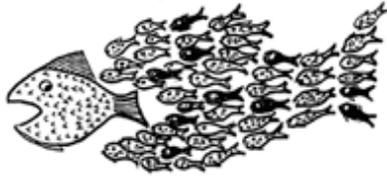


Beware of Capitalist Sharks!

*Radical Rants
and
Internationalist Essays*

Richard Greeman



**Praxis Research and Education Center
Moscow and New York**

DEDICATION

**To my daughter, Jenny,
and to young people everywhere. You deserve a brighter world
than the tragic one you've inherited.**

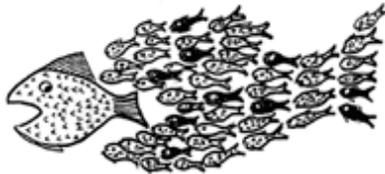
Credits: Thanks to Wikipedia, the IWW.org and other anarchist and open-source sites for the free clip-art of which I have made such unrestricted use. Thanks to all my radical friends and particularly to Jenny Greeman, Ian MacMahon, Cathryn Swan, Mitchel Cohen for your attention, help and comment over the years. Thanks to the cooperative spirit of Lulu.com and the Internet for making it possible for Praxis to publish these 'Sharks' in N.Y., Moscow and around the world.

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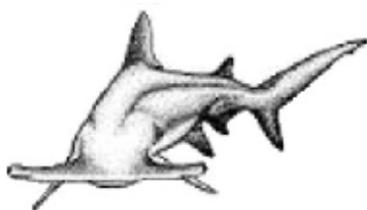
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Warning!

Capitalist Sharks



Trying to reform Capitalism is a futile as preaching Vegetarianism to a Shark. It is also dangerous, as the two liberal protesters in the shark's maw on the cover of this book are about to discover.

The sorry History of five hundred years of capitalist 'Progress' points to the conclusion that, by its very nature, Capitalism cannot expand without devouring Workers' lives and chewing up the Natural World — no more than a shark can survive without gorging on fresh Blood and Flesh.

The original breeding ground of Capitalist Sharks was Western Europe, where they set about devouring the Commons, knocking down the peasants' cottages, hanging the homeless as 'vagabonds,' driving free yeomen farmers off the green land into dismal factories, devaluing the labor of Women, and persecuting them as Witches.

Capitalist Sharks were sighted off the American shores as early as 1492, ravaging the Caribbean. In their savage hunger for silver and gold, they nearly exterminated the Native Peoples. So the greedy Colonial sharks were obliged to replace dead Native Americans with ever fresh supplies of Black Africans, kidnapped and sold to be worked to death as slaves. In their home waters, the voracious European White sharks grew larger and hungrier, battering on generations of toiling men women and children,

sucking in and slowly chewing their substance through fourteen daily hours of dreary labor in soot-darkened satanic mills or under the lash on their American plantations.

Naturally, as the Capitalist Sharks grew, their appetites increased, and by the end of the 19th century ravenous full-grown Imperialist Sharks were swarming in a feeding frenzy, driven by a desperate urge to devour the teeming populations and fabulous natural wealth of Africa and Asia.

As the 20th century dawned, the Imperialist Sharks began attacking each other (as sharks in a feeding frenzy will). The larger Capitalist Sharks naturally overcame the smaller, and the surviving Giants continued slashing and biting each other all over the planet. Soon the various species were forming into great schools for the purpose of mutual aggression.

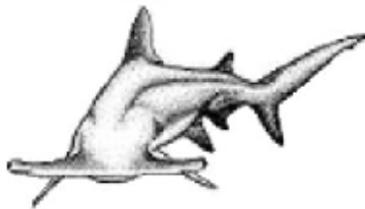
Political ichthyologists distinguish at least four such groupings: the *freemarketus omnovor*, the *fascii viciocii*, the *stalinia rapacia*, and the *theocraticus ferocius*. After each orgy of mutual destruction, the surviving species enjoyed a few prosperous years of fat feeding until leaner years drove them to new hecatombs.

By the 21st century, the older species of European White Sharks were being challenged in their former feeding grounds by younger breeds of fast-growing Chinese, Indian, Iranian, Russian and Brazilian Capitalist Sharks, better adapted for preying on the local varieties of fish and increasingly more competitive. Soon new oceans were churning with Blood, but with so many sharks competing, the supply of big game fish was soon depleted and there were only the masses of little fish left to prey on.



The most successful Capitalist Sharks in this war of All against All tempered their ferocity with guile. As the pickings got slimmer, these smarter sharks adopted protective coloration to lurk in shallow shoals where they could sneak up on the littler fish (the only ones left) and devour them. Some clever Capitalist Sharks painted themselves Green; some even pretended to be Vegetarians, the better to lull their prey!

The German Capitalist Shark specialist Herr Doktor Bertolt Brecht had predicted this phenomenon in 1930: “If sharks were men there would be an end to all little fish being equal, as is the case now. Some would be given important offices and be placed above the others. Those who were a little bigger would even be allowed to eat up the smaller ones. That would be altogether agreeable for the sharks, since they themselves would more often get bigger bites to eat. And the bigger little fish, occupying their posts, would ensure order among the little fish, become teachers, officers, engineers in box construction, etc.”



Following in Herr Dr. Brecht's august footsteps, your humble Author has spent the past fifty years patiently collecting specimens of 'Vegetarian' shark behavior among both Left-finned and Right-finned species from every corner of the globe. These anatomical descriptions are designed to help the reader recognize the different species as they swim across the aquarium of her TV screen. This 'Taxonomy of Capitalist Sharks' is his modest scientific contribution to the cause of the Working People and other small fry in the class struggle (which the rich have been waging against the poor as a one-way affair for far too long!).

Recent studies in Political Ichthyology have identified seventeen new species of Vegetarian Sharks, including the Oxymoronic Clean-Coal shark, the Great Green Oil-Derrick shark, the Elusive Trickle-Down Economics Shark, the Philanthropic-Billionnaire Shark, the Humanitarian War Shark, the Compassionate Conservative Shark, the Safe Nuclear Power Shark, the Slippery Shared-Sacrifice Shark, and the Change-You-Can-Believe-In Shark.

These Corporate Sharks pretend to be Vegetarians, but never forget they really are man-eating Capitalist Sharks! No point in trying to get them to give up Human flesh or even go on a diet, as liberal reformers urge us to do. They can't. It's not in their nature.

Today, all these 'Vegetarian' species are flourishing, despite the increasing mistrust of the little fish, some of whom even want

to ban sharks of any kind from entering the shoals (!). Indeed, through natural selection, the surviving little fish have become smarter, and today Little-Fish scientists and whistle-blowing blowfish have been trying to understand why so many Little Fish continue to be fooled by their predators' apparently transparent 'Vegetarian' disguises.

Recently, many Corporate Sharks have evolved glowing, multicolored media eyes with which they are able to hypnotize their prey. Other corporate species inject a poisonous green substance called 'Campaign Contributions' into the Small Fish General Assembly — effectively paralyzing its members.



The Corporate Sharks also fatten a species of Judas Goatfish, bred to 'represent' the Little Fish by luring them into the jaws of lurking Privatizer Sharks who swallow up the very schools in which the fish children learn to swim. Judas Goatfish also lurk 'innocently' within NGOs, think-tanks, universities, trade-union bureaucracies and Left political parties, so watch out for them! The irony of this painful jest is that the Billionaire Sharks and pet Judas-fish cry 'Class War!' every time some Liberal Little-Fish dares pronounce forbidden words like 'Taxing' and 'Spending.'

Many little fish secretly believe the Billionaire Sharks don't want to see their bloated corporate profits spent on fish-nurseries, fish-schools, fish-nests, clean water, and the public goods the little fish desperately need. Since 1980, the Neo-Liberal Privatizer Sharks have succeeded in devouring most of these public goods in the so-called 'developing' World, and now their gaping jaws are taking great bites out of the 'advanced' countries.

The Capitalist Sharks first sighted off South America half a Millenium ago in 1492 continue devouring the planetary Commons, penetrating every remote corner of the Earth, privatizing the Water, fouling the Air, killing off the Animals and enslaving the People in their ever-increasing hunger for more Profits. These Profits were deposited in fish-banks and used to inflate underwater bubbles. When their bubble popped in 2008, all the oceans

went into a Dark Depression.

Meanwhile, the waters were heating up as a result of years of frenzied thrashing by Capitalist Sharks, destroying the coral on which the little fish feed. Soon there would be no more prey for the Capitalist Sharks to feed on, but this did not stop their frenzied thrashing for profits. Predatory capitalism is no more likely to reform itself than a Man-Eating Shark is likely to turn Vegetarian. It is high time for the billions of us Small-Fry Fish to turn the tables by uniting globally to prosecute Class War against the Billionaire Loan sharks who rule the world.



Number is the Little Fish's strong suit. "We are many, they are few" famously said the poet Shelley (anticipating the 99 percent-ers by 200 years). The name of the game is 'Billions vs. Billionaires.'¹ This book is devoted to the art of winning at that game. So if there is even one chance in a hundred of winning this game, Planetary Self-Organization is the card for us to play. Not by fighting Capitalist violence with more violence, terror against terror, Barracuda vs. Shark, but through Solidarity and United Resistance (in any case, they have all the guns.)

Sound like a pipe-dream? just remember this, Dear Reader: The day all of us little Working Fish wake up and go on a Planetary General Strike is the day when the power of the Bankers and Corporations dissolves into thin Air. Thanks to the Internet, mass global civil disobedience can be organized in Real Time. That day could be tomorrow.²

¹ Want to play *Billions vs. Billionaires* (B&B)? Join us at <http://billionairesandbillions.wikispaces.com>, a Wiki set up for translating eco-socialist visions and revolutionary class struggle tactics into entertaining popular forms designed to go viral. Join us in phase one: 'Collective Creation.'

² These lines were written in August 2010. Five months later, an 'Arab Spring' of 'rolling rebellions' — linked by Facebook, Twitter and Al Jazeera — spread from Tunisia to Egypt to Morocco, Yemen, Syria and beyond, inspiring workers in Wisconsin (USA) to fight back against the post-2008 capitalist offensive. Then came Occupy Wall St. Arabs teaching democracy to Americans. What will the next 'tomorrow' bring?

Learning how to win begins with examining the inevitable ‘mistakes’ made by earlier generations of rebels and revolutionaries in their attempts to organize and with scrutinizing those rare moments when Revolutionary masses have ‘stormed the Heavens,’ briefly illuminating the landscape of Possible Futures. These flashes are the beacons that light our way forward.

Richard Greeman
Montpellier, France
March, 2012



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My Political Education

I guess I was born a rebel. My parents were active Progressives (pro-Soviet until 1956) while my maternal grandfather, Sam Levin, an immigrant tailor from Russia, was a card-carrying member of Eugene V. Debs' American Socialist Party.³ During his Presidential campaigns, Debs barnstormed the U.S. on a train called 'The Red Special' making whistle-stop speeches in every town and city, including Hartford, Connecticut. That's how my grandfather got this autographed picture, a prized possession of his which I inherited along with his library of Socialist books. This makes me a 'red-diaper' grand-baby.



EUGENE V. DEBS

In the 6th grade, at the beginning of the Witch Hunt, I was labeled a 'Communist' during Social Studies class by the son of a local 'liberal' Democrat politician who must have heard his parents badmouthing mine. I had zero idea of what a 'Communist' was back then (we were 'Progressives' at home), but I knew that label could get me in trouble. Never at a loss for words, I instantly retorted that I was not a 'Communist' but a '*commonist*' because I was 'for the common people.' This inspir-

³ Debs, a union organizer from Indiana, was the leader of the Socialist Party in its heyday as well as one of the founders of the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World). His credo: 'I want to rise *with* the people, not *from* the people' said Debs. 'Do not expect any leader to lead you to the Promised Land, because if he could, he could lead you out again.' As an anti-war candidate, Debs took away a million votes from Woodrow Wilson in 1916. When Wilson declared war a year later, the great liberal locked Debs up in for talking against the draft and kept him in jail for years after the War was over. — which didn't stop Debs from running for President from Leavenworth Penitentiary and getting a million votes. The government destroyed the Socialist Party and the IWW during the anti-Red Palmer raids in 1919, and my Grandpa Sam was still considered something of an outcast in Hartford when I came along.

ation shut the pint-sized red-baiter's nasty little trap, won the approval of my 11-year-old classmates, and has defined my political outlook ever since.

As a Yale College Freshman in 1957, I was recruited to the Young Peoples' Socialist League by its Organizer, Michael Harrington, who had been invited to campus and gave a rousing socialist speech. I was soon involved in peace and civil rights activism, agitating for reform but increasingly aware that militant activism alone was not enough and that only in a new society — socialism — could our dream of peace, justice and equality be realized. However, this would not be the totalitarian 'socialism' of the USSR, which my parents' friends continued to defend, even after Russian tanks crushed the 1956 Hungarian Revolution of Workers' Councils.

The YPSLs had me read Victor Serge and George Orwell (for whom our campus forum was named), and they soon talked me out of any lingering illusions about the 'progressive' USSR with its privileged bureaucracy, forced labor camps and total distortion of the Marxist philosophy which I was beginning to discover in its original form. Among the socialist speakers the Orwell Forum brought to campus were the Civil Rights pioneer Bayard Rustin, the psychologist Erich Fromm and the Marxist philosopher and former Trotsky secretary, Raya Dunayevskaya, whose Marxist-Humanist movement I later worked with over the next fifteen years in N.Y., Detroit and central Connecticut.



RAYA DUNAYEVSKAYA



CARLOS CASTORIADIS

And of course we were caught up in the activism of the late Fifties: civil disobedience against Civil Defense A-bomb drills, Fair Play For Cuba Committee, protesting the House Un-American Activities Committee and civil rights. In 1958, I joined the massive Youth March on Washington for Integrated Schools organized by Bayard Rustin, A. Philip Randolph's Negro American Labor council and of course us young socialists. Twenty-thousand of us sincere, well-dressed, white and black high school and college students poured in to D.C. from nearly every state in the union. It

was the biggest demo since the Thirties, and not one line in the next day's *N.Y. Times*. That day something snapped inside my Freshman heart. I had lost my last hope for liberalism and reform and become a revolutionist.

Spending a year in France was the next great eye-opener for me. Living in another country and learning its language is the best way to see your own country objectively, devoid of the national prejudice we imbibe with our mother's milk. In 1959-60, I studied in Paris where I learned a lot, got swept up in the anti-Algerian war movement, and joined a small revolutionary group called *Socialisme ou Barbarie* ('Socialism or Barbarism') whose leading comrades included 'Chaulieu' (Cornelius Castoriadis), 'Laborde' (François Lyotard), 'Vega' (Alberto Maso of the POUM) and Daniel Mothé (who worked in an auto factory). On a later stay in Paris, I met Vlady Kibaltchich, the son of my favorite revolutionary writer, Victor Serge (1890-1947), a Russian who wrote in France and whose novels Vlady asked me to translate into English.

During the Sixties, I studied and taught French at Columbia University in New York where I was active in civil rights (CORE), labor (1199) and the Independent Committee Against the War in Vietnam, to which I brought my knowledge of the French defeat in Indochina. With David Gilbert, I was one of the founders of SDS and was Mark Rudd's 'faculty advisor' during the 1968 student occupations and strikes. I got my PhD on a police-occupied campus at a strikers' Counter-Commencement presided by the radical journalist I.F. Stone.

In N.Y., I was also in the orbit of veteran Anarchists like Russell Blackwell, Sam and Esther Dolgoff and radical journalists like Daniel Singer and maverick socialist I.F. Stone — an old family friend. I thus had the great chance of learning from older political activists, including veterans of the Russian anti-Stalinist opposition, the Spanish Civil War, the European anti-fascist resistance and the U.S. labor movement — revolutionary heretics whose ideas were based on libertarian socialism and critical, humanist Marxism.

For me, these extraordinary men and women were living links to the revolutionary past. They incarnated its *ethos*, breathed its energy, spoke of people like Leon Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg and Emma Goldman as if they had just left the room. I had the im-

pression, in our conversations, of being initiated into an oral tradition which paralleled and completed the reading of history and the ‘sacred texts’ of Marxism. Along with my day-to-day political activism, these conversations (and the readings they led to) were the ‘universities’ in which I completed my political education while earning degrees in French from Yale, Columbia and the Sorbonne in my ‘spare time.’ Obviously, with this attitude and these credentials, my future career in academia was destined to be chequered, to say the least.

I spent the Seventies and Eighties in central Connecticut, mostly teaching French (and sneaking Marxism into the curriculum) and participating in the anti-Vietnam-War movement, defending the Black Panthers and later as part of the Central American Solidarity movements. I learned Spanish and went to Nicaragua in 1984 to study the Sandinista revolution and Witness for Peace on the Honduran border.

The collapse of totalitarian Communism in 1989 came not as a discouragement or a disillusion, but an exciting opening to make contact with fellow dissidents and revolutionaries in Russia. I was part of the first non-Intourist organized trips of *informali* — U.S. radicals invited by Russian environmentalists, syndicalists, dissident Marxists, anarchists and human rights fighters. These contacts led to the creation of the Victor Serge Library and the Praxis Center in Moscow, which I talk about at the end of this book. With this political education and fifty years of experience of the movement’s ups and downs, I have never been tempted to turn away from the basic Marxist-humanist, libertarian socialist and anarchist revolutionary traditions that nurtured me and that experience has confirmed and enriched.

My mentors also taught me to cherish the brief positive experiences of the revolutionary past, to scrutinize those rare historical moments when the tremendous creative force of revolutionary humanity emerged and briefly lighted the way to the future - from the 1871 Paris Commune to the Russian Soviets of 1917; from the self-managed farms and factories collectivized and de-



VICTOR SERGE, 1920s

fended by the Spanish Anarchists in 1936, to the world-wide risings of the Sixties; from the French General Strike of May 1968 rebellions to this Century's rising Latin American popular movements. In these pages, I have attempted to transmit to new generations some of the lore I learned in these radical working class, socialist and internationalist 'universities' and to elaborate and reinvent it for our times.

Two main concepts, borrowed from Victor Serge and Rosa Luxemburg, dominate my outlook: Internationalism and Tolerance. For me, Internationalism is basic: in our age of multinational corporations, the only way to defend ourselves against global capitalism is globally, through the planetary unity of the working, thinking creative people in all countries. This was the dream that united Marx and Bakunin in the First International, and to me the word 'internationalism' still says it all. To avoid the temptations of nationalism, identity politics and despair, we must continue to 'Act locally, think globally.' So with each concrete struggle we must ask the key questions: 'Does this tactic increase solidarity with people of other nationalities, or divide us?' and the parallel question: 'Does this tactic move us closer to our ultimate goal — a new society?'

To me, Tolerance, respect for the 'other,' is the only means to reach the revolutionary end; if by revolution we mean a new human society in which "the freedom of the individual is the basis of the freedom of all" (Marx). Without respect for the individual, without freedom of opinion, without the right to dissent and the availability of unbiased information, We-the-people will never be able to find our independent path. Instead, we billions will forever be misled by corrupt or fanatical leaders and manipulated by controlled mass media. Instead of an infallible single Party, I propose critical thinking, horizontal organization, and the development of an 'invisible international' woven of thousands of links where people can discuss and decide everything for themselves.

