taxes are a vital part of any plan for broadening ownership and income. During the past decade, tax policies have gone in the opposite direction. Sharply increased capital gains taxes are also called for. However, capital gains which are channeled into Universal Stock Ownership or into Employee Stock Ownership Plans should be tax ex-

empt.

Land trusts are an extremely useful type of land tenure. The concentration of land ownership and the exploitative pattern of land tenure distort our economy and are reflected in badly inflated costs both of rents and of home ownership. Forty years ago, 60 percent of American families could obtain housing for 25 percent of their incomes. Today only the richest 10 percent can do this.

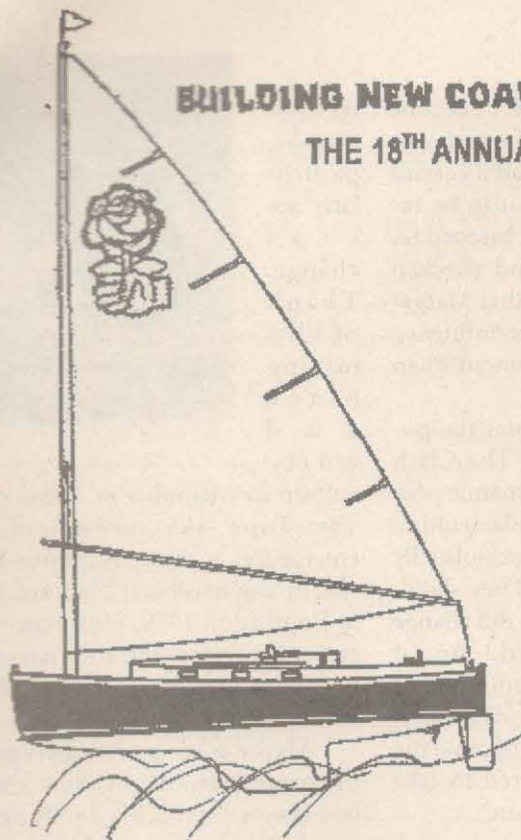
Co-ops and credit unions, two time-honored and successful forms of enterprise, help broaden the base of ownership and income, and frequently increase buying power as well. The National Cooperative Business Association reports that large numbers of Americans are members of co-ops.

Public ownership and management has always filled a necessary place in our society, but they have their own set of problems and limitations. A major problem has been the practice of political patronage. In the Tennessee Valley Authority, of which my father was the first chairman, patronage was firmly rejected and hiring was done strictly on the basis of merit. Partly as a result, the TVA was able to carry through the largest and most complex engineering job in the world, with good pay and excellent working conditions, and with fairly low costs. Any expansion of public ownership should be accompanied by this kind of rigorous organizational hygiene.

A technologically advanced society, dominated by a paradigm of greed and exploitation, is doomed to self-destruct. That paradigm can be shifted by DSA in its education programs and activism.

I haven't let up at my age. Neither should you.

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Can Music Still Make a Difference?

BY BILLY BRAGG

To be honest, that perpetual question, Can Music Make a Difference?, is one that I don't consider much. Even if music can't, that shouldn't stop us from trying. Also, when you've written a political song, how can you ever gauge if it has made a difference? It seems to me that the relationship between music and change is more complex than simply the singing of songs.

For instance, at a concert in New York a year or two ago, a guy came up and gave me his card. He was a labor lawyer and he told me that this career choice was a direct result of my music. Now, that made me feel pretty proud. But upon reflection, I felt that such a phenomenon could be looked at in a number of different ways. For instance, has my skill as a songwriter ensured that there are better labor relations in the New York area, or did I just provide the soundtrack to this guy's vocation? After all, it's not me out there defending people in the workplace, is it?

Was that attorney an activist drawn to Billy Bragg or did Billy Bragg make him an activist? Ask

yourself the same question: I bet your answer is similar to mine. I was drawn to The Clash because I had a certain worldview and wanted that to be reflected in the music that I listened to. I read their interviews and checked their lyrics, but I suspect that Margaret Thatcher was a bigger influence on my political development than The Clash.

Which is not to dismiss the politicizing effect of punk. The Clash opened my mind to the dynamic possibilities of political popular culture and, in doing so, they undoubtedly changed things for me. They didn't change the world but they did change my perception of the world. And it was because of my disappointment in the failure of bands like The Clash to change the world that I became the kind of performer prepared to take a stance against Thatcherism.

This suggests that music does not have the impact of an event, which changes the world instantly and tangibly, but is more akin to an idea, which works in a gradual way—making small subtle changes that build up over time. In that sense, music can be a cata-

lyst for change, particularly social change. Think of Elvis mixing black and white

culture in Memphis in 1954, or the Two-Tone ska movement that emerged as a direct response to the rise of the neo-Nazi National Front in England in 1979. However, music can only perform this role in conjunction with genuine forces of change within society.

Maybe a song of mine changed the perception of our New York labor lawyer friend. Maybe he just enjoyed jumping around his bedroom to *Help Save the Youth of America*. Whichever way you look at it, one simple fact remains: it is up to the audience to change the world, not the performer.



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