For this reason, I'm uncomfortable with political labels other than 'internationalist.' My Marxist friends consider me an Anarchist because I reject the State and the self-designated Vanguard Parties that aim to conquer it. On the other hand, sectarian Anarchists throw up their hands whenever I quote Karl Marx — forgetting that Anarchism has no political economy of its own, that

Bakunin himself translated *Das Kapital* into Russian, and once wrote to Marx: "I am your disciple and proud to be one."

Victor Serge appeals to me because he was an internationalist with roots in both Anarchism and Marxism, was critical of them both, and rejected sectarians who claimed to hold the monopoly of the truth - and who therefore felt free to manipulate, raid, and split activist groups, to expel dissenters (and to shoot them when in power). In any case, pluralistic and essentially non-violent mass movements represent the only way for the party of Humanity to emerge victorious, the coming momentous planetary social struggles looming on today's horizon.



The Radical Rants and Internationalist Essays in this collection have been selected and organised to present a coherent argument about capitalism's apparent collapse and the possibility of a more egalitarian and ecological future.

Part I (Is Another World *Really* Possible?) poses the alternatives facing us as 'Ecosocialism or Ecocide' and asks the question 'How do we get from here to there?' One possibility is a 'Modern Archimedes' Hypothesis' based on a projection of historical experience into the age of cybernetics. Its dialectic is informed by chaos theory, emergence, quantum politics, and Castoriadis' cyber-utopian *Content of Socialism*.

The challenge to our age is this: *can* we realistically imagine (without Divine or Extraterrestrial intervention) a technically feasible, ecologically sustainable post-capitalist future and visualize historically possible roads leading to it? For if we can even *imagine* the sleeping powers of humanity awakening, if we can *visualise* billions of people throwing off the fetters of the profit system and establishing a planet-wide cooperative commonwealth, then we have *already* awakened those powers. (So watch out for idea-viruses. This book may be catching.)

In Part II ('Capitalist Sharks'), I analyze late capitalism's terminal economic, political and ecological crisis, trace its origins and pointing out dangerous non-revolutionary 'shortcuts' that promise to resolve it but won't. My search for a way out of

today's crisis next turns backward into the history of the successes and failures of past social movements.

In Part III ('Where Are The Riots of Yesteryear?'), I look back my experiences in the turbulent Sixties, when many in my generation thought 'another world' was possible, and try to draw some lessons.

In Part IV ('Killing the Jews'), I try to understand a 20th Century tragedy: the complicity of the WWII Allies in the destruction of European Jewry.

In Part V ('Back in the USSR'), I turn even further back into history, to the birth of the world's first Republic of Workers' and Peasants' Councils in Russia in 1917. If Russia proved that Other Worlds *are* possible, it also showed that they can turn into nightmares. By returning to the revolution's origins, I attempt to lay to rest the ghost of the Soviet tragedy, which continues to haunt today's movement for Another World. I conclude this section with the post-Soviet new left in Russia, today embattled under an increasingly violent semi-fascist mafio-capitalist regime, and introduce the reader to the Praxis Research and Education Center (of which I am proud to be a founder) based at the Victor Serge Library in Moscow and dedicated to rediscovering and reviving Russia's historic anti-totalitarian socialist tradition.



NOTE: Six of the pieces in this collection were published under the title *Dangerous Shortcuts and Vegetarian Sharks* in 2007. Later Experimental Editions, including one distributed in Britain in 2008, swelled to an unwieldy 409 pages. Today's VIth Experimental Edition contains updates, indicated by square brackets [March 2012].

Part I

Is Another World

Really Possible?

Radical Emergence Year One

The Rolling Revolts of 2011

Two thousand eleven will certainly go down in world history as a revolutionary year — in some ways surpassing the international uprisings of 1968 (to which Part III of this book is devoted). The international wave of rolling rebellions of 2011 began in January with the popular uprising in Tunisia, overthrowing the corrupt, French-supported dictatorship of Ben Ali, then hopped over to Egypt in February, sweeping away the tyrant Mubarak and from there spread across North Africa and the Middle East.

Here on the European side of the Mediterranean, Greek workers and youth were in the streets and on general strikes against banker-imposed austerity, while in Spain, encampments of youthful *indignados* spread from Madrid's Costa del Sol to Barcelona to Seville and Cadiz. At the same time, the example of the Arab Spring boomeranged over the Atlantic to Madison, Wisconsin, where it inspired the Occupy the Capitol movement, the first sign of sustained popular resistance to austerity in the U.S. since the Crash of 2008. In October, the examples of Tahrir, Wisconsin and Madrid in turn inspired October's Wall St. occupation, which then spread to other cities, famously changing the subject of the political conversation in America from debt-fueled austerity to equality. In turn, Zuccotti Park inspired a movement of 99%-ers occupying locally (and globally) with a strikingly ambitious goal: 'Occupy Everything!'

Here in France, although the local imitations of the Spanish *indignados* did not take off, the first stirrings of the 'Arab Spring' galvanized activists in the North African community with meetings and demos in support of the movements in Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Yemen and Libya. When asked to speak, I

would describe how the demonstrators in Madison, Wisconsin, consciously inspired by Tahrir Square, had occupied the State House and my audiences enjoyed the irony of this tale of Arabs ‘teaching democracy to us Americans.’ The Arab revolt of 2011 was actually not a great surprise to me. As a supporter of the Iraqi women’s and trade-unionist movements, I have long worked with the democratic forces — mostly invisible in the media — struggling to emerge in the nominally Moslem ME/A world. As I wrote concerning Solidarity with the Iraqis: ‘Our place is along side of the civilians like ourselves: teachers, students, health-care professionals, office and factory workers, trade-unionists, civil servants, and homemakers, women and men, gay and straight, struggling for their rights against the double terrorism of G.I.s breaking down their doors and Islamicists blowing up their schools and markets.’⁴

In April, I got a chance to spend two weeks with friends in Morocco, where the sudden appearance of the February 20th Movement (the Moroccan incarnation of the Arab Spring) was challenging the police state of King Mohammed VI. The 20th February demonstrations opened up a space of relative freedom for Moroccans to breathe free, demonstrate their grievances and discuss their ideas in print and in public. It was an exciting place to be, with new groups putting forward their grievances nearly every day. Renewing ties with Moroccan revolutionaries of my generation, many of whom had suffered exile, prison and torture under the French-supported monarchy, the feeling of exhilaration was electric. ‘We were right to have lived long enough to see this,’ was the phrase doing the rounds during this heady Arab Spring.

When October came, I wished I were back on the streets of New York, nostalgic for the mass demonstrations and occupations of the 60s; but new media like GlobalRevolutionTV enabled me to breath the air of excitement and hope around Occupy Wall St., just as blogs from North Africa and Al Jazeera had kept me and my North African friends in France in touch with the Arab Spring (vastly downplayed by the French media).

⁴ See my ‘The Threat of Radical Islam’ (2010). Reprinted in Part II below.

Occupy Everything

As for ‘Occupy Everything,’ I can’t think of a more succinct expression to describe the kind of revolution I’ve always dreamed of.⁵ Since my youth, my vision has been of bottom-up social change based on mass assemblies; popular power imposed by forceful — but essentially non-violent — tactics like mass strikes, mass occupations and mass demonstrations; what John Holloway has termed ‘power *against*’ and ‘power *to*’ (but not oppressive ‘power *over*’); a revolution of ordinary people first *occupying* and then self-managing their work-places and neighborhoods democratically to create a federated, cooperative economy based on human and ecological need, not profit. These are not new ideas. The slogan ‘Occupy Everything’ pretty much sums up the anarcho-syndicalist philosophy of the IWW (‘Wobblies’). It also reminds me of the big sit-down strikes and factory occupations of 1936-37 in the US and France, of the student-worker rebellions of 1968, and more recently of the mass assemblies and ‘takings’ by workers of enterprises shut down during Argentina’s IMF-imposed bankruptcy. Not new ideas, but ideas whose time has come.

And what about “We are the 99%!” How better to draw the Marxian ‘class line’? It succinctly expresses the movement’s composition (the poor and the threatened middle classes) and names the ‘class enemy’ (the economic 1%, not just the government they control). Another brilliant chant of the Occupiers goes: ‘This is what democracy looks like!’ It tears the veil of respectability off of the corrupt political systems that parade under the official heading of ‘democracy,’ and invites people to actively participate in changing society, *outside* of official channels, valid from Tahrir to Madrid to Wall St. All these popular verbal inventions express the movement’s half-conscious revolutionary aspirations. They ask ‘why not occupy everything and run society cooperatively, democratically, and ecologically in the image of our assemblies and collectives?’

⁵ After reading and writing radical leaflets and banners for fifty years, I’m jealous I didn’t think of ‘Occupy Everything!’ first. On the other hand, I did dream up a great name for a multiplayer online game, ‘Billions versus Billionnaires,’ but it took the Zucatti Park Occupiers to come up with 99%-ers versus 1%-ers.

How many political consultants, Madison Avenue ad agencies, public opinion polls and political focus-groups would it have taken to come up with three such brilliant political slogans, guaranteed to go viral? They confirm my long held confidence in the mass creativity of people in struggle and in the ‘wisdom of the many’ — themes I develop later in this book. In any case, 2011 certainly brought joy to the heart of this old rebel, confirming my faith in humanity’s capacity for self-creation. All year long as I read and watched the news — for example, Pacifica’s Sharif Abdel Kouddous’ exhilarating on the scene reports from Tahrir Square⁶ — I would catch myself shaking my head and repeating ‘I can’t believe it!’, only to answer myself, ‘but you’ve been waiting for something like this to happen for years!’

After waging top-down class warfare on the 99% for a generation, capitalism’s chickens are finally coming home to roost — as I had long been hoping (and incautiously predicting⁷) they would. 2011’s world-wide wave of popular revolts certainly represents the biggest challenge to the ruling 1%-ers since the 60s, when world wide revolts broke out from Vietnam to Paris to Prague to Chicago. Moreover, 2011 may prove to be just the beginning of something bigger as the worldwide economic, political and ecological crisis continues to deepen and as capitalism’s ‘solution’ (grind the poor, rape the environment) continues to outrage the mass of humanity.

Euphoria and Disappointment

Alas, after the euphoria of some early victories — the toppling of long-time dictators Ben Ali in Tunisia and Mubarak in Egypt — 2011’s Arab revolutions face new obstacles in their quest for political freedom and social equality: for example, the power of the Army, the conservative weight of the Islamists, and above all the vast wealth and imperialist support behind the corrupt *comprador* capitalist regimes still in place. It is the nature of revolutions that once they knock down an obstacle, a new one rises in its place, and so on, until the last barrier is knocked down — that of the world capitalist system. And this can only happen

⁶ Podcast at www.democracynow.org.

⁷ See ‘Capitalism’s Terminal Crisis’ in Part II below.

on a global scale.

So let us not be discouraged that the burgeoning revolutions of the Arab Spring seem to be stalled for the moment — as entrenched power groups backed by foreign capital try to reinforce their grip, as conservative Islamists (legalized at last by these mass democratic uprisings) pass from the side of the rebels to that of the powers that be, and as mass mobilizations seem to be ebbing. Such ebb and flow is endemic to social struggles, as the history of past revolutions testifies. The forces of reaction can be depended on to throw up new obstacles — from violent repression to sham reforms and cooptation of leaders — which the forces of revolution must continuously overcome. These struggles, with victories followed by defeats, are the way mass movements educate themselves.

Social revolution may appear to have gone underground, but it can be counted on to keep rearing its head in the face of ever new opponents until its goals — democracy, equality, social and environmental justice — are met. ‘Well grubbed old mole’ quipped Karl Marx (quoting his beloved Shakespeare) about one such revolutionary outburst during the 19th century’s wave of democratic revolts. And as the French rebels of May 1968 used to chant: ‘This is only a beginning! Continue the Struggle!’ Future historians may look back on 2011 as ‘Year One of the Radical Emergence.’

In any case, the radical Genie that was let out of the bottle can never be stuffed back in again. The revolts of 2011 are already historical. Listen to this, from the Egyptian blogger ‘sandmonkey’ who tells us to:

Think of the students of the Lycee in Cairo, 6th and 7th graders, who did a 3 day sit-in protest demanding the return of a teacher that got fired for carrying an anti-Mubarak sign in Tahrir and forced the administration to re-instate him. Think of all the 8 and 10 year olds who went out with their parents the day of the referendum to vote and had the experience engrained in their psyche forever, something we never had ourselves, and know that they will never allow that right to be taken away from them. Think of all the 12 year olds who are watching all the hot issues (secularism vs. theocracy, left vs. right, the role of the army, the role of the po-

lice, etc.) being debated all around them right now, and having their political consciousness formed right now and know that when they turn 18 it will be next to impossible for someone to trick or co-opt them. Think of all the 15 and 16 year olds who are watching the protests all around them and the lessons and mistakes that we are doing and think of what those kids will do the moment they get into college in a couple of years or when they join the workforce. Think of all your friends, wherever they are, who are joining and debating and talking and wanting to help and do something, and know you are not a solitary phenomenon. The Virus is everywhere. The Future is AWESOME.⁸

To this, I can only add that the history of mass movements indicates that after a lull, they almost always pick up from the high-point of previous struggle, from the peak of the last revolutionary wave, as if a period of defeat and apparent 'forgetfulness' had not intervened. So I'm confident we will learn a lot more about the creativity of mass non-violent movements in the future. Meanwhile, as Flo Kennedy, the wisecracking Black militant of the Sixties, used to say: 'If you take a bath on Sunday, don't be surprised if you stink on Friday.'

The Historical importance of the revolts of 2011

Whatever the outcome tomorrow, no one will deny that 2011 proved, contrary to near-universal expectation, that mass revolutions are still possible in the 21st century. After the revolutionary waves of the '60s and '70s subsided, the rise of neo-liberal, globalized capitalism in the '80s, followed by the 1989 collapse of so-called 'Communism' in Russian and Eastern Europe, had seemed to confirm Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's dogma 'There is no alternative' (TINA). And in a curious sense, the Iron Lady was right. There was no political alternative *within* the system, what with British Labor, the US Democrats, and the European Social-Democrats all converted to privatization, downsizing, outsourcing, social cutbacks and the like. By the 21st

⁸ <http://www.sandmonkey.org/>

century, reformist alternatives to the neo-liberal program of increasing inequality and the unbridled exploitation of labor and the environment had been eliminated, a process accelerated by the increasing power of big money over the political process at every level. However, what Dame Thatcher and her Chicago School adepts perhaps did not foresee was the possibility of an 'Alternative' *outside* the system — popular revolution — the only avenue left open by the total corruption of representative political institutions. And that is what they are faced with now.

Might 2011 mark the beginning of a new world revolutionary era? Most of my friends on the 'realistic,' programmatic Left consider my vision of revolutionary emergence going viral as pure romanticism. Not so the intelligence community and the CIA, which warned President Obama upon his taking office in the wake of the Crash of 2008 that 'domestic insurrection' posed a more serious threat to the U.S. security than 'foreign terrorism.' As evidence of the seriousness with which the masters of the capitalist universe take the rebellions and occupations of 2011, let me cite examples of two types of counter-productive U.S. strategies that reveal the level of panic in the national security community, one international, one domestic:

1) On the international front, how else to explain continued U.S. military support for Arab dictatorships like Bahrain, which brutally crushed its democratic movement and jailed the doctors who treated the wounded; continued support for Egypt (recipient of U.S. military largesse nearly equivalent to Israel's), and of continuing shipments of the tear-gas shells used against the occupiers at Tahrir? This desperate policy unmasks any U.S. pretensions as a friend of 'democracy' among the peoples of the Arab-Muslim world. It insures that any successful revolution there will necessarily consider itself anti-U.S., thus undermining U.S. influence in this vital petroleum-producing zone.

2) Domestically, we see the spectacularly inordinate and unnecessary police brutality systematically unleashed on peaceful, non-violent U.S. demonstrators, guilty at worst of trespassing, a misdemeanor normally punishable by moderate fines. The frightening images of sitting students and young women corralled in a police net being systematically sprayed in the face with merciless pepper-spray brought up for me grim memories of respectful, cleanly-dressed black and white student protesters being brutal-

ized on TV by Southern Sheriffs and State troopers with dogs, clubs, water canons and prison-farms. Those images made U.S. justice look so bad, that, at the time, the Kennedy brothers finally had to provide Civil Rights workers in the South Federal protection — but only as a Cold War move to blunt Communist propaganda around the world.

Today, unlike the reluctant JFK, the Obama Administration is doing nothing to prevent such images of U.S. justice going viral, *au contraire*. These horrendous images stand as a warning of what might happen to you if you lift your head in the U.S. They are designed to make the frightened parents beg their daughters and sons to stay away from demonstrations. Leaks concerning meetings and exchanges among local and Federal security and law enforcement communities suggest that this Robocop approach is a more or less concerted policy, while the consensus of media and officials seems to be that this kind of Robocop ‘policing’ is the way to deal with social protest, while the victims’ lawsuits by the Civil Liberties groups get lost in the news cycle. Given the blow to U.S. reputation abroad, permitting such spectacular examples of police over-reaction can only be a deliberate policy.

Yet in the U.S. as in the Middle East, the response of the national security state to social unrest will not only serve to disgrace and de-legitimize the system that so mistreats its citizens, it will also boomerang. Almost every insurrection in modern times, beginning with the French Revolution, was sparked off by an instance of what we would call ‘police brutality.’ When the Czar signed the order to fire on Father Gapon’s 1905 procession petitioning the ‘Little Father’ for social relief, he signed his own death warrant. In May 1968, when the Paris CRS riot cops broke up the student occupation and attempted to clear the Latin Quarter, the resulting violence brought out the working class and sparked a general strike that shut down the country and caused President De Gaulle to flee. As Gandhi allegedly put it: ‘First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they repress you, then you win.’ State violence, destructive, tragic, is ultimately useless in the long run when the conditions for social revolution are ripe, and they couldn’t be riper now. My point is this: if our class enemies take our burgeoning revolutionary movements so seriously, maybe we ought to take them seriously too.

Five Original features of 2011 movements

Journalists and pundits have characterized the global movements of 2011 in various ways with the annual edition of Time magazine naming the Rebel as ‘Person of the Year 2011’ But from a revolutionary perspective five original features stand out: 1) their creative appropriation of the Internet; 2) their internationalist spirit; 3) their radical anti-ruling class message; 4) their appropriation of mass non-violent resistance; and 5) their horizontal forms of self-organization, prefiguring a new society.

1. Creative Use of the Internet

Scientists have discovered that RIV-11, the highly contagious Revolutionary Idea-Virus of 2011, was transmitted through the Internet, spreading from one Arab country to another through hundreds of blogs and websites as well as via new independent media, propagating an epidemic of rebellious acts and radical ideas. Among the major mass media, the international news organization Al Jazeera, based in Qatar, was sometimes sympathetic and reliably more objective than any government-censored national media or, for that matter, the Western networks like CNN, BBC, or the TV news here in France. If you have any doubts, click on Al Jazeera English for round-the-clock news and documentaries.⁹ Up until now, dictatorships — by controlling the mass media, banning meetings, and persecuting dissidents — have been largely successful in isolating their subjects and preventing people power to reach a ‘critical mass.’ Today, the 21st Century connectivity of interactive Internet sites, cell-phones and social media — widely available everywhere on the planet — have changed that equation in favor of mass democratic movements of the oppressed.

Full Personal Disclosure

Another source of satisfaction for me as the revolts of 2011 developed and spread was the apparent empirical confirmation of

⁹ Al Jazeera, with a Washington bureau and highly professional U.S. based team of reporters, is banned from the U.S. airways. It is available via podcast at http://www.aljazeera.com/watch_now/, and heard daily on WBAI (99.5 FM) in New York, and over the web at WBAI.org.

ideas about connectivity and revolutionary self-organization I have been developing for fifteen years — theories concerning the emergence of internet-connected, horizontally-organized, spontaneous revolutionary movements on a planetary scale. In 1997, I was invited by my comrades in Moscow to represent the Praxis Center (see Part V) at an International Conference entitled ‘Stop Capitalist Barbarism — Prepare the Socialist Alternative’, hosted in Cape Town, South Africa by WOSA, the Workers’ Organization for a Socialist Alternative. WOSA’s independent Marxist leaders had only recently been released from Robben Island — the notorious prison where they were held along with Nelson Mandela. By 1997, Mandela, now President, and his African National Congress party were carrying out neo-liberal policies (with the support of the South African Communist Party) that harshly affected the poor, the young, the organized workers whose years of resistance had put him in power.

There were delegates from as far off as Mauritius, Australia, and the Brazilian rain forest. Our logo was the globe with the South at the top, symbol of our rejection of the traditional hub-and-spokes model of international revolutionary organization with power flowing down from the Kremlin (or from a shabby rented office in Paris, Rome or New York). Our goal was to build an International Network (ostensibly *not* a hierarchical Party) a possibility suggested by the new ease in global communication through the Internet. Thrilled to be in newly liberated South Africa and in such august company, I thought hard about what would be worthy of presenting. The position paper I submitted ultimately became the basis of the ideas in this book.¹⁰

I named my theory a ‘Modern Archimedes Hypothesis’ in honor of the ancient philosopher’s famous boast: ‘Give me a lever long enough, a fulcrum, a place to stand, and I will lift the

¹⁰ Richard Greeman, ‘On Building an International Network: A Vision in Three Parts,’ *Discussion Bulletin*, International Conference ‘Stop Capitalist Barbarism— Prepare the Socialist Alternative,’ Cape Town, South Africa, Dec. 1997. Sadly, this brave attempt among seasoned revolutionaries to create an open, horizontally structured international network foundered on the rocks of Left sectarian power struggles exposed in the double dealing by the largest and richest of the constituent groups, *Socialismo internazionale*, based in Rome, Italy, which was maintaining a parallel international organization under its control. This bitter disappointment led me to reconsider the question of ‘the party.’

earth!’ The question facing the 21st century is: Can the world’s billions collectively ‘lift the Earth’ out of its catastrophic capitalist orbit before environmental damage becomes irreparable? In my hypothesis, the Modern Archimedes would need a *social* lever (International Solidarity), a *philosophical* fulcrum (Planetary Consciousness), and an *electronic* platform (the Internet) on which we 99%-ers can unite our strength on a planetary scale and put an end to capitalism before globalized capitalism puts an end to us.

In 1997, many of my Leftist friends looked upon the Internet as an elitist gadget developed by the U.S. military and destined to be monopolized by commercial interests. Today, they are (justifiably) concerned with the use of the Internet for government surveillance of citizens, forgetting that the FBI and such have always opened the mail, tapped the phones and recorded the meetings of everyone the governments considered ‘subversive.’ What’s new in 2011 is that we can fight back with Wikileaks! To me, the potential of interactive Internet technology combined with its ‘hacker ethic’ and communitarian freeware mentality appeared as an implicitly egalitarian form of ‘emergent’ self-organization. And, like my comrades in the global South, I also foresaw that the Internet could help overcome Eurocentrism and the other parochial nationalisms that have always divided humanity and kept revolutions confined within national borders.

My main point was and remains that such international networking is necessary in our era of capitalist globalization when only a coordinated planetary movement targeting the trans-national corporations could be effective in the class struggles to come. I saw the ever-expanding Web as a potential class struggle weapon: one that would transform an old revolutionary syndicalist dream — the international general strike to overthrow capitalism — into a technical possibility. I called it ‘a vast conspiracy whose center is everywhere and nowhere!’ The reader will judge for herself if my somewhat visionary theories (developed in the following chapters) ultimately hold water, but no one can deny the crucial role of the Internet in the trans-national revolutionary movements of 2011.

From Tunisia to Wall St. and on to Manege Square in Moscow, all of 2011’s mass movements made brilliant use of the Internet and social media, which kept newly-minted activists informed in real time of what was happening on the ground and en-

abled masses of people to come together and demonstrate effectively in the absence of a structured leadership organization. Indeed, the spontaneous protests involving thousands that suddenly occupied public spaces behaved not like the ‘headless bloodthirsty mobs’ of Conservatives’ nightmares but like a sentient being with a thousand video eyes and cell-phone ears, or like a colony of ants foraging a new territory and sharing information about where to send workers. This Internet-based horizontal network-type of organization also turned out to be effective in dealing with censorship, government propaganda and state repression.

A Story of Links

It is interesting to recall some of the ways in which the Internet propagated an international wave of revolutions, all of which had, of course, long been simmering beneath the surface. The story begins with Private Bradley Manning, the heroic, idealistic 19 year-old computer nerd, who took his soldier’s oath to defend the U.S. Constitution seriously, (allegedly) downloaded Megafiles of secret government communications, blowing the whistle on thousands of violations of U.S. and international law. Manning (allegedly) passed them on to another great hacker hero, Julian Assange, the founder of Wikileaks, who posted a selection on his site. Both, of course, have suffered repression for their devotion to truth-telling, with Manning, kept in solitary for a year and a half facing life in prison (and possible execution), and Australia-born Assange struggling to avoid deportation to the U.S.

The next link in the story of 2011 takes us to Tunisia. Among the thousands of these downloaded documents published on Wikileaks were diplomatic cables documenting the cynical corruption — long suspected but unprovable — of President Ben Ali, whose family had become enormously wealthy ruling Tunisia with an iron hand for the past 23 years. This information, transmitted via Internet, enraged a young Tunisian named Mohamed Bouazizi who set himself on fire in protest against injustice, corruption, unemployment and inequality under Ben Ali. Bouazizi was not the first Tunisian to commit such a desperate act, but his self-immolation was posted on YouTube and propagated via Facebook where it evoked enormous anger across Tunisia and inspired thousands to pour into the streets demanding

social justice and an end to kleptocratic dictatorship. The Internet diffusion of a stolen document was the spark that burst into Bouazizi's tragic flame, then spread like wildfire via social media into the streets. The Internet proved to be the tool that provided the masses with the connectivity necessary for such a massive radical Emergence — the very phenomenon which Tunisia's police state and its government-controlled media were designed to make impossible.

Similarly, in Egypt, where militant worker strikes had been simmering for months, the spark that lit the fire of revolution was the bold YouTube video posted by 26-year-old Asmaa Mahfouz, the courageous Cairo woman who dared to bare her face, speak her real name, and challenge all self-respecting Egyptians to join her in protest at Tahrir Square on January 25. Of course the Internet itself didn't make either of these uprisings happen. Revolutions happen on the ground, lead by real people. As it happened, Mahfouz was herself in touch with the May 6 network, a radical group which had long dreamed of organizing such a demonstration. And although Cairo's Tahrir Square and other mass demonstrations opened a whole new political era for Egypt, it was the strength of the workers' strikes along the Suez Canal and in the energy sector that ultimately forced the regime to retreat and compromise. To conclude: the Internet is a tool, an organizational and communications tool, no more no less; but unlike the top-down, one-way broadcast media, it is one that the people can wield to their own advantage to transmit information, organize, and assemble their numbers — their greatest force. Moreover, the Web's connectivity and Emergent structure corresponds to the Emergent properties of spontaneous, popular self-organization, as analyzed as early as 1905 by Rosa Luxemburg in her *Mass Strike* pamphlet.

2. Internationalism

The ability of information, revolutionary ideas, and exemplary actions to leap over frontiers thanks to the new Internet technologies brings us to our next point, the spirit of internationalism that inspired the movements of 2011. We saw it exemplified in the telegrams of support from the Cairo teachers' unions to the Wisconsin occupiers who openly proclaimed they were 'in-

spired' by the Egyptians to overcome their fear and apathy — thus defying the U.S. media-led racial profiling of Arabs as terrorists. Later, in October, the Wall St. occupiers received the visit of several leading Egyptian activists including Asmaa Mahfouz of the May 5 movement as well as Yemeni activist Tawakkul Karman. And on October 15, less than 24 hours after the Zuccotti Park occupiers claimed "victory" over the City of New York's attempted eviction, 951 Occupy Wall Street-inspired demonstrations reportedly took place in 82 countries around the world on 'Global Occupy Day.'

As the revolutionary spirit hopped from one country to another, a conspiratorial mind might with justification have imagined a secret 'Invisible International' directing the movement like a stage manager behind the scenes. (Indeed several Arab dictators accused the CIA, while Russia's Vladimir Putin blamed it all on an Islamist conspiracy to destabilize his regime!) Far from being the result of a centralized conspiracy, however, the symbolic internationalism of 2011 remained largely virtual and has not yet achieved its potential for self-organization.

Despite exchanges of messages of solidarity and some tentative international actions — in particular the Palestinian people's non-violent invasion of Israel's borders — most of the communication between the democratic movements in different countries is still mediated by the Internet and the mainstream media. There have apparently been no successful efforts to organize pan-Arab encounters among rebel students, women and worker activists from Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco and other countries. Having been involved in one such effort with the Moroccan Human Rights Association in Rabat, I came to understand that the personal poverty of most student and worker activists, lack of accessible transportation, government restrictions on all sides, and preoccupation with local ongoing struggles make such international undertakings extremely difficult at the moment.

More surprisingly, here in Europe, I have not been able to observe any efforts to organize European anti-austerity activists from Greece, Spain, and Italy, where young people and workers have occupied and demonstrated against Europe-imposed, cut-backs in salaries, education, health and other public services designed to reduce the people of Southern Europe to debt peonage to the German banks. The Euro plays the same deflationary role

here today as did the gold standard in the 19th Century, restricting employment, lowering wages and keeping debtors forever on the run by making them pay back in dear money what was borrowed in cheap.

With common problems, a common currency and open borders, you might consider Europe one country, and the European capitalist offensive to make the workers pay for the bankers' economic crisis is Europe-wide. Yet, although there have been self-organized Europe-wide marches by the unemployed, the wealthy European unions and Left political parties have shown zero interest in organizing a Europe-wide resistance, much less proposing a joint counter-offensive. As we will discuss later, the main reason for this lack of international solidarity is that the European unions and electoral parties are bureaucratically organized and subsidized by their national governments with mandates (and interests) restricted to operating within their parochial national borders and within the existing system. They have no incentive either to rock the boat at home or to sail forth into uncharted international waters without their government-issue legitimacy as official representatives of 'their' working classes.

The problem for the revolutionaries of 2011 — and not only in the Arab world, and in Europe, but beyond to Russia, the U.S., Latin America, Africa and Asia — is how to go beyond this admirable spiritual and virtual internationalism toward actual, effective internationalism. Serious international networking and on the ground organizing will be necessary in order for the 99% to stand united on a planetary scale against globalized capitalist imperialism, adept at the age-old game of divide and rule. For in a global economy, as long as wages remain low in one region, they can never rise in another. And as long as some are in bondage, none can be free. Revolution must go global, like capitalism. As long as one bastion of capitalism stands, no victory, no temporary advantage, can ever be secure. Indeed, as we will argue below (in 'The Invisible International'), it is hard to imagine globalized capitalism being overthrown without something like a global general strike to give backbone to generalized civilian uprisings across the planet. Now let us return to the other original features of the movements of 2011.

3. Radical Anti-Ruling Class Message

Like the ‘virtual’ internationalism implicit in the rolling revolutions of 2011, the revolutionary character of these movements remains virtual as well. However, as long as capitalism fails to solve the problems that provoked these movements — unemployment, poverty, racism, sexism, lack of dignity, political impotence, fear for the future of the economy and for the environment — the struggle will go on. And since capitalism is itself the problem, the implicitly revolutionary character of these movements will eventually have to become explicit, in whatever form that takes.

One admires the skill with which the Wall St. Occupiers deflected the media’s constant insistence that their ‘leaders’ ‘state their demands’ — and thus assimilate their protest into the very political system they were rejecting. The logic is simple: no leaders, no one to be co-opted by the establishment. No demands, nothing to be negotiated away. Instead, the Occupiers of 2011 succinctly summarized their message by repeating: ‘We are the 99%!’ ‘This is what democracy looks like!’ and ‘Occupy everything!’ These slogans, as we have seen, are imaginative, strikingly powerful, and enticingly vague as befits a movement in the process of defining itself. They imply vast revolutionary aspirations, although the protesters who formulated them probably do not yet imagine the implications of these aspirations in terms of the titanic class struggles it will take to achieve them. Meanwhile, there is no dearth of issues that the Occupiers have taken on as they filter out of the parks and into the neighborhoods, fighting ‘redlining,’ opposing evictions, supporting strikers, feeding the hungry. But the main focus is always on the system as a whole.

A quick comparison with the movements of the ’60s and the ’90s is instructive. As far as the U.S. is concerned, the ’60s and ’70s were an era of single-issue protest movements: anti-Vietnam war, anti-racism, women’s rights, anti-nuke, Latin America solidarity, environment, and so on. Although their militancy challenged the establishment massively and forcibly, they were oriented toward making change within the system and eventually were absorbed by it — without, for all that, ever fully achieving their goals. The choice of Wall St. as the target in 2011 suggests the tacitly the anti-capitalist character of today’s movement. Al-

though there were ‘anti-imperialist’ movements (openly or tacitly pro-Russian or pro-Chinese imperialism) in the ’60s, few were actually anti-capitalist in practice. The nominally Communist and Trotskyist parties that tried to take over the anti-war or anti-racist groups’ single-issue approach mostly talked about Malcolm X, Ho Chi Minh or Castro rather than explaining that the ‘issues’ of racism and war were linked by the capitalist profit-system. Today, after the Crash of 2008, the billionaires’ bailout paid for by the poor, and Wall St. as the obvious villain, the capitalist cat is out of the bag.

On the other hand, just being anti-Wall St. doesn’t make you a revolutionary socialist, and many of the protesters would be happy just to see a few Wall St criminals sent to jail, some New Deal type reforms like regulation of the securities markets and the corporations, less money in the electoral system, green jobs, and a fairer tax system. What is new, is that they all know that capitalism is to blame for their problems, and when the capitalist system, now in terminal crisis, proves itself incapable of such reforms, they will think more about changing the whole system from the bottom up.

In this overt anti-capitalism, the spirit of ‘Occupy’ is similar to that of the anti-corporate globalization movements of the ’90s, which attacked international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank and openly declared ‘Another World is Possible.’ Like the rebellions of 2011, the anti-globalization movements of the ’90s were internationalist from the start, converging on capitalist strongholds like Davos, Seattle and Cancun and relying on massive, mostly non-violent demonstrations. What is new about Occupy is that it spreads around the world via its grass-roots, acting locally while thinking globally.

4. Non-Violence

To Western readers raised on media stereotypes of Arabs as warlike clansmen, violent fanatics, and gruesome terrorists, perhaps the biggest surprise of the Arab Spring was the assimilation and effective deployment of the tactics of mass, non-violent resistance. Without the guidance of charismatic leaders, the masses of Tunisia and Egypt spontaneously deployed historically proven tactics of non-violent struggle, like mass marches, demonstra-

tions and occupations of public space, civil disobedience, fraternization with the soldiers sent to repress them, backed by prolonged political strikes among workers in key industries. By combining *all* of these classic tactics, the Tunisian and Egyptian masses were able to topple two of the world's longest-reigning and most corrupt French- and U.S.-backed dictators *in a matter of days*. Clearly, these Arabs were on to something!

The thousands of Tunisians and Egyptians who together carried out this brilliant tactical victory, having lived all their lives in violent, repressive societies understood instinctively that massive non-violence was the *only* way to bring their real strength — their numbers, their courage, their solidarity — to bear against mega-weaponry of the 21st century police state. To me, the epitome of their creative non-violence was the way thousands of Egyptian protesters on the bridge leading into Tahrir forced their way into the Square through the police blockade after sustaining a day-long push-and-shove battle with ever new lines of brave protesters moving up to the front as lines of wounded and exhausted passed to the rear. Non-violence does not necessarily mean 'passive' resistance. Mass action is necessarily coercive. Nor does non-violence recognize the sanctity of bourgeois property — only of life. The sit-in strikes of workers barricaded inside the corporation's property is one of the workers' most forceful weapons, revived, starting in 2010, by the Egyptian textile workers, mostly women.

The *N.Y. Times* made much of the contribution of foreign non-violent strategists like Vermont Professor Gene Clark to the emergence of non-violence among the Arabs, but it turns out that the Islamic world had its own historic non-violent role-model in Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the 'frontier Gandhi,' who according to Michael Shank (the *Nation*, March 16) 'built a 100,000 strong non-violent resistance movement out of local tribal people' among the Pashtouns on the Pakistani-Afghanistan border — an arbitrary frontier imposed by the British, the better to divide and rule the Pashtouns. According to Khan, 'Mohammed taught that a Moslem is one who never hurts anyone by word or deed.' The record of British atrocities against Khan's peaceful followers in the '20s was worthy of a Kadaffi. So much for the Clash of Civilizations.

I doubt that many of the young Arab protesters had ever heard of either Clark or Kahn, but that didn't stop them from re-appropriating and re-inventing the most effective tactics in the historic-

al arsenal of non-violent struggle, from Gandhi and the successful Danish WWII Resistance to Nazi Occupation to Martin Luther King.¹¹ What the Tunisian and Egyptian movements also showed is that non-violence encourages positive, democratic, socialist, humanist values. In Egypt, we saw women and men, young and old, workers and professionals, secularists, Christians and Moslems spontaneously joined in mutual respect and solidarity, while street crime fell as the police vanished and neighborhoods organized and picked up the trash. This admirable prefiguration of true democracy (including respect for women) was established for two weeks among the thousands in Tahrir Square (and later among the occupiers of the Wisconsin State Capitol and Wall St. as well). Non-violence is woman-friendly, and, without the full participation of women, there can be no genuine democratic and social revolution. Once you remove the latent threat of man-on-woman violence, the full strength of women — the majority who bear the load of society — emerges. Take away the men with guns, and watch that woman power emerge. Listen to the voice of a Greek woman protester:

As a 10-year-old to a 14-year-old I lived through the Nazi occupation in Athens. There was not solidarity among the starving people of Athens then. Each family was struggling to survive alone. Today, again people are starving in Athens. I am amazed and surprised at the flood of solidarity that has appeared among the Greeks, of all ages, but especially among the young Greeks and the working class. It is not only moving, it is precious. As previously mentioned, the Greeks are **angry**, especially the **women**, women of all ages, with older women at the top. I consider this as a formidable force, which will contribute greatly to, literally, gaining back our land from the "supermen" American and European.

One cannot help comparing the astonishingly rapid and relatively painless nonviolent revolutionary overthrow of Ben Ali and Mubarak with the dismal record of violent revolutionary tactics

¹¹ For a highly readable introduction to the poorly-known history of non-violent struggles I recommend *A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict* by Peter Ackerman and Jack Duval.

like guerilla warfare which succeed (when they do) only after months or years of death and destruction and which generally lead to endless civil war and military rule (for example, in Algeria), wiping out the gains of women in the process. Alas, the non-violent revolutionary victories of January and February of 2011 have been overshadowed by the tragic news from Syria and Libya, where a promising democratic uprising degenerated into a civil war abetted by outside imperialist interests.

Was massive non-violence possible in Libya, with its dispersed population, regional and tribal divisions, lack of a coherent civil society? I doubt it. Oil-rich Libya is a vast, underpopulated Arab country where most of the work was done by immigrant labor, mostly from Black Africa. Appallingly, these poor, frightened Blacks, trying desperately to go home, were scapegoated by the insurgent Arab populations during the NATO-backed Civil War. On the other hand, there is the example of the democratic movement in Yemen, which like Libya, remains a traditionally warlike clan society where armed factional conflict is endemic. Led by an outspoken young woman, Yemen's mass movement, like that of Egypt, remained non-violent in the face of government-sponsored armed aggression. Indeed, at one point, tribal warriors reportedly joined the movement having apparently left their weapons at home. (The fighting between army units loyal and disloyal to the clan of the dictator are apparently independent of the parallel mass movement for democracy.)

In Syria, significant numbers of soldiers assigned to repress non-violent civilian demonstrations have deserted and gone over to the side of the revolution, which is a historic step, necessary for any revolution to succeed. Many have taken up arms, ostensibly to protect the local populations, providing the Assad regime pretexts for massive bombardment of civilians. Although the cruel Assad would have invented other pretexts, it is hard to see how the presence of these liberation army units in their midst will help the oppressed civilians toward a democratic, women's rights and social-equality solution to this tragic dilemma. Indeed, leaked documents from security forces in a number of countries, from Syria to the U.S., suggest that governments deliberately provoke violence in order to make impossible a campaign of massive non-violent protest, whose proven effectiveness (as in Egypt) is their greatest fear. This policy is carried out through two methods: po-

lice over-reaction (in Syria, the mediatized torture-death of a 12 year old protester) and police provocation (in the U.S., the infiltration of Occupy Oakland by undercover agents who provoke violence and then move on to other towns).

Concerning the liberation of Palestine from Israeli military occupation, another apparently intractable problem, let us recall that the *most* progress was made by the first *intifada*, massive and largely non-violent with the Palestinian women (the most educated in the region) in the lead. Since then, the two armed factions, Fatah and Hamas, the one bureaucratic and the other Islamic, have been fighting each other, thus weakening the Palestinian cause and making life impossible for civilians already being tortured by the Israelis. Fatah's Palestinian Authority plays local police force for Israeli domination while Hamas pointlessly lobs an occasional rocket at Israel, bringing down reprisal on the heads of their civilian brothers, sisters, parents, children in Gaza in the form of merciless poundings by IDA artillery and U.S.-supplied jet fighter-bombers. Could a worse situation be imagined? Let me conclude this discussion by quoting a Palestinian physician and parliamentarian, Dr. Mustafa Barghouthi:

I remember the days when some political leaders of the largest Palestinian political parties, Al Fatah and Hamas, laughed at our nonviolent struggle, which they saw as soft and ineffective. But the turning point came in the summer of 2008, when we managed to break the Israeli naval siege of Gaza with small boats. Suddenly, I saw great respect in the eyes of the same leaders who had doubted the power of nonviolence but finally recognized its potential. The power of nonviolence is that it gives Palestinians of all ages and walks of life the tools to challenge those subjugating us. And thousands of peace activists from around the world have joined our movement. In demonstrations in East Jerusalem, Silwan and Hebron we are also being joined by a new and younger Israeli peace movement that categorically rejects Israeli occupation.¹²

¹² Mustafa Barghouthi, "Peaceful Protest Can Free Palestine, *N.Y. Times*, Feb. 22, 2012.

To be sure, neither the tragic dilemma of Syria, nor that of Palestine, can be solved by waving the magic wand of non-violence, even if strikes, boycotts, demonstrations and non-cooperation remain more effective, more inclusive and less destructive tactics than civil war. Such problems can only be solved through *international* solidarity among peoples (which has nothing to do with foreign armed intervention). The Egyptian revolution, stalled though it remains, has already at least forced the partial opening of the border with Gaza, giving the Palestinians held prisoner there by Israel some access for travel and relief. The attempts of Arab sympathizers outside to non-violently invade the borders imposed by Israel on Palestine was a powerful demonstration of what is possible.

5. Horizontal Forms of Self-Organization, Prefiguring a New Society

Another striking original characteristic of the movements of 2011 is the absence of the charismatic leaders and structured organizations typical of earlier movements and epitomized by the ubiquitous image of the Sixties guerilla leader *Commandante* ‘Che Guevarra — more present today as a T-shirt icon or ‘brand’ than as a revolutionary model. Not only have today’s Occupy Everything movements not produced equivalents of Guevarra, the Black Panthers’ Bobby Seale or media-inflated leaders like France’s 1968 student spokesman Dany-the-Red Cohn-Bendit (today a successful politician), they seem to eschew top-down types of leadership organization in favor of a more open, fluid, temporary type of organization from which new leaders are constantly emerging and where the voices of women are at last heard (as they rarely were in the more *macho* groups of the ’60s). Moreover, these assemblies are federating.

Spanish sociologist Jose Luis Moreno Pestaña, a witness-participant in the Cadiz and Seville assemblies of *indignados*, reports:

The assemblies are held in public spaces. Sometimes we hold assemblies of the whole city, but the weekly assemblies are done by neighborhood. Every week there are coordinating meetings for all the assemblies in the city. The representatives change every three

weeks, since the objective is to put in place a collective apprenticeship in how to acquire activist “capital.” We learn how to speak in public, how to debate, to synthesize the positions that emerge.¹³

In the politics of Occupy, the medium is the message. And for the Occupiers from Tahrir through Madrid to Zuccotti Park, the essential message is: ‘This is what democracy looks like.’ Means are not separate from ends, process from revolt. The movement itself prefigures the new society it seeks — egalitarian, ecological, cooperative. As stated in the Declaration of the Occupation of New York City: “Exercise your right to peaceably assemble; occupy public space; create a process to address the problems we face, and generate solutions accessible to everyone. . . . Join us and make your voices heard!”

Interestingly, the Zuccotti Park Occupiers came up with an ingenious way of ‘making voices heard.’ Necessity was the mother of this peoples’ invention. When the City banned the use of loudspeakers, the Assemblies decided to repeat, phrase by phrase, what each speaker was saying, those in front amplifying for those in back, so everyone could hear and participate. With good-humored irony, this process was baptized ‘Mic-Check.’ It encourages speakers to concentrate what is essential in their thoughts into short units and get to the point, while it also obliges the hearer to really take in the speaker’s words and make them in some sense her own.

Writing from Oakland, CA, Ken Knabb, the self-styled mild-mannered enemy of the state, observes:

From the beginning the occupation movement has been resolutely antihierarchical and participatory. General assembly decisions are scrupulously democratic and most decisions are taken by consensus — a process which can sometimes be unwieldy, but which has the merit of making any manipulation practically impossible. In fact, *the real threat is the other way around*: The example of participatory democracy ultimately threatens all hierarchies and social divisions, including those between rank-and-file workers and

¹³ www.nonfiction.fr

their union bureaucracies, and between political parties and their constituents. Which is why so many politicians and union bureaucrats are trying to jump on the bandwagon. ... In this process we are already getting a taste of a new kind of life, life as it could be if we weren't stuck in such an absurd and anachronistic social system. So much is happening so quickly that we hardly know how to express it. Feelings like: "I can't believe it! Finally! This is it! Or at least it *could* be it — what we've been waiting for so long, the sort of human awakening that we've dreamed of but didn't know if it would ever actually happen in our lifetime."¹⁴

Regarding ends and means, Knabb concludes: 'popular participation is itself an essential part of any real solution.' In a similar vein, Stephen Graham, the author of *Cities Under Siege: The New Military Urbanism*, decries that American cities 'have become much more sanitized, much more controlled by questions of zero tolerance, by questions of really aggressive policing, to clear out those that are deemed to be sort of not fitting a model of urban life.' On the other hand, he declares:

What's so wonderful about the Occupy protests is that there's a different, a much more hopeful idea of cities being pushed there, in a world where we have a really radical crisis and a radical sense of illegitimacy for the social model that we're all still having to live under... So, in a way, I think what the Occupy movement is so powerful at is demonstrating that by occupying public spaces around the world, and particularly these extremely symbolic public spaces, it's reasserting that the city is the foundation space for democracy. And we have to reassert that symbolically and with the actual groupings of the activists in space. So the internet is not enough. It's very much necessary to reassert that cities are political spaces which need to be used to mobilize social and political change.

¹⁴ Ken Knabb, Bureau of Public Secrets <http://www.bopsecrets.org/recent/-awakening.htm>

Moreover, the occupations of 2011 do not just stand as examples of democracy and ideal prefigurations of a better society to be visited and admired on public squares, they also spill out into the surrounding communities, from which they draw their sustenance. Take, for example, this report from Mogniss H. Abdallah in Egypt: “In Cairo on April 22, the first national assembly of the Popular Committees for the Protection of the Revolution brought together 5000 people on Tahrir Square. Some 220 of these Committees are implanted across the country and have already come together in some 40 local coordinating committees. Their purpose is the self defense of their neighborhoods, villages and factories. They came into being, quite spontaneously, on January 28th when the police were suddenly withdrawn and criminal gangs of “baltagueya” were unleashed on the population by the regime.” But instead of the planned ‘chaos’ and violence designed to turn honest citizens against the revolution, the self-organized volunteers brought about a rebirth of citizen consciousness and civic order, including the recycling of garbage.

Since that time, the Committees have extended their field of action, monitoring the police, local authorities and social services. Also demanding the arrest and trial of corrupt men in power, the dismantling of fraudulently elected local councils, the restitution of illegally appropriated public goods, democratic election of local governors and an end to military trials of civilians. What we are seeing here is the spontaneous creation of an autonomous democratic counter-power, organized for self-defense, and challenging the existing powers on every front. These 21st Century Egyptians may or may not be aware that the Paris Commune of 1871 grew out of local volunteer self-defense committees or that the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917 were made by the self-organized, federated councils (Soviets) of workers, soldiers and citizens; but their common sense, class instincts and the needs of the moment, drive them — and will continue to drive them — to similar forms of self-organization. Thus the social revolution goes about its business.

Likewise in Greece, with the embattled working people under attack from the full power of European capital, the social movements are becoming ‘more community-based, local-based, so they can address specific needs more. For example, electricity is being taxed, so they’re working on making sure people don’t

have their electricity cut off, preventing people from being evicted from their homes.’ So observes Marina Sitrin, author of *Horizontalism*¹⁵ who has also studied popular movements in Latin America, including in Argentina during the financial meltdown when *piqueteros* and neighborhood assemblies drove several successive governments from power and workers took over closed factories and self-managed them. Sitrin continues:

Similarly in Harlem, people have been working with Occupy Harlem in preventing people’s heat from getting cut off; in Occupy Bronx, it’s about preventing people from getting expelled from their homes—so, more and more kind of reterritorializing, but at the same time keeping a space where we can have our assemblies and exchange experiences from around the city. And I think, actually, it’s a much more radical, if not revolutionary, way of organizing, because when we just come to one plaza, we come to a plaza and have a gathering related to that space. When we’re in our neighborhoods and we come together and relate in that way, it’s more like alternative governance, which is I think what we’re seeing to a small extent in Greece now and in Spain, as well.

One last example of prefigurative politics comes from Greece, where thousands upon thousands of working people lost access to their health care when they were forced into unemployment by the austerity measures imposed by the European Union and the international banks. The same manufactured ‘debt crisis,’ closing hospitals and clinics, has also left many recent Greek medical school graduates unemployed, and so now these young doctors are treating unemployed patients ‘outside the system’ in clinics improvised in peoples’ apartments. How better to demonstrate the absurdity of the commodified capitalist social system that leaves sick people untreated while unemployed doctors walk the street or work as busboys.

¹⁵ “Occupy Entgers Third Month,” *Democracy Now!*, Nov. 16, 2011.

The Birth of Radical Emergence?

The revolutionary year 2011 may indeed enter history as the beginning of something new. Let's call it Radical Emergence. 'Emergence' is a relative new scientific concept related to Complexity theory which helps explain self-organization in fields as different as biology (evolution), zoology (flocking), physics (quantum), cybernetics (networking), human history (city-building), and social movements. Interestingly, Emergence theorists frequently cite Rosa Luxemburg's analysis of worker self-organization during the 1905-06 mass strikes in Russia. In terms of Emergence, one could say that in 2011, humans around the globe began emerging out of their atomized states and forming new movements, like clouds spontaneously forming out of droplets in the atmosphere. In one place after another, people came together in new self-organized assemblies and invented new forms of socialization based on autonomy, mutual respect and community in struggle.

As in 'flocking,' another form of emergent behavior found in nature, the movement's leaders emerge and then replace each other as spontaneously as the 'leaders' in a flock of migrating birds, whose collective compass guides them unerringly across continents, through storms and other obstacles. The leader birds at the front express the flock's consensus of the moment — like the ever-changing spokespersons of the mass assemblies and occupations. The singer-songwriter David Crosby (of Crosby Stills, Nash and Young fame) puts it this way: 'The spread of a movement—look, this thing is like a solution that's reaching saturation. And at the right point, all of a sudden, the crystal forms. And that's what's going on down there in that park. America is a solution, and it is reaching a saturation point. And this crystal is starting to happen all over the country.'¹⁶ Autonomy plus Connectivity equals Radical Emergence!

Warning! More Capitalist Sharks!

We have been concentrating in this essay on the good news: the rolling rebellions of 2011 indicate that popular revolution — once considered 'history' — may very well again be on the historical agenda in the 21st Century. Given capitalism's headlong

¹⁶ *Democracy Now!*, November 10, 2011.

rush toward economic and ecological disaster, this must be considered good news. Now comes the bad news. What comes *after* a successful revolution is not always an improvement. Indeed, as Conservatives have been reminding the world for over 200 years, what comes after may be a good deal worse. Moreover, those who *make* revolutions — the poor and the oppressed, especially the women — are rarely those who benefit when the revolution comes to power.

Alas, history has presented our generation of toilers and rebels with a situation of stark simplicity. Although there was no dearth of revolutions during the 20th century, and although dozens of self-designated ‘Marxist’ parties and ‘national liberation’ movements came to power, not one actually improved the lot of the workers. Instead, the new ‘socialist’ and nationalist elites once in power have turned dictatorial and corrupt. Since the triumph of neo-liberalism in the ’80s, all (except North Korea) have converted to the corporate-controlled ‘free market’¹⁷ — but not necessarily to the ‘free society’ which, according to liberal capitalist ideology, supposedly flows inevitably from it. Instead, these new elites have grown rich in power and today cling to their privileges in the face of mounting popular resentment on every continent.

In the ex-Soviet lands, the former Commissars in charge of socialized state industries successfully morphed themselves into oligarchic CEOs, siphoning off the wealth accumulated by years of workers’ sacrifice into private, offshore bank accounts. In the Peoples’ Republics of China and Vietnam, the leaders of the Communist Party and the Army continue use their monopoly of power and police-state apparatus to discipline an increasingly rebellious working class. Yet these were the regimes that were held up as ‘revolutionary’ examples during the rebellious ’60s and ’70s when my generation of activists was struggling to change the world.¹⁸ They have produced more new breeds of

¹⁷ Among the last was Castro’s Cuba, which abandoned by Russia and desperate for hard currency, descended to a revival of Batista-era gambling and sex tourism — this time Euro- rather than Dollar-denominated — a tragic expedient for a once-promising revolution.

¹⁸ Yet much of the radical U.S. anti-war movement considered itself ‘Maoist’ even after 1971 when Mao allied himself with Nixon and Kissinger to undermine North Vietnam (a Russian ally) and the anti-U.S. resistance in South Vietnam.

capitalist sharks to be aware of, beginning with *stalinia rapacia* (or Nomenklatura Shark), and going on to *theocraticus ferocious* (which has both Israeli and Arab subspecies) and the *kleptokratus africanu*, (whose protective black coloration hides its nefarious predation on its kind).

In Africa as well, people of my generation still recall the heady days of the victorious anti-colonial revolutions of the Sixties with their promise of liberation and a better life. They also recall the sacrifices they made to secure victory (for example, the women of Algeria during the long war of independence). Yet today they live in poverty and despair, with women more oppressed than ever, while the nationalist and 'socialist' leaders of those revolutions and their successors live in arrogant luxury as the kleptocratic officials of U.S.- or French-backed regimes — the dictatorships against whom a new post-revolutionary generation is at last rising up, most recently in Senegal, ironically once considered the beacon of revolutionary concepts like *Négritude* and 'African socialism.'

Today's despotic post-revolutionary regimes extend from Syria (officially ruled by the pan-Arabist Baath 'socialist' party) to Egypt, down to Ethiopia (where in the '90s two allegedly 'Marxist' regimes fought a bloody civil war), all across North Africa, and down the coast to the Union South Africa, where as recently as 1994 a heroic mass struggle of Black youth supported by a popularly-organized world-wide economic boycott of *apartheid*, overthrew the heavily-armed, reactionary *apartheid* regime. Yet once in power, Nelson Mandela's ANC quickly degenerated into yet another corrupt neo-liberal regime, skimming into its pockets part of the vast profits generated by South Africa's underpaid miners and workers, allowing the banks and multi-nationals to ship the bulk profits off-shore, propping up the outrageous Mugabe tyranny in next-door Zimbabwe, while leaving the country nearly bankrupt and unable to supply even minimal social services to the teeming poor.

As a result of these betrayals and disappointments, 'revolution,' 'communism,' and 'socialism' became dirty words not just to Conservatives but also to generations of embittered working people and disillusioned intellectuals, especially in societies that actually experienced such regimes. After so much disappointed idealism and tragic self-sacrifice, who can blame them? Mean-

while, since the 1980s, neo-liberal politicians and pundits have been endlessly repeating as a self-evident ‘lesson of history’ that *any* form of organized resistance leads inevitably to a new *gulag*.

Yet despite the post Cold-War consensus that ‘There Is No Alternative’ to capitalism (TINA) and that ‘History’ had come to an ‘End’ with free-market democracy, by the mid- ‘90s, new anti-capitalist movements arose among the youth around the planet proclaiming ‘Another World is Possible’ in the face of corporate globalization’s attack on the environment and peoples of the Third World. And since the Crash of 2008, with a deepening recession and a world-wide capitalist offensive to make the working people pay for the Crash through wage-cuts and government-imposed austerity, the economic situation has become so intolerable that the masses are being driven in desperation to revolutionary action despite their justified fear both of repression and of new betrayals and disappointments. Once in motion, as we have seen again in 2011, people soon discover the joys of revolution, throw off apathy and fear, assert their autonomy, and begin to realize their dignity as human beings and relate to each other in new ways. The Genie is out of the bottle. And with it new possibilities.

OK, Suppose we win? What happens *after*?

So if we are really to take seriously the hope that 2011 has opened a new revolutionary era, it behooves us to return to the question of ‘what happens *after* our revolution succeeds?’ This means investigating the underlying causes that make liberating mass revolutions degenerate and eventually turn into their own opposites and perhaps thinking of ways to avoid some of them in the future. By writing this book, I hope to make some useful headway in this direction. We must at least have some approximate answers to this fundamental question if we are not to sail into dangerous, uncharted waters of revolution in the dark, without a compass or even a chart, however crudely drawn. There are many sharp rocks and dangerous shoals out there, not to mention capitalist sharks, and the survivor stories of past revolutions and attempts at revolution, as recorded in history and living memory, are our best guides.

After so many revolutions turned sour, it is no surprise that there is no consensus yet on how to create a genuine socialist al-

ternative, although there is certainly a consensus among reasonable people about what paths to *avoid*. Every 21st century worker knows what genuine socialism *isn't*. None desire to live under a top-down military-bureaucratic dictatorship with no right to speak out, organize and strike. So if another world really is possible and if that much-abused word 'socialism' still has any positive meaning, it would refer to the kind of society prefigured by the occupiers from Tahrir to Wall St. I mean some kind of cooperative commonwealth, a federation of democratic, open societies where women are respected and people are economically as well as politically self-governing. Moreover, in today's globalized economy such a commonwealth must be planetary — and ecologically sustainable.

Sound good? The problem is "how to get *there* from *here*?" That is the subject of this book. It asks the question, Given the democratic, egalitarian, participative society we seek as an *end*, what *means* are best suited to get us there? My thesis is that when it comes to politics in the last analysis the means themselves determine the end. It draws on the evidence of survivors of past revolutions gone astray, like Victor Serge's *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, and attempts to sort out what solutions to the crucial question of 'organizing the revolution' have backfired and what alternative solutions, pushed aside by historical forces during the 20th century, might prove to be effective in the coming revolutions of the 21st.

My preliminary conclusions based on a half-century as a participant-observer of revolutionary movements and a student of their history is that the two fundamental underlying causes of post revolutionary degeneration are: 1) Vertical, bureaucratic, revolutionary party organization, and 2) the limits of national isolation (leading to reactionary nationalism). Moreover, these two forces — nationalism and vertical leadership — tend to re-inforce each other. The vertical leadership of an embattled revolution isolated behind national borders, feeling obliged to tighten the reins of its power to secure itself against foreign intervention and internal subversion, is unlikely to give up power and will eventually turn into the elite of a corrupt self-perpetuating privileged counter-revolutionary bureaucracy.

Such was the outcome of the French Revolution. Surrounded by a coalition of hostile monarchies and undermined by royalist

subversion the Jacobin leaders unleashed the Terror, then turned it against the rebellious poor, whereupon they undermined their own power base, fell under the guillotine and opened the door to a new form of monarchy, Napoleonic imperialism. The same pattern applies to the Russian Revolution of 1917-19, led by the vertically-organized Bolshevik Party and invaded capitalist-financed White armies and a coalition of British, French, U.S., Japanese and other expeditionary forces. White Terror provoked Red Terror, which became institutionalized as Stalin established his bureaucratic dictatorship under the absurd pretext of ‘building socialism in a single country’ — backward Russia surrounded by a hostile capitalist world and forced to face the world market and the imperialist arms races.

In both cases, the newly privileged ‘revolutionary’ elites, once entrenched, ended up having more in common with their former enemies — the aristocrats or capitalists — than with their own working people, and were eager to collaborate with them: Bonaparte and his brothers married royal princesses, former KGB Colonel Putin became a financial Oligarch, and veteran Vietnamese and Chinese Communist Party chiefs became overnight billionaires by selling off the labor of their own rigidly controlled workers to rapacious U.S. corporations on the cheap. (N.B. The thousands of strikes in China and the occupation of the village of Wukan in Yuanddon Province by its residents, linked by cellphone, in defiance of the authorities in order to save their homes and fields from a corrupt land sell-off imposed by Communist party officials are very much part of the rolling rebellions of 2011.)

So to return to the question of ‘What happens *after* the revolution?’ if our newly-possible, 2011-inspired dream of a revolutionary future is not to turn into a nightmare, solutions must be found to, what for shorthand we can label, the ‘nationalism problem’ and the ‘vertical bureaucracy problem.’ Thus formulated, the respective solutions would obviously be 1) ‘internationalism’ and 2) ‘horizontalism’ — the same original characteristics that stood out during the rolling revolutions of 2011. The following chapters develop these concepts, both historically and futuristically, in terms of what types of human self-organization may succeed in the 21st century at a time in history when, if we all don’t get together and put an end to capitalism’s depredations in this generation, there will be no planet fit for human habitation in

the next generation — the generation of my cherished granddaughter, that of your children, and your own generation, dear young Reader. So read on and see. This book may not have all the right answers, but at least it is asking the right questions while there still is, maybe, time.

March 2012

Ecotopia: A Bet You Can't Refuse

One Chance in a Hundred?

Let's be optimistic! Let's bet there's one chance in a hundred that the Earth will still be habitable at the end of the 21st Century! Think I'm exaggerating? Try answering the following questions honestly: Do you personally think that weapons of mass destruction are likely to stop proliferating? Do you truly believe that pollution is going to stop getting worse? Can you actually imagine that forests will stop disappearing? That the climate will stop heating up? Do you actually see an end to:

glaciers melting?
icebergs shrinking?
arctic permafrost disappearing?
oceans rising?
coastlands sinking?



famines raging?
epidemics spreading?
cities deteriorating?

global unemployment rising?
poverty increasing?
armed conflicts erupting?
refugees multiplying?
petty crime flourishing?
corporate crime expanding?
real wages declining?
useless wealth piling up?
rich people withdrawing into gated communities?
youth despairing?
drugs spreading?
AIDS spreading?
prisons boiling over?

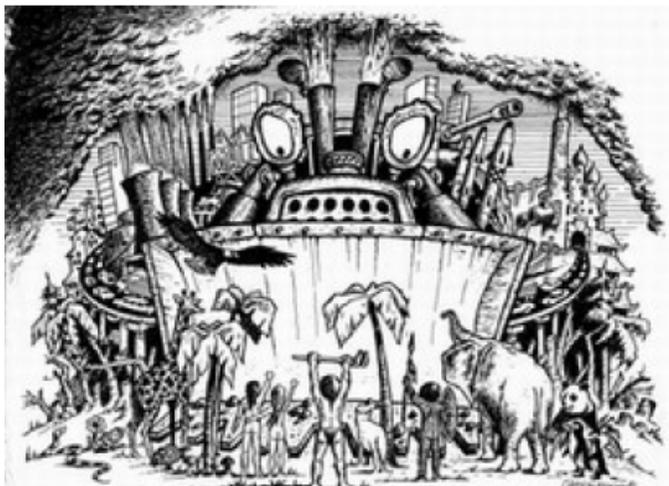


religions fanaticizing?
nationalists killing?
womens' rights shrinking?
government security hardening?



civil rights disappearing?
threat of atomic war increasing?
danger of nuclear accident growing?
women being degraded?

wars dragging on forever?
small farms dying?
forests shrinking?
droughts spreading?



biofuels starving peasants?
oil spills starving fisherfolk
storms increasing?
deserts extending?
world hunger increasing?
the struggle for water intensifying?
animals and fish disappearing?

Need I go on? You know as well as I do that each of these trends will lead to foreseeable disasters if left unchecked. Now imagine all these trends interacting in horrid synergy. Atmospheric warming leading to glacier melting leading to oceans rising leading to coastal flooding leading to fleeing refugees leading to worldwide epidemics leading to social chaos leading to martial law leading to ... you name it. Not a pretty picture. Small wonder we rarely allow ourselves to actually visualize such a future and to imagine ourselves living in it. I dare you to close your eyes and try it, right now, just for thirty seconds...

Denial and Distraction

Hard to stay focused on that picture? Our situation reminds me of people in the Robert Louis Stevenson story who were living in a city built on the edge of a volcano. We get (more or less blithely) through the days without cracking up thanks to a single powerful psychological factor: *denial*. (Didn't they name the longest river in the world after it?) Feeling the need to turn your eyes away from immanent global catastrophe?



Today's marketplace provides a full spectrum of diversions for whiling away your time on the way to extinction! Shopping is a sure-fire way to take your mind off the horror; so are TV and losing yourself in work. Grass is great if it helps you laugh at the absurdity of it all, but if it makes you paranoid, stick to booze. (I find alcohol excellent for momentary forgetting.) If you have access to anti-depressants, tranquilizers and Percodan; they're the drugs of choice for the quietly desperate. Of course, extreme sports are more of a thrill, and a lot of people get their rocks off competing for more and more money, more and more power. Gambling gives you the same rush.

Cocaine and speed can be cool too if you like the fast lane, but don't knock old standbys like opium and heroin if you just want to forget. Alas, the downside of the opiates is they inhibit sex, which satisfied customers consider the best bet for an inex-

pensive, healthful, peaceful diversion. On the other hand, beating up on your family or on people from other groups can be diverting up to and including murder and mutilation. For the more introspective, there's suicide (martyrdom optional). And speaking of martyrdom, let's finish off this list with the least expensive diversion on the market: obliterating yourself behind a group identity. Identities are packaged in a variety of garish colors like religion, nationality, sexual orientation and race to appeal to down-market consumers.



But if we do dare peek out from under our security blanket of denial, what do we see? We are the children of the 20th Century, the bloodiest so far in history. Future historians, if there are any, will see the 20th as an orgy of mechanized mayhem, featuring brutal totalitarian dictatorships, two bloody world wars, aerial bombardment of civilians including nuclear weapons, scientific genocides, and the devastation of vast swaths of the earth. The epidemic that plagued the 20th Century was violence, and it threatens to overwhelm our own.

Our own 21st got off to a fast start on September 11, 2001 — a tragic pretext for the planet's high-tech military super-power to proceed with plans to invade oil-rich, strategically important countries while cowing its allies. Meanwhile, several more unstable states have acquired atomic bombs. A booming trade in

conventional arms is fueling all the civil wars, slow genocides and intractable regional crises we inherited from the bloody 20th. And we've nine more decades to go with no peace in sight. Add this growing epidemic of violence to all those other destructive tendencies, and one chance in a hundred to get us out of this mess begins to look like generous odds.

Call me an optimist.

A Challenge to the Imagination

For the sake of argument, let us agree that there *is* one chance in a hundred for a livable world in 2100. If that one chance does exist, shouldn't we be able to *imagine* it, as a kind of Sci-Fi story? After all, human beings dreamed of space-travel for centuries, and writers of future fictions imagined it with greater and greater accuracy.¹⁹ So why shouldn't 21st Century humans at least be able to *imagine* a possible future in which Space-ship Earth is saved from self-destruction?

Let's put our imaginations to work. What kind of realistic salvation scenario can we imagine for a planet in the thralls of a powerful social and economic system which seems inexorably to be leading us to predictable catastrophes? If we exclude divine or extra-terrestrial intervention from our fantasy, then we need to imagine the emergence of some kind of positive revolution in human relations. In other words, we need to envision a radical change in the way humans work, run things, relate to each other and to other living beings to rescue the planet before it becomes unlivable.

But is the emergence of such a positive revolution in human affairs even *imaginable* today?

The only way to answer that question is to join with me and accept the challenge of dreaming up imaginary visions of *possible* roads to Utopia. Only when humans pay attention to their dreams can Humanity awake from the sleep-walk of neurotic denial and the nightmare of capitalist barbarism. If we can put our heads together and realistically imagine such a positive human revolution succeeding, then our one chance in a hundred ex-

¹⁹ As a result, neither the first *sputnik* nor Yuri Gagarin's epoch-making manned space flight came as a surprise to Sci-Fi fans despite the official secrecy that surrounded the Cold War space programs.

ists. So why not dream? Whatever the odds may be, betting on Utopia seems to be our only chance of winning. Let's remember the handwriting on the walls of revolutionary Paris in 1968: 'Take Your Dreams for Realities!' 'All Power to the Imagination!' Indeed, perhaps dreaming together is the most useful thing we can do in the midst of all the conflict and confusion around us: to dream of *possible* Utopias and to imagine materially possible roads to get there. See note.

NOTE: Translation of above into revolutionary jargon for the benefit of Serious Revolutionaries: Given the propensity of negative tendencies in the contemporary objective situation to converge into critical crisis, the spontaneous semi-conscious mental activity vulgarly known as 'dreaming' posits itself as an imperative task that every conscious militant must urgently embrace.

At this point in our discussion, I hear parental voices whining: Isn't dreaming up roads to Utopia an impractical waste of time, like playing *Dungeons and Dragons* or *Second Life*? Maybe, Mom and Dad, but what if play is the only way out of the industrious mess you (and your parents) got us into? How can people change the world without a positive vision, a direction, a goal?

The Power of Utopias

In any case, it turns out that the human imagination is a powerful thing, and Utopian thought has been a major influence on human society at least since the Greek philosopher Plato outlined his ideal society in *The Republic* — a two-thousand year-old book which continues to inspire political thought to this day. During the Catholic Middle Ages, Saint Augustine's Utopian *City of God* set the ideal pattern for a Christian polity. In 1516 at the dawn of the capitalist era, the term *Utopia* (the word means *No-place* in Greek) was coined by Thomas Moore, an idealistic churchman (and later high official at the Court of Henry

VIII). Moore saw private property, enforced by legal violence, as the root cause of the poverty and injustice in Tudor England.²⁰

He spun a traveler's tale of a faraway land where nobody starved because every able person shared in society's work for just six hours a day — anticipating the French 35-hour work-week by five centuries. Moore's outspoken idealism later cost him his head (and earned him a sainthood) when he refused to approve of the King's divorce.

Meanwhile over in sunny France, François Rabelais, the unfrocked monk and medical doctor who wrote the comic novels *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel*, created an anarchistic Utopia in his fictional Abbey of Thélème, a reversal of the oppressive monastic life, whose only rule was Do What Thou Wilt. Utopias based on religious visions of human holiness and wholeness have inspired vast peasant revolutions down through history. In Germany in 1563, the city of Münster was turned into a radical commune by Anabaptists under Jan of Lyden; in 17th Century England, the 'Diggers' and 'Levelers' shared out the land and wealth; and in China, beginning in 1851, the Ta'i-p'ing rebels occupied major provinces in China for over a decade. All were led on by dreams of fellowship and equality.

Chinese Utopians. During the Ta'i-p'ing Rebellion of 1851-1864, the rebels conquered and held major portions of China for over a decade before being finally put down by the British General Gordon (henceforth 'Chinese' Gordon). Inspired by a religious sect, the T'ai-pings abjured alcohol, gambling and opium; they practiced complete equality between men and women, equal division of the land, construction of a new social order based on cooperative hamlets of twenty-

²⁰ England, Moore's traveler observed, was a barbarous land where sheep eat men because the peasants were starving after being driven off their common lands, which were enclosed as sheep-walks, providing profits for the wool industry and mutton for the rich to eat.

five families and State granaries as a hedge against recurring famines, which had decimated China in the 1840s.

In the early 19th century, the ‘Dickensian’ poverty of the dawning Industrial Age provoked a new Utopian response in the socialist proposals of Fourier and Saint-Simon and in the successful colonies created by the philanthropist Robert Owen. These Utopian visions in turn inspired a young German philosopher named Karl Marx, who sought to integrate them with a new political force that he saw emerging under capitalism — workers’ social justice movements that took to the streets throughout Europe in 1848.

Marx and Utopia

The difference between the Utopian socialism of Owen, Fourier and St. Simon and what Marx and Engels (in the Germanic philosophical jargon of their era) called ‘scientific socialism,’ was this. The Utopians proposed an ideal model society without worrying too much about how it could be realized (except for Owen, who founded actual colonies). Marx rooted socialism in the ‘science’ of history, as the successful outcome of the class struggle between worker and capitalist. Marx himself published no Utopian blueprints, although he did theorize about socialism and its higher stage communism in letters to his associates. Marx’s ‘scientific’ method was to learn from the actual movement of the workers, whose ‘way of knowing’ was through engaging in social struggles — like the English workers’ campaigns for a democratic Charter and the Ten-Hour-Day. Thus, when the French workers created the world’s first workers’ government (the democratic, egalitarian Paris Commune of 1871), Marx pointed to the Commune’s actual working existence as the practical answer to the theoretical question of how to organize socialism. So Marx did not so much reject Utopia as redefine it as ‘the new society emerging from the shell of the old.’



In 1888, the American socialist Edward Bellamy published his novel *Looking Backward* about a dreamer from Boston who awakens in a future society where people live secure, fulfilling lives with no use for money, under a rigorously rational socialist regime. This anti-capitalist best-seller initiated millions of young Americans into thinking along lines that were entirely new to them and radicalized a number of future American socialists like Eugene V. Debs, Daniel de Leon, Charles Kerr, and the great defense lawyer, Clarence Darrow. The novel's popularity spawned socialist clubs all over the country and helped unite splinter groups into a growing nationwide socialist movement in the 1890s.²¹

In England, the poet and graphic artist William Morris, founder of the Arts and Crafts movement, became converted to Marxian socialism around 1880. Morris was uncomfortable with Bellamy's utilitarian Utopia, with its obsessive productivity and state control, and so in 1890 he answered it with his own successful novel, *News from Nowhere*. Morris' dreamer awakes in an idyllic post-revolutionary London, free of industrial pollution,

²¹ Socialism in the U.S. The half-forgotten American socialist movement had millions of voters and locals in cities and rural areas all over America. Socialists published daily papers in a number of cities as well as 140 magazines in 14 different languages.

where the inhabitants, handsome, sane and happy, live next to nature and work only for pleasure. This novel had an enormous influence in England.

A half-century later, British socialist George Orwell wrote his satirical anti-Utopias *Animal Farm* and *1984* and opened the eyes of millions of readers to the phoniness of totalitarian Communism's claims on the Utopian dream. During the later 20th Century, a number of North American science fiction writers tried out Utopian scenarios. Robert Heinlein, Margaret Atwood, Ursula Le Guin, Marge Piercy, Kim Stanley Robinson, Ernest Callenbach and others have created futuristic Utopias that give us critical perspectives on the present as well as plausible, detailed, brilliantly imagined histories of possible future societies in which everything from ecology to sex has been revolutionized. Translated in many languages, these thought-provoking, prophetic, sometimes inspiring Utopian novels have been read by millions.

Fascist Dystopias

Future fictions can even inspire deeds. In the 1980s, the racist right in the U.S. was galvanized by a novel called *The Turner Diaries* by Andrew MacDonald, the leader of the white separatist organization National Alliance. The novel depicts a violent racist revolutionary struggle in the United States that escalates into global genocide, leading to the extermination of all Jews and non-whites. For the author and his fans, this was not a negative outcome but rather the fulfillment of his dream of a White world.

The Turner Diaries soon became the Bible of the Nazi-Christian armed militias that flourish in the United States. In these milieus, some folks took MacDonald's paranoid fantasies for actual fact. *The Turner Diaries* was the bedside reading of Timothy McVeigh, the young ex-soldier who killed more than 400 people with a bomb of his own making when he blew up the Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995. He was apparently inspired by the episode where Turner describes how the Order dynamites the FBI Building. Which goes to show that life sometimes imitates art. (Not to be outdone by the Christian Fundamentalists, bin Laden's terrorists raised the *ante* seven years later and killed 3,000 in New York.)

Since around 2000, the *Left Behind* series of apocalyptic novels have been topping the best-seller lists in the U.S. — a publishing phenomenon that has generated films, and other spin-offs. The novels describe the adventures of a group of evangelical Christians who survive the rise of the Antichrist — plus plagues, judgments, and the final battle of Armageddon (*Left Behind* Vol. 11). These novels have a born-again Christian audience of millions linked by talk radio and fan clubs, where current events are interpreted in terms of the Apocalypse scenario derived from the 2nd Century Gospel of St. John.²²



It's a sad commentary that wackos, racists, survivalists and end-of-the-world fundamentalists seem to be the only subcultures with a vision of the future, albeit a frighteningly negative one. Our strife-torn world cries out for positive visions. We desperately need an *imaginable* Utopia. It isn't enough for good

people merely to protest, to struggle eternally *against* the latest outrage. Of course, we must resist war, racism, sexism, police-state repression and a host of other evils. But what we most need today is a positive goal, a vision of a *possible* future without which our awareness of the endless evils of this world only makes us passive and cynical.

A Favorable Moment?

Such a vision — at once Utopian and realistic — is needed to strike the imagination and spark hope, without which no positive revolution is possible. One chance out of a hundred isn't a huge hope, agreed. But we know where despair leads: drugs, anomie, religious and nationalist fanaticism. Moreover, the historical moment, although dark, may well be favorable for floating a new revolutionary vision of a more human society for a

²² See 'Religion and Repression in the US' in Part II above.

simple reason: since the collapse of Communism, Liberalism and Social-Democracy, there are no more competitors.

During the 90's, Communism — more nightmare than dream — transformed itself into Mafia capitalism in Russia and China and lost its appeal. In Europe, Social Democracy is definitively discredited as a Left-wing cover for free-market privatization. And since 2001, the American model of free market neo-liberal capitalism has lost its sheen. Once proclaimed as 'the end of history,' the neo-liberal vision is increasingly tattered.

Only yesterday, greed was good and CEO's were gods. Then the dotcom bubble burst, massive embezzling by top management was exposed (remember Enron?), looted retirement funds collapsed and big modern countries like Argentina found themselves bankrupt after submitting to IMF economic therapy. Seven year later, Bear Stearns, Lehman Brothers, Washington Mutual, Wachovia and even Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae gambled themselves out of business. Today, the diehard free-marketeters are hardly more credible than the diehard Communists. The world is waking up from the American Dream with a nasty hangover. Only yesterday, reactionary new philosophers in Europe and neo-con pundits from right-wing think tanks in the US had a monopoly on politically correct thinking. Today they are seen as tiresome, not trendy. Their world is in crisis. We are entering a century of breakdown and contestation. It will either end as a century of Utopias or it will end in catastrophe.

The men in suits who rule the world today have no plan for the future. Perhaps because unconsciously they understand that there will be no future — since they are busy killing it. Their main preoccupation is holding onto their power and wealth. Their perspectives are limited to inflating quarterly balance sheets, winning biennial election campaigns, silencing critics, and fighting 'holy' or 'humanitarian' wars over control of resources. They are like the officers of a ship drifting rudderless toward a rocky shore, busy looting the cargo, locking up the passengers and crew below decks and fighting among themselves for the booty.

Mutiny on Starship Earth

The name of that vessel is Starship Earth. Its only hope is that the passengers and crew can figure out a way to get organized and

take over the bridge before it is too late. Mutiny on Starship Earth: great title for our Utopian scenario. Just what we need to start with, *if* we can imagine a plausible one.

That is the nature of the Utopian Bet. Even with the odds against us, it's a bet we can't refuse. Because like it or not, we are all in the same boat, passengers and crew alike — far out at sea and drifting toward shipwreck. One chance in a hundred may seem like pretty slim odds, but look at it this way: The bad news is that we will soon have nothing to lose but the dismal spectacle of a dying world — made uglier every day by increasing injustice, suffering, and stupidity. The good news is that we have a finite chance to save a beautiful planet with all our friends on board. Nothing to lose against an infinity of life and beauty? Mathematically speaking, it's zero against infinity — pretty good odds in my book.

Talk about a bet you can't refuse!



How to get There from Here

A Modern Archimedes Hypothesis

★ *I will raise the Earth!* ★ *The Modern Archimedes Hypothesis* ★ *The Lever of Planetary Solidarity* ★ *Divided We Fall* ★ *The Internet as a Planetary Platform* ★ *The Fulcrum of Planetary Consciousness* ★ *Internet, Democracy, Emergence* ★ *Our Age of Absolutes* ★ *Simple, One-Sided Negation* ★ *Utopia, or the Negation of Negation* ★ *Connectivity, Complexity, Quantum, and Emergence* ★ *An Ecotopian Manifesto* ★ *Conclusion*

Supposing then that we do bet on Ecotopia, our next problem is imagining how we can possibly get from here to there without supernatural or extraterrestrial help. In other words, what are the human (social), material (technological) and ideological (spiritual) elements — actual or latent in globalized capitalist society — that can combine to enable the emergence of global social movements capable of stripping the Billionaires of their power and creating sustainable post-capitalist societies?

I will raise the Earth!

They say that in ancient times, that bold philosopher and inventor Archimedes of Syracuse boasted: Give me a lever long enough, a fulcrum, a place to stand, and I will raise the Earth! Of course, we know Archimedes' amazing feat was

only a hypothesis — a ‘thought experiment’ that could take place only in the mind. But Archimedes’s discovery was no less powerful for being a ‘mere’ idea dreamed up by a philosopher. In the centuries after Archimedes, inventions based on his hypothesis vastly multiplied the puny strength of human beings so that they were able to circumnavigate the globe and eventually to dominate it — for better or for worse. Can anyone then doubt the ability of an idea — a thought experiment — to multiply human power?

Our problem, if we want to successfully imagine a plausible science fiction scenario with a happy ending, is to think up a similar hypothetical formula for multiplying human power so that our passengers and crew can lift the Earth out of its destructive orbit before it is shipwrecked. Our mutineers will need a lot of leverage to overpower the officers who are fighting among themselves, looting the ship, and steering it toward disaster. How to imagine such a *lever*, *platform*, and *fulcrum*? History seems to indicate that whenever people are ready to pose new questions, the means of resolving them are already present.

The Modern Archimedes Hypothesis

In our scenario for ‘Mutiny on Spaceship Earth’ the three elements are already on board, ready to be configured into a new power strong enough to halt the onrush of global self-destruction and release the human energy to build a new society. I call them: *The Social Lever*, *The Electronic Platform*, and *The Philosophical Fulcrum*.



- *The Social Lever* is the vast untapped power of planetary solidarity. Once the Billions of passengers and crew members aboard Spaceship Earth unite and act together, no force can stop them. Divided, they are pitiful and weak. United, their power is irresistible.
- *The Electronic Platform* is the Internet. Its emergent technology is tentacular, infinite in its connections, interactive, and indestructible because its center is everywhere and nowhere. Accessible to nearly everyone on the globe, the Internet provides a place to stand large enough for Billions to interact. The Internet is a planetary platform where each can speak for her/himself on equal footing, where Billions of passengers and crew-members can connect, unite, empower themselves and take initiatives on a planetary scale — the only scale on which it makes sense to confront the power-mad officers of predatory global capitalism.
- *The Philosophical Fulcrum* is planetary consciousness: the awareness that planets are mortal and that we are all in the same boat. It is a vision which places the survival of Spaceship Earth and its inhabitants at the center of all things. It is the affirmation of Life on Earth as a new universal, as the common spiritual and practical basis around which Billions can unite.

The Lever of Planetary Solidarity

Solidarity is the most familiar of the three powers. As the radical poet Shelley put it: We are many, they are few. We all know that there is strength in numbers, and it's six Billion of us against about six thousand Billionaires. It follows that united we stand, divided we fall, for in the words of the old song 'union makes us strong'. Solidarity is not merely a realistic tactical, practical necessity; it is a positive social ethic and a fundamental human value as well. The old labor slogan sums up the lesson of all the great religious teachers of the past two thousand years: 'An injury to one' — to the humblest child among us — 'is an injury to all'. In the case of our Mutiny scenario, it is obvi-

ous that if the passengers and crew imprisoned below decks in sealed compartments don't find a way to come together and unite, they won't be able to take over the bridge before the money-crazed officers wreck the ship.

If, for the sake of realism, we base our successful mutiny scenario on recorded human history, it turns out that the potential power of mass solidarity has shown itself at revolutionary moments from ancient times. Ever since the revolt of Spartacus and the Roman slaves, the poor, the downtrodden, the exploited have shown their ability to unite and use their numbers to win concessions from their powerful oppressors — even to overthrow them. Down through the ages — from the vast peasant uprisings in Feudal times to the mass revolutions of the 18th, 19th, 20th centuries down to the Arab Spring of 2011 — numbers, united, have overcome armed entrenched power structures... At least momentarily.

Women and Children First. “But what about human nature,” people object? To be sure, the aggression, competitiveness and greed exemplified by the brawling, pilfering officers of Spaceship Earth (and by most of us average folks on petty, personal levels) are based on natural human instincts — traits which capitalist society magnifies both by cultivating and rewarding them. But cooperation and solidarity are also instinctive human survival traits — arguably more essential, if less obvious, because we take them for granted. Yet, without the nurturance and attention of parents, extended families and local societies, no human infant could survive our prolonged early helplessness or ever learn to speak. In humanity's long past, solidarity and collaboration have been more effective than competition and aggression for our survival. As Barbara Ehrenreich points out in *Blood Rites: Origins and History of the Pas-*



sions of War, early humans — naked, hairless, clawless bands of men, women and children armed with sticks and stones — were easy prey for mega-mammals like the saber-toothed tiger. How then did these early human bands protect themselves and their young when faced with huge ravening predators? Apparently, our ancestors drove them off by forming a chorus line, donning costumes, waving branches, making horrible noises with voice and instruments and putting on a rhythmic group dance! This is not a joke. Put yourself in the place of a tiger looking to pick off a slow-moving human child for an easy snack and suddenly faced with an organized band of fifty men, women and children all wearing branches on their heads to look ten feet tall, waving more branches like claws on long, outstretched arms, jumping up and down, pounding their

feet, agitating their branches and beating on drums altogether in the same rhythm while advancing in a body — a 100-foot Chinese dragon screaming like a banshee. ‘Well, I wasn’t *really* in the mood for human child today, anyway.’ According to Ehrenreich, it would be hundreds of thousands of years before a class of aggressive, male predators armed with hi-tech bows and spears emerged to drive off other predators, call themselves chiefs and dominate society — like the officers of Spaceship Earth.

Make no mistake. In no time or place have the wealthy ever shared any of their power or privileges without a struggle. It was only by uniting in mass movements, unions, and political parties that ordinary working people won such democratic rights as universal suffrage, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, the eight-hour day, and legislation mandating universal education, healthcare, job safety and social security. Moreover, such reforms

— today under attack — were achieved only after generations of struggle and so far only in Europe, the Americas, and a few Asian and ex-colonial countries.

Today, neo-liberal capitalism is attacking these basic rights on a global scale, even in the wealthy advanced countries. Moreover, in vast portions of the world, the common people still have not won personal freedom, civil liberties or a say in government — in spite of generations of mass sacrifice in



the name of democracy and national independence. As a result, their labor is cheap. Globalization allows transnational businesses to exploit that cheap labor, and capital has been flowing from the democracies — where employees can still protect their rights to some extent — to the dictatorships, where they can't. Moreover, authoritarian rule — the business-friendly, security-driven police state — is on the rise even among the traditionally liberal democracies: a contaminated export blowing back to the capitalist homelands along with 'third world' poverty in first world cities.

Solidarity must be international to be effective. This is what the workers of Europe concluded after the defeat of the Europe-wide 1848 national-democratic revolutions. In 1864, they formed the first International Workers' Association. Nearly a century and a half later, under globalized corporate capitalism, it is all the more obvious that unless the lever of solidarity is extended across borders, it is no longer an effective tool against the profit-driven 'race to the bottom.' Without it, the Billionaires — who can move their money electronically and ship their factories cheaply from country to country — will always dominate the Billions, who are rooted at home and barred from crossing national borders seeking work in the so-called free labor market. Thus, the same ruthless U.S. corporations who moved their operations to impoverished Mexico after imposing NAFTA are now relocating to Asia, where the wages are even more pitiful.

Divided We Fall

Why did the advantages won by people-power in the past remain partial and temporary? Largely because they remained isolated. By uniting, the slaves of Ancient Rome were able to win military victories under the leadership of the gladiator Spartacus. But they were eventually hunted down by fresh Roman Legions brought in from other provinces of the Roman Empire. In modern times, the same isolation seems to have condemned every revolution to the same sorry fate. At various times, the common people in France (1789, 1830, 1848, 1871, and 1968), Russia (1905, 1917), Spain (1936), China (1911, 1949), Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968) have united to successfully wrest power from the hands of feudal, capitalist or Communist overlords. But as long as their revolutions were con-

fined to one country, they were doomed to ultimate defeat — just like Spartacus and the slaves of Rome. These revolutionary moments flash out like solitary beacons across history, illuminating at once the liberatory potential for mass self-organization latent among oppressed people — as well as the seemingly inevitable doom of their struggles when left isolated. Some more recent examples:

1871. Following the French Emperor Napoleon III's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, the workers of Paris took power in the besieged French capital, held out against the invaders, organized elections and took charge of defense, administration and education on an egalitarian basis. But this Paris Commune, isolated from the rest of France, was crushed after two glorious months by the official French Army with the help of the Prussians.

1917. The useless slaughter of the First World War provoked mutinies in many armies, and a wave of mass revolts followed the Armistice in 1918. But the revolutionaries took power first during the War in 1917, in backward, impoverished Russia, where there was no basis for building a modern socialist society. Worse still, the Russian people were cut off from the workers of Europe first by the War and then by the intervention of counterrevolutionary armies and expeditionary forces financed by France, Britain, Japan, Poland, the U.S. and other capitalist governments which feared the revolution would spread. Isolated, the Russian Revolution degenerated into a totalitarian dictatorship — thus discrediting the dream of socialism or communism in the eyes of many workers for nearly a century.

1936. Under the Spanish Republic, a fascistic *junta* led by General Franco staged a *coup d'état* against the elected government, but the workers and small farmers rose up in arms and held out for three years, despite betrayal by the liberals and Communist leaders. To crush revolutionary democracy in Spain, Franco had to import troops and weapons from Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, while France, Britain and the US — worried about their investments under a Spanish democracy — isolated the legitimate Spanish Republic with a one-sided embargo. Ironically, the democracies' abandonment of the Spanish people made Hitler's conquest of Europe inevitable.

1944-45. At the end of World War Two, the leaders of the democratic West, Churchill and Roosevelt (later Truman) turned Eastern Europe over to the tender mercies of their ally Stalin, the

Russian Communist dictator, in return for Stalin's promise to call off the Communist-led armed Resistance movements threatening to take power in post-war France, Italy and Greece under the popular slogan: 'From resistance to revolution!' In Greece, the red partisans refused to submit to a British-imposed puppet government, and resisted, in isolation, for several years. In East Europe, Stalin bypassed the (Communist-led) local anti-Nazi resistance fighters and imposed loyal (to him) Communist puppets who had spent the war in Moscow. Yet within a few years, East European workers and intellectuals began rising up against the pitiless, slave-driving 'Communist' police state — uniting in a general strike (Berlin 1953); creating Workers' Councils (Hungary 1956); establishing 'socialism with a human face' (Czechoslovakia 1968); and setting up independent Solidarity trade unions (Poland 1981). Russia was able to crush these heroic revolts only because until 1989 they remained largely isolated within individual Communist satellites, which took place at different times. Also, the Western powers urged anti-Communist resistance *via* Radio Free Europe, but they turned their backs on these actual workers' revolutions, allowing the Russian tanks to roll over them without so much as lifting a finger.

In the 1950s and 1960s, colonial peoples all over Asia and Africa fought their way to independence. But new bureaucratic-military elites — espousing 'nationalist,' 'democratic,' 'religious,' or 'Marxist' ideologies — took over the reins of power and instead of realizing the dreams of Pan-African or international socialist Unity, squabbled among themselves, exploited tribal politics and got rich on sweetheart deals with the former colonist and multinational corporations, who today continue to lay waste to the lands and the peoples of Africa in their greed for petroleum and precious metals.

1968. That year a wave of popular rebellions broke out in a number of countries, challenging simultaneously both Russian and Western imperialisms. Yet despite similar goals and mutual sympathies, these revolts remained isolated and were finally repressed by the police and armed forces of the various governments. These movements certainly inspired each other — from Vietnam to Paris to Prague to the U.S. — and they shared common goals. However, the rebels of 1968 were not connected globally and had no means to coordinate their movements in real time

on an international scale — divided as they were by the Iron Curtain and lacking the kind of interactive information and communications systems activists take for granted today.

1989. By the time the Berlin Wall actually fell and the Moscow-imposed dictatorships of Eastern Europe were overthrown, the Utopian spirit of 1968 in the West lay buried under twenty years of capitalist counter-revolution epitomized by Margaret Thatcher's doctrine that 'There Is No Alternative' (TINA) to neo-liberal globalization. Thus, the newly free Russian and East Europeans, instead of being greeted by the solidarity of rebel students and workers, were instead overwhelmed by capitalist speculators: AFL-CIO union representatives preaching the gospel of private pension plans, neo-liberal 'Chicago boys' preaching 'shock therapy' and Mafia-capitalists privatizing the collective factories and houses the Soviet workers had labored to create and still officially owned under Communist laws — truly the robbery of the century!²³

Are the revolts and freedom struggles of ordinary people condemned to remain forever isolated and easily co-opted or crushed? Today, more than ever, the motto 'United We Stand, Divided We Fall' must be understood globally. An injury to one is an injury to all, *everywhere* on the planet. We have learned that movements for justice and equality can never succeed if they are confined to a single country. No boss will pay \$20 an hour to a U.S. worker when he can outsource her job to some (U.S.-supported) low-wage dictatorship for 80 cents an hour. This lesson becomes more and more urgent as capitalist globalization imposes a 'race to the bottom' of pay and conditions on wage earners in every land. It is becoming increasingly obvious to all that in a globalized economy, human rights, social benefits and popular reforms must be enjoyed by working people in *all* countries before they are secure in *any*, and that movements for human and environmental rights must be international to succeed. The Lever of Solidarity must be *planetary* before it can 'lift the

²³ On the other hand, we can only imagine what kind of world we might be living in today, if, instead of waiting until 1989, East had met West in 1968, when, from Prague to Paris to Peking, youth and oppressed people everywhere were rising up and demanding Utopia. For more about the Sixties, from the viewpoint of a participant-observer, please see my 'Where Are The Riots of Yesteryear?' in Part IV, below.

world.’

Thus, if we want our Sci-Fi scenario for a successful Mutiny on Spaceship Earth to be politically realistic, we must visualize it breaking out on a world-wide scale: think of global movements directed against multi-nationals like GE, Coca Cola, BP and Monsanto and other corporations that exploit their workers, displace local populations, pollute the earth, and support dictatorships. Imagine these social movements coming together in a series of world-wide workers’ general strikes, supported by demonstrations and consumer boycotts, leading to an international wave of uprisings and takeovers broad enough to surround and isolate the Billionaires and their reactionary allies. Throughout the 19th and 20th Centuries, such a planetary revolution scenario would have been rightly considered a mere ‘Sci-Fi’ fantasy. In the 21st Century, thanks to the possibilities of mass self-organization opened by the new global information technologies, a successful Mutiny on Spaceship earth is practically possible, a realistic one chance in a hundred.

Indeed, it could happen tomorrow.

The Internet as a Planetary Platform

Historically, advances in communication and transportation technology have generally gone hand-in-hand with advances in popular self-organization. During the democratic revolutions of the 18th Century, cheap printing and the post office (both recent developments) enabled the revolutionary Committees of Correspondence in the American colonies and the French provinces to share local grievances, discuss ideas, organize congresses, inform each other of plots, publish and circulate the revolutionary broadsheets and pamphlets that made the revolutions of 1776 and 1789 possible. In the 19th Century, railroads, steamships, the telegraph and the daily newspaper spread the democratic revolutions of 1848 all across Europe within months. Unfortunately in the 20th Century, radio and later television — organized as one-way, top-down broadcast media — became the favorite tool of totalitarian dictators like Hitler and Stalin, manipulative politicians like Churchill and Roosevelt, and wealthy advertisers whose right-wing commercial media monopolies dominate the airwaves in the so-called free countries.

In the 21st Century, on the other hand, Internet technology and social media promise to give the advantage back to people-power. They may also give a new meaning to informational democracy. For the first time in history, this new technology has placed at the disposal of the Billions uncensored sources of information like WikiLeaks as well as a planetary platforms large enough and accessible enough for all to participate, decide and act together. With its infinite interconnections, the World Wide Web enables groups in struggle to communicate, exchange information, discuss ideas, work out common programs and coordinate actions on a planetary scale in real time.

The technology of the Internet has the potential of creating vast, worldwide assemblies where true international democracy can take form; forums where consensus can be reached on an ongoing basis; platforms where massive planetary actions can be coordinated from hour to hour around the globe. With ever more powerful computers joined together, even problems like translation — the curse of Babel — are being solved. At last the passengers and crew of Spaceship Earth have the tools they need to talk to each other, so they can break out from below decks, swarm the bridge and take over from the squabbling, pilfering officers.

The Web is also a vast 24-hours/day 7-days/week public library where the passengers and crew can find and propagate not only uncensored information but also the critical, revolutionary ideas they will need to unite. The collective creation of Wikipedia, the cooperative, multi-lingual, ever-expanding, self-correcting information resource, is a model of this kind of Internet emergence. So is the non-sectarian Marxist Internet Archive www.marxists.org. For the first time in history, the storehouse of revolutionary internationalist thinking and the recorded experiences of centuries of struggle is accessible to all. Thus, the Web potentially weaves together ideas and planetary communication, connecting the *Lever of Solidarity* with the *Fulcrum of Planetary Consciousness*.

Before going further, I want to make it clear that I do *not* believe that technology can substitute for active human solidarity and collective organization on the ground. ‘Revolutionary’ chat rooms can never replace face-to-face workplace and neighborhood organizing; radical websites are no substitute for popular movements, or for unions, parties, newspapers, alternative broad-

casting, international meetings and other forms of human interaction. Indeed, it was the ‘one-two’ combination of spontaneous self-organization via Internet networking and mass occupation of public space *on the ground* that produced the most revolutionary results.²⁴ When I first put forward these ideas in 1997, my friends on the Left also raised the objection that Internet technology was ‘elitist’ — yet today people in the poorest parts of the world are using their cellphones to organize. They also objected that the big corporations were ‘taking over’ the Internet, forgetting that cyberspace is nearly infinite, leaving room for both the Trusts and the Trotskyists.

On the downside, despite Obama’s 2008 campaign pledge to preserve an open Internet, the efforts of big business and the communications lobby in the U.S. to pressure the FCC into ending ‘Network Neutrality’ so as to establish a two-tier Internet with the big advertisers in the fast lane squeezing out the public is a very real threat. Another serious danger is way the algorithms used by Facebook and other sites to ‘personalize’ peoples’ accounts end up feeding them only information which the machine ‘thinks’ they want, thus reinforcing their prejudices and insulating them from unpleasant information (for example about global warming).

Nor do I maintain that the Web is immune to police-state censorship and spying by authoritarian regimes, as, for example in China, where the authorities are often able to block discussion of subjects like democracy (with the complicity of ‘do-no-evil’ Google). The Chinese also mine emails (with the help of Yahoo and Facebook) in order to spy on and punish dissidents, as does the U.S. government. Obama and Clinton preach ‘Internet Freedom’ abroad while cracking down hard on WikiLeaks and heroic whistle-blowers like Private Bradley Manning.

Recently in the Middle East, dictatorships faced with upris-

²⁴ It is interesting to note that the vast power of self-organized masses first manifested itself historically in the 1905 revolution in the Czarist Russia, where mass strikes and mass assemblies (soviets) spread like wildfire across the whole Czarist Empire thanks to the spontaneous, informal networks that linked largely ‘unorganized’ workers. A century later, just when the neighborhood networks and social connections so important for human solidarity had largely been destroyed or atomized through suburbanization, mass media, and consumerism; solidarity got a new lease on life thanks to the virtual networks of Facebook and Twitter.

ings coordinated by Facebook and Twitter have simply shut down the Internet. On the other hand, when dictatorships clamp down on the Internet, they deprive themselves of the creativity and technological ferment necessary for economic development and end up stagnating. This kind of censorship was arguably one of the causes of the collapse of totalitarian Communism in Russia, which lagged way behind the West in computer technology. In any case, networked technology is a major headache for the world's dictators and would-be censors, who can no longer just seize your newspaper or smash your printing press. Thus, in 2007, when the Burmese dictatorship shut down websites during the 'Saffron revolution' led by Buddhist monks, the demonstrators used their cell-phones — another new form of electronic networking in the hands of the people — both to coordinate their movements and to get photos of the repression to the world press. Three years later, the same revolutionary cyber-tactics brought the dictatorships of Tunisia and Egypt to their knees.

In any case, hackers in China and around the world eventually find ways to get around the hated police-state censors and their U.S. corporate accomplices. Indeed, the Chinese Internet went wild with joy in May 2011 when a student hit the exalted Fang Binxing, the 'Father of the Great Firewall,' with his shoe and got away.²⁵ Paradoxically, the U.S. has been supporting the development of an alternate internet that governments can't shut down through hacker-developed "suitcase" technology that can allow cell phones to communicate in a peer-to-peer manner, directly with one another without going through a central authority.²⁶

The hacker mentality and the 'freeware' movements have long incarnated a Utopian spirit in themselves and should be considered as the allies of social movements around the world. Private Bradley Manning, the martyred hero of the anti-war movement who released thousands of pages of government secrets to WikiLeaks, was a teenage hacker imbued with the ideals of the hacker ethic. So, for that matter, was Julian Assange,

²⁵ Andrew Jacobs, "Chinese Student Takes Aim, Literally, at Internet Regulator," *N.Y. Times*, May 19, 2011.

²⁶ Michael Wines & Sharon LaFraniere, "In Baring Facts of Train Crash, Blogs Erode China Censorship," *N.Y. Times*, July 28, 2011. Microblogs expose truth of train crash; see also, Wines & LaFraniere, "Chinese Protest Suspension of Bloggers," *N.Y. Times*, August 26, 2011.

who created WikiLeaks. Freeware challenges the commodified basis of human creativity. It rejects the privatization for profit of collectively developed use-values from computer software to healing plants cultivated by Native Americans under the monopoly capitalist ‘intellectual property’ laws.

So like everything else in capitalist society, the Internet remains a contested space. However, by 1997, when I first elaborated the ‘Modern Archimedes Hypothesis,’ three points were already becoming clear:

1. **The Internet is a powerful and increasingly accessible new tool for struggle** whose revolutionary potential is beginning to be seized upon by popular movements around the globe.

2. **The Internet makes *technically possible* the internationalist dream of a global movement of working people uniting in real time** to overthrow the bosses and establish a sustainable, self-governing post-capitalist world.

3. The Internet’s web-like global network, whose ‘center’ is everywhere and nowhere, may turn out to be **a more effective model for the emergence of planetary, democratic and working-class movements than the traditional hub-and-spokes, center/periphery, top-down model of centralized parties and ‘internationals.’**

To be sure, the Internet can isolate people in front of their computers, but it also allows them to get to know each other, to feel less alone, to access information, to mobilize massively for action. Despite its origins as a Defense Department program, from the beginning, the Internet was eagerly appropriated by global justice movements and has proven itself an invaluable tool on the ground. Some examples:

- In 1994, the Zapatistas opened the anti-globalization era with their anti-NAFTA rebellion and **used first the Internet to mobilise global support against the invading Mexican Army’s attempt to repress them.**
- In 1997, the locked-out Liverpool dockers and their supporters organized a successful international dockers’ boycott of scab ships, which were turned away by dockers in the US and Japan.
- In 1997, the workers and students of South Korea used

the Internet to coordinate their massive General Strike.

- In 1998, a piece of software named *meetingtool* developed by the website MoveOn.org allowed potential anti-war activists to find each other in isolated localities.
- In 1999, anti-corporate globalization protesters in Seattle (and later at Genoa, and Cancun) succeeded in crippling the IMF and WTO; they also coordinated their movements via Internet.
- In 2001, the first annual World Social Forum was organized in Brazil, attracting representatives of social movements from around the globe connected via Internet.
- In 2002 in Caracas, Venezuela, the demonstrators who freed President Chávez from the US-backed right-wing *coup* plotters mobilised the *barrios* via Internet.
- In April 2003, millions of demonstrators in 57 different countries organized the first planetary anti-war demonstration to protest US plans to invade Iraq. The *N.Y. Times* heralded the birth of a ‘new superpower:’ world public opinion.
- In 2006, rebels in China reportedly pulled off 83,000 strikes and uprisings against overwork and pollution.
- In 2009, the people of Iran used cellphones, texting and social media to organize mass demonstrations to protest election fraud by the leaders of the Islamic Republic.
- In January 2011 in Tunisia, in response to the posting on Facebook of the self-immolation of a desperate protestor, social media were used to bring people into the streets to successfully oust longtime dictator ben Ali, whose corruption had been exposed by Wikileaks and publicized by the semi-independent Arab news network, Al-Jazeera.
- In February 2011, this ‘rolling Arab revolution’ spread to Egypt, where the corrupt Mubarak dictatorship was overthrown, thanks in part to the word spread via the same new media. The Arab Spring has not stopped ‘rolling’ yet — spreading to Morocco, Algeria, Syria,

Yemen and across the oceans to Spain and to Wisconsin, USA, where it inspired workers to resist neo-liberal attacks on unions and public services.

- In Italy, despite intense propaganda from President Berlusconi's media monopoly, voters recruited through Twitter turned out in huge numbers to reject nuclear power, privatized water and presidential impunity in the May 2011 Referendum.
- In Oct. 2011, the Occupy Wall Street movement, organized via Internet and broadcast live by GlobalRevolutionTV galvanized the 99% against the 1% and changed the political conversation in the US from manufactured hysteria over the 'debt' to the reality of inequality.
- In Dec. 2011, tens of thousands of Russians used social media to organize huge demonstrations in Moscow that shook the corrupt, autocratic Putin regime to its foundation.

The Fulcrum of Planetary Consciousness

The Fulcrum of Planetary Consciousness is the philosophical base on which the Archimedes Hypothesis stands. As such it is less familiar than the Lever of Planetary Solidarity (whose existence is historical) and the electronic Platform (which is technical). Moreover, like the Internet itself, Planetary Consciousness is still in its infancy.

This Consciousness is nothing mystical but quite concrete. Today, for the first time in history, most of the world's six billion human inhabitants are aware that they are living on a vast globe populated by many other peoples (and species). I consider this awareness a revolution in human consciousness whose power and depth have as yet not been realized. For tens of thousands of years, human horizons were limited to the immediate range of the band or tribe or agricultural settlement. About two thousand years ago, Greek philosophers first speculated that the Earth is a planet and plotted its orbit, but only in the last five hundred years did people actually learn to map the globe and sail around it. And only in the past century —

‘thanks’ to two world wars — have the vast majority of the earth’s human inhabitants been made aware of lands and continents beyond their own village or province. For example, even in the heart of Europe, many French country folk didn’t speak French and had never ventured beyond the next village prior to WWI (1914).²⁷ And it was WWII that finally brought the impact of the outside world to much of Asia and the South Pacific. By the 1960’s, the proliferation of battery-powered transistor radios exposed millions of Africans, Asians and South Americans living on the land to news of the outside world, but only in our own times have humans actually *seen*, via photos taken from space and viewed by millions, the amazing, cloud-swirling blue-green globe we live on. Seeing is believing: One world. One humanity. A revolution in perception, a revolution in thought.

Tragically, this revolution in planetary consciousness coincides with growing planetary awareness that life on our planet is menaced with extinction. Since 1945 — since Hiroshima and Nagasaki — it has become more and more evident that our survival as a species is threatened by our own ingenuity in inventing machines of unprecedented power and destructiveness. During the sixty years of nuclear proliferation and stockpiling that followed the annihilation of the two Japanese cities, intimations of humanity’s mortality have slowly been imposing themselves on all but the simple, the selfish and the self-deluded. Likewise, awareness of the slower, yet deadly destruction of the natural world, ruthlessly ravaged for corporate profit, is becoming universal. More and more humans are experiencing the palpable effects of pollution and global climate change, and as the massive (Internet-connected) food riots indicate, 21st Century peasants and villagers are increasingly likely to attribute these dramatic droughts, storms, floods and epidemics to global causes — indeed to global corporations — than to local gods or spirits. Another revolution in human consciousness as yet unevaluated.

Thanks to 20th century revolutions in scientific consciousness, men (mostly) learned to split the atom and manipulate the

²⁷ Graham Robb, *The Discovery of France: A Historical Geography From the Revolution to the First World War*, W. W. Norton 2008.

genome. Like overgrown children, scientists began playing with the very building blocks of matter and of life. They are also breaking them. Our technical abilities have developed far beyond our level of social and political organization, and as a result, atomic power and genetic engineering have been used exclusively for military domination and private profit. What an irony that the discoveries of Albert Einstein, who was a socialist and one-world internationalist, have been hijacked by business and government for the production of unsafe, cheaply-built nuclear reactors and stockpiles of megabombs sufficient to destroy life on earth ten times over. Likewise, the genetic revolution has been hijacked to produce genetically modified seeds — patented and imposed by force and fraud on farmers so as to turn them into corporate serfs and destroy self-sustaining peasant agriculture.



If we don't take control of this technology soon, the planet that emerged out the first Big Bang will go out in another big 'bang' (or perhaps a 'wimper' — when the fresh air runs out). Marx wrote that 'one basis for science and another basis for life is *a priori* a lie.' Our species, which Victor Serge once depicted as 'intelligent monkeys toiling on a green globe' has become too smart for its own good. Human monkeys have monkeyed around with genome and the atomic structure of matter-energy and unleashed powers they are unable to control within the limits of our profit-oriented capitalist society. So Planetary Consciousness means learning to connect up our collective brain before engaging gears!

What irony that Humanity's discovery that we all share one planet coincided with Humanity's (less acknowledged) discovery of our capacity for self-destruction. Like the proverbial elephant in the living room, there is no getting around the looming specter of extinction, whether it takes the form of Nuclear Winter or of the gradual death of the polluted biosphere. Stepping out of denial and acknowledging the increasing possibility of annihilation in the foreseeable future is the second stage of Planetary Consciousness.

At this level, Planetary Consciousness confronts us with the

unavoidable existential choice between absolute and irreconcilable opposites: Profits versus People, Money versus Nature, Death versus Life. On the one hand, the increasing likelihood of destruction of human life on earth; on the other, a possible ‘one chance in a hundred’ for a positive revolution in human relations leading to a new society based on solidarity and cooperation, rather than greed and conflict.

And so, **a second negation grows out of the negation of Life under predatory capitalism.** It arises from *within* that alienated society dominated by Mammon-worshipping businessmen who bow down to the graven images they have stamped on the money that is their true idol. From within the contradiction between Life and Money, from within that alienated society where Billions toil, suffer and starve to earn profits for corporations, Humanity cries out *Ya basta!* — the Earth is not a commodity to be bought and sold! Life is not a commodity to be bought and sold; I personally am not a commodity to be bought and sold. [Since these words were written, the Occupy Everything movements of the 99%-ers have sent this anti-capitalist message reverberating around the world.]

Planetary Consciousness means understanding that the same human ingenuity which threatens the planet with destruction *also* holds the promise of a life of abundance, once it is liberated by freely associated human subjects. For if creative humanity manages to unite on a planetary scale, if our species, instead of destroying the planet comes together to save it, and if we are able to build a new society based on intelligence and love, balancing community and individual freedom, competition and cooperation, ingenuity and harmony with nature, then we may discover a new, truly ‘human’ nature and begin true human history — a post-history, a truly ‘common era’ whose infinite development we can barely imagine. A new society in which humans, liberated from the bonds of fear, greed, competition for survival, solitude, self-alienation, class antagonism, war, hatred, and servitude, will be reintegrated into the biosphere and free to develop the full human potential for creativity, discovery and spirituality.

This final stage of Planetary Consciousness consists in realizing the necessity of a positive revolution in human relations, the emergence of a new society based on solidarity and cooperation rather than on greed and oppression. This planetary conscious-

ness speaks in the new voices now being heard around the planet. Thousands, perhaps millions of people, have begun proclaiming in chorus: Another world is possible! By organizing and resisting corporate globalization, by educating themselves and others, these global justice movements are helping to save the planet on a practical level by fighting pollution, forest-destruction, privatization of social and natural resources. In the meantime, these *alter-mundialistas* — like all of us — are searching for alternatives, for a planetary vision of a *possible* better world, for an idea capable of drawing together Billions and focusing their power. In other words...for Utopia.

Humanity's recently-acquired Planetary Consciousness has great historical potential, but time is short and Starship Earth seems to be accelerating its course toward disaster. Admitting for the sake of argument that our Modern Archimedes' Hypothesis provides a theoretical basis for a successful Mutiny among the passengers and crew, we need to ask: How will the vast, untapped force of humanity become conscious of itself and emerge before it is too late? How will the billions organize? How will they be able to govern themselves and the world economy? To answer these questions, let us return to the Internet, specifically to the underlying scientific principles of connectivity and emergence that account for its stupendous growth.

Internet, Democracy, Emergence

When I first put forward this 'Modern Archimedes Hypothesis' in 1997,²⁸ people took me for a naïve visionary and a techno-elitist. Today, no one can deny the potential of on-line networking for revolutionary self-organization. Less obvious, however, is the potential of the Web to enable new types of organization, based on the network model rather than the traditional hub-and-spokes model. In Latin America, the symbolism of the woven web, powerful yet delicate, had already been proposed by activist women as an alternative to male-dom-

²⁸ Richard Greeman, 'On Building an International Network : A Vision in Three Parts,' *Discussion Bulletin*, International Conference, "Stop Capitalist Barbarism — Prepare the Socialist Alternative," Cape Town, South Africa, Dec. 1997.

inated, top-down power. Self-organized, autonomous groups of peasants and indigenous peoples have been networked all over the Americas since 1992, when the Internet helped bring them together to celebrate 500 years of survival and resistance to colonialism. In recent decades, new forms of horizontal organizations began emerging in the region, rooted in urban neighborhoods and rural communities, in factories and on the land, yet networked nationally and even internationally.

Today, activists from these movements network online and at World Social Forums, connect with networks of workers, ecologists, and activists, compare conditions, discuss strategy, and organize global solidarity with similar movements as far off as Asia. In the context of national politics, these autonomous networks are at the base of the vertical power of progressive presidents like Lula, Kirchner, Correa, Chavez, and Morales — pushing these leaders to challenge the power of local landowners and the global corporations and openly criticizing them when they fail. These wired indigenous are in today's planetary vanguard: challenging capitalism, protecting the land and saving nature from the ravenous corporations. Far from being 'historically backward,' rural communities have successfully appropriated 21st Century capitalist communications technology at its highest level and used it as a weapon for their own emancipation. Now, so have the allegedly 'backward' Arab masses.

What about the future? If the Web model of a 'network of networks' continues to prove effective as a structure for an expansive, flexible, practical transnational organizing, might it not also foreshadow the structure of a future self-organized planetary society? The Achilles' heel of democracy has always been the necessity of delegating authority to representatives, who all too often end up forming a separate political class with its own interests. But what if direct 'town-meeting' type participatory democracy could be organized not only locally, but also regionally, and globally via Internet hookup? What if every citizen of the planet could make her/his voice heard equally with every other, get access to experts' advice and unite with others of the same persuasion? And then *vote* — whether in their own mass assemblies or internationally via a secure Internet hookup? What if the great issues facing humanity could be debated everywhere and then *decided* in global

referendums via the Internet? What if economic planning on a global scale could be combined with worker self-management and maximum local autonomy? What if every individual could participate in decision-making in each of her capacities as resident, parent, child, producer, consumer and citizen? What if, after centuries of successful revolutions being hijacked and perverted by new bureaucratic elites, the common people were able to control the destiny of a new society as it emerges *from below*?

Back in 1958, when computers were in their infancy, the (then) Marxist philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis was the first to imagine such a computer-connected self-managed society in his essay ‘The Content of Socialism.’²⁹ A critic of bureaucratic top-down management as exemplified by Russian Communism and the American corporation, Castoriadis saw socialism *emerging* out of workers’ self-activity. A professional economist, he was able to elaborate in concrete detail a complete national economy, free of the waste and coercion of corporate Communist central planning. In Castoriadis’ scheme, ‘Planning Factories’ produced alternative plans — to be debated and eventually voted by the producers via wired hookups — explaining in simple terms the relative costs and consequences of each proposal in terms of labor time, resources, growth and consumption levels — giving society the choice between enjoying more leisure or working harder for future goals. The concrete images in Castoriadis’ model made such an impression on me a half-century ago that I have never since doubted democratic socialism’s practical ‘*do-ability*.’

Castoriadis’ vision of a self-managed society recalls Engels’ image of the new world emerging out of the shell of the old — adopted in 1905 as the logo of the Industrial Workers of the

²⁹ “*Sur le contenu du socialisme*” by P. Chaulieu (pseudonym for Cornelius Castoriadis) was first published in *Socialisme et barbarie* (Nos 22 and 23, 1957-58) — the year before I joined the group in Paris. Castoriadis’ inspiring text was quickly translated and published in England as a *Solidarity* pamphlet by ‘Paul Cardan’ and eventually in French in 1979 under Castoriadis’ real name — which I only learned years later. At that time, Castoriadis, a Greek revolutionary, who was living as a refugee in a France militarized by the Algerian revolution — a cause which *Socialisme ou Barbarie* openly supported. Trained as an economist, he worked under his real name for the Paris-based OCEDE and knew everything about the world economy (and everything else). It was in conversation with Castoriadis that I first heard about Norbert Wiener (then at Harvard) and cybernetics.

World (IWW). What was original in 1958, was Castoriadis' appropriation of the theories of the socialist-minded mathematician Norbert Wiener, the pioneer of computer science who explored the feed-back principle and recognized the emergent quality of cybernetics.³⁰ Today, not only cyberneticists but physicists, biologists, mathematicians, economists and scientists in other fields are studying and analyzing the emergent phenomena of spontaneous self-organization from below in the context of Chaos/Complexity/Emergence Theory.

Connectivity, Complexity, Quantum and Emergence

The new factor that makes the age-old dream of humanity rising actual in the 21st Century is connectivity. It has recently been demonstrated that there are on the average only six degrees of separation between each of the six Billion humans on the planet. That means that you probably know someone, who knows someone else, who knows someone, who knows someone, who knows someone who knows me — or even more unlikely, who knows a certain Mrs. Wu, a peasant in Setchuan Province, China. These are weak connections, of course, but another of the paradoxes of Emergence is that weak connections are the fabric that makes up the strength of complex network structures like the Internet and the human brain.

Connecting up the cells of the collective brain of humanity is precisely what is needed to save the world from the pseudo-rationality of the corporate profit system that is consuming it like a cancer. The Internet provides the connectivity for the emergence of what I call 'Planetary Consciousness' — the indispensable philosophical fulcrum of the modern Archimedes Hypothesis. And although the phrase 'the collective brain of humanity' sounds mystical, recent experiments and research have confirmed what a recent book by James Surowiecki (*Wall Street Journal* and *New Yorker* business columnist) calls *The Wisdom of Crowds*. (Subtitle: *Why the many are smarter than the few and how collective wisdom shapes business, economies, societies and nations*.) It turns out experimentally that the judgment of large numbers of randomly chosen people is often strikingly superior to that

³⁰ See Norbert Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings* (Anchor, NY, 1954).

of the experts. What is the explanation? The diversity and impartiality of opinions in a freely associated group or random mass apparently combine in positive ways to create this collective intelligence. But it only works when people are free of the kind of hierarchical constraints that produce ‘group-think’ in committees, hence the pitiful failure of the ‘experts’ in authoritarian, bureaucratic organizations like the CIA to deliver accurate ‘intelligence’ (for example about Saddam’s WMDs) or of mainstream economists to foresee the Crash of 2008.

This ‘wisdom of crowds’ can be seen as a wired version of the ‘wisdom in the heads of many’ we old socialist revolutionaries used to talk about. A splendid example of collective wisdom is the creation of *Wikipedia* the free online encyclopedia, by thousands of individual contributors in a dozen languages, covering a hundred times as many cross-indexed topics as the long-revered *Encyclopedia Britannica*. I had the privilege of growing up with the 1947 *Britannica*, which was written by experts, cost my parents a small fortune, was full of upper-class British bias, short on the achievements of non-Western civilizations and native peoples and was soon out of date. As for accuracy, *Wikipedia* is always correcting itself and maintains strict scholarly standards for referencing facts. You can even change what you object to.

An even more amazing example is the emergence of a self-organized society among the protesters in Cairo’s Tahrir Square in February 2011 — a human spectacle that give inspiration and courage to people from Madrid to Wisconsin to Wall St. One is astounded by the ingenuity and peacefulness with which major problems of food, sanitation, communication, defense and political direction were solved by a huge crowd of strangers long isolated in a semi-police state. The courage of a lone woman who dared bare her face and post her challenge on YouTube, precipitated anger long simmering, and the instant communication between the occupiers and their social networks outside the Square allowed the movement to snow-ball, once it got started. In the process, the demonstrators themselves were literally transformed, overcoming deep-seated prejudices and antagonisms of gender and religion, into citizens of a self-governing society based on respect for others and a sense of justice. While retaining their identities, their individualities, the citizens of Tahrir merged into (or rather emerged as) a new collective identity. This, even

more than overthrowing Mubarak, was Tahrir's most potent victory. In February 2011, the spectacle of Tahrir let the Genie of unfettered human self-development out of the bottle. With home-made videos diffused by Internet, their image of a *possible* self-governing, cooperative, caring human society spread like an idea-virus around the world.

In any case, there is nothing impractical or unscientific in the romantic image of the collective brain of humanity connecting up its myriad nodes through cyberspace. Or of humanity acting with collective wisdom and strength of Billions to take charge of our poor world. 'Only connect!' could be the motto of a modern revolutionary network. Far from being unscientific, the concept of Emergence is common to much 21st scientific thought in fields as diverse as Quantum mechanics, cybernetics, and brain physiology. Emergence — the spontaneous creation of order and complexity out of chaos — has now been observed in various natural phenomena which were previously inexplicable in terms of the standard top-down scientific models of cause/effect, leader/follower.³¹ For those of us without access to higher mathematics, biology provides a more graphic example of emergence in the slime molds that appear and disappear as if from nowhere in the woods. Under certain favorable conditions, thousands of autonomous cells spontaneously come together and form new, more complex autonomous organism — the slime mold, a goopy vomit-like blob, which emerges, changes shape and moves. Not only that, it *thinks*, sort of. When placed by experimenters between two bits of food, it sent out pseudopods in *both* directions. However, when conditions change, the organism disaggregates into individual cells and seems to vanish. Scientists spent years searching for the 'leader' cell. Only after advanced computer techniques allowed researcher to model this behavior mathematically was its bottom-up nature revealed.

Similarly, scientists at first rejected well-documented reports from Asia of thousands of chirping crickets or flashing fireflies suddenly chirping or flashing in unison (like human concert audiences starting to clap in unison without any leader intervening).

³¹ See *The Quantum Society: Mind, Physics and a New Social Vision* by Danah Zohar and Ian Marshall, 1993. Also 'Quantum political economy' by Marxist physicist David Hookes (Univ. Liverpool).

Emergence has long been observed in the complex organization of ant and bee ‘societies;’ it is also visible in the development of the infant human brain, where Billions of brain-circuits spontaneously grow out of a few cells and connect into complex networks; we see Emergence as well in the history of the world’s cities where people of many trades came spontaneously together, each pursuing his/her own interests, and ‘accidentally’ produced what we call civilization. Social movements are also a form of spontaneous self-organization from below, as Rosa Luxemburg observed in 1905, the year of the revolutionary mass strikes she analyzed in Poland-Russia. Order and complexity are thus observed emerging out of chaos, based on connectivity between large numbers of free agents following their own paths.³²

However, for this complexity to emerge, there must be a critical mass of individuals. ‘Many is different’ is the rule in Chaos-Complexity-Emergence theory. The other critical condition is freedom to communicate and interact ‘horizontally’ free of distortions imposed by a ‘vertical’ one-way organizing power, for example by corporate or government bureaucracies which generate

³² The grandfather of Chaos/Complexity/Emergence theory was probably Blaise Pascal, the 17th Century French mathematician, scientist and religious philosopher — from whose *Pensées* (Thoughts) I borrowed the ‘Bet’ argument — and who contributed to probability theory, infinitesimal calculus and invented the first mechanical computing machine. In the early 20th Century the Soviet geologist Vladimir Vernadsky developed his theories of the interconnected geosphere, the biosphere and the noosphere (human thought) which seem to be confirmed by modern science. My own highly superficial knowledge of these theories comes from reading the books of Edgar Morin (who was part of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* in the early ‘50s) and scientific popularizations, often written by practicing scientists. For example Steven Strogatz (Cornell Applied Math), one of world’s leading researchers into chaos, complexity and synchronization, author of *SYNC: the emerging science of spontaneous order* (Penguin Science 2003); Mark Buchanan, former physicist and *Nature* editor, author of *Small World: Uncovering nature’s hidden networks* (Phoenix London 2002); Albert-László Barabási, (Physics, Notre Dame) *Linked* (Penguin 2003). The best of the science writers is Steven Johnson, whose *Emergence* (2001) is a classic for beginners. See also Roger Lewin, *Complexity, Life at the Edge of Chaos* (Phoenix London 1993); John Gribbin, *Deep Simplicity, Chaos, Complexity and the Emergence of Life* (Penguin 2004); and James Gleick *Chaos, Making a New Science* (Penguin 1987). The same research bolsters Malcolm Gladwell’s best-selling *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make A Big Difference* (Little, Brown & Company 2000) which focuses on exploiting the PR potential of complexity theory.

group-think. A corollary of complexity theory is that, free of such interference, tiny events may trigger huge changes, like the proverbial beat of a butterfly in China provoking a hurricane in Bermuda. Such is the nature of epidemics, fads, and religions, which grow exponentially once they reach the ‘tipping point.’ Utopia may turn out to be such an ‘idea virus,’ spreading through the Web and provoking the emergence of planetary consciousness. In any case, the recognition of emergence as a powerful natural phenomenon makes it scientifically plausible to visualize the emergence of a world-wide movement of multitudes of ordinary working people connecting and joining forces to save the planet from capitalism. And to run in cooperatively afterward.

Such a visualization requires a major revolution in our way of thinking. The ‘vertical’ model of top-down organization, whether in society or in nature, has such a hold on our minds that it is difficult for us to think ‘horizontally,’ much less in the three or four dimensions required by modern physics. We have all inherited the 17th Century ‘scientific’ mindset of Descartes and Newton with its discrete atoms and billiard-ball physics. Our social thinking is still based on Adam Smith’s 18th Century theories of humans as unconnected individual economic atoms. Our political notions — whether establishment or ‘revolutionary’ — rely on simplistic top-down models of expert leaders and hierarchical organizations. Our logic is confined to mechanical notions of Cause and Effect and the crude duality of ‘Either/Or,’ ‘A or Not-A.’

Yet well over a century ago, Einstein’s relativity did away with distinct notions of ‘matter’ and ‘energy’ as separate entities, and Quantum mechanics has been telling us for nearly as long that the universe is unstable, elusive, multiple, contradictory, holistic, and that it doesn’t work the way Newtonian mechanists used to think. Impossible? Quantum physics is said to be like the Queen in Lewis Carroll’s *Alice Through the Looking Glass*: it asks us to ‘believe six impossible things before breakfast.’ Quantum logic is also based on Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle, where the act of observing phenomena itself alters them. For example, light can be understood either as a particle or a wave, depending on how we measure it, but it can never be observed as *both*. It also turns out that electrons don’t spin in orbit around atoms like the stable planets revolving around the sun in Newton’s model. Not only do they leap from orbit to orbit for no apparent reason; they appear,

ghostlike, to occupy several potential orbits *simultaneously*. This potentiality is like the mental ‘trial balloons’ that spin through our minds as we imagine various possible futures. Moreover, not only is the position of electrons indeterminate, apparently *everything* in the universe is interconnected in a holistic system so that particles are observed in ‘ghostly’ action and reaction over distance and over time. Quantum reality was described by one of its discoverers as ‘a vast sea of potential.’ Indeed, Quantum systems interact and interpenetrate, retaining their integrity (their ‘particle function’) while at the same time merging (their ‘wave function’).

Envoi: An Ecotopian Manifestal

Physicists have often compared these Quantic interactions to people dancing. As the dancers move together rhythmically (the wave function), they retain their individuality (the particle function) while at the same time creating a new emergent holistic system (the dance itself). Dancers love the feeling of getting ‘swept up’ or ‘lost’ in the dance, yet somewhere we are always aware of our own individuality. There is no ‘contradiction’ between our individual and social selves. The dance itself emerges as we interact with other dancers, mirroring their movements and being mirrored in turn. Like all emergent holistic systems, the dance is a ‘whole greater than the sum of its parts’ (another ‘impossible thing’ we were taught not to believe in). Humans apparently crave this kind of creative interaction, according to Barbara Ehrenreich in her brilliant *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy*. Ehrenreich shows that ecstatic danced religion — still practiced in indigenous societies — was humanity’s earliest expression of spirituality. On the other hand, down the ages, organized religious and political authorities have uniformly tried to repress this tradition because of its revolutionary potential. Collective joy has been the enemy of power from Greek King Pentheus’ tragic attempt to suppress the worship of Dionysius to Puritanism’s suppression of the participatory tradition of Carnival and its replacement by spectacle and individual consumption under capitalism. Ehrenreich, a leading U.S. Socialist, ends her *History of Collective Joy* with a hopeful ‘Possibility of Revival,’ and I think she’s on the right track.

What better metaphor for the potential of humanity's radical Emergence than the image of Billions of people dancing in the streets? Instead of a monolithic, militaristic, top-down revolutionary vanguard liberating the Masses, why not imagine multitudes of people everywhere descending non-violently into the streets and dancing up such a storm that even the hired mercenaries of the capitalists have to put down their guns and join the joyful throng! It wouldn't be the first time that dance epidemics have swept across the world. According to ancient Greek historians Paucities and Plutarch, female worshippers of Dionysius called *maenads* used to abandon their spinning and children and run out into the woods in a frenzy of dance. In the Middle Ages, an infectious 'dance plague' called the *Tarantella* swept from village to village across Italy, irresistibly drawing people into the streets to dance until they dropped. Even in the most repressive societies, women still retain their traditional female circle dances, and I suspect that women — including women of faith — will take the lead in dancing our way out of self-destruction. And if men are irresistibly drawn into the dance, they will have to lay down their weapons before they are allowed to join.

'The Dance Craze that Saved the World?' Why not, in this age of planetary connectivity where fads, fashions and financial disasters are propagated literally at the speed of light? Instead of organizing a centralized World Revolutionary Party, we eco-revolutionaries should be organizing a Party for the Planet, like Dr. Earth, whose new London eco-club *Surya*³³ has shock absorbers beneath the dance floor which convert dance motions into electricity to run the club's air-con system. The club's tables are made out of recycled magazines and the walls crafted from old mobile phones. 'We are now at the 11th hour of a global Armageddon caused by climate change,' says Dr. Earth. 'Clubbing should not be about escapism, alcohol and drugs. It should be about bringing people together in the name of hope, planet Earth and a positive future for mankind.' Right on, Doc!

Party for the Planet! is only one of a number of Mutiny on Starship Earth scenarios — perhaps the most pleasant imaginable — consistent with contemporary science that the Archimedes Hypothesis permits us to imagine as one chance in a hundred bet.

³³ www.club4-climate.com

But what if love and joy turn out to be more powerful than hate and shame? The world's great Teachers all seemed to think so. To hold fast to such an idealistic planetary vision — I frankly admit it — demands an existential 'leap of faith.' Or, at the very least, the kind of 'temporary suspension of disbelief' we bring to a good film or novel. At every moment, new, grimmer headlines seem to undermine our assumptions, while the voices of despair invite us to recline into cynicism and expediency, or to embark on self-defeating dangerous shortcuts like violence and dictatorship. But however much we are tempted to doubt the power of these assumptions, our existential commitment directs us to behave *as if* the assumptions on which survival depends were *a priori* valid. That is the Utopian Bet, and the only way to verify the validity of its assumptions is to play them out to the end. To win we must play the card of our lives believing we really *do* have at least one chance of winning back our peaceful green world. In any case, what do we have left to lose that we aren't losing now? So let's dance the dance! *Hic rhodus, hic salta.*

Conclusion

The Archimedes Hypothesis proposes a theoretical model for visualizing the material-historical possibility of a planetary revolution in our age of globalized corporate capitalism and planetary connectivity. The power of solidarity has proven itself capable of overcoming tyranny again and again, wherever people have united. The consciousness that a new society is necessary if the planet is not to be destroyed is more and more widespread. Today's Internet technology at last provides a space for people around the planet to connect and take positive action on a global scale. Scarcity is no longer an issue. Modern technology produces such an abundance of food and material goods that overproduction undermines market stability. Inequality, not scarcity, is the cause of want. Utopia may thus be a realistic possibility — however remote it may seem at the moment. At the very least, the Archimedes Hypothesis permits us to imagine realistic science fiction scenarios about successful Mutinies on Spaceship Earth. It gives us the theoretical right to dream. And if one or more of these scenarios is compelling enough to fire the imagination of people around the world, who knows what may

result from these small beginnings when the idea-virus of Utopia reaches the tipping-point and becomes an epidemic?

That, at least, is our Utopian bet. On the one hand, nothing to lose but the dismal spectacle of a dying world; on the other, a chance in a hundred to save ourselves and the beautiful blue-green planet we live on. In any case, it's a bet we can't refuse. In the 18th Century — the age of scientific and political revolutions — radical writers like Voltaire, Diderot, Thomas Paine and the Encyclopedists boldly proclaimed 'the pen is mightier than the sword.' History proved them right. Feudalism was overthrown. Today in the 21st Century — the age of connectivity and emergence — the Modern Archimedes Hypothesis entitles us to state a claim of our own: The electronic keyboard hooked up to the Internet is mightier than the nuclear missile!

P.S. Please join me and my friends at <http://billionairesandbillions.wikispaces.com/> and help dream up realistic scenarios for *Mutiny on Spaceship Earth*.

**ALL POWER TO THE
IMAGINATION.**

Revolutionary Organization: Horizontal or Vertical?

If we are really to take seriously the hope that 2011 has opened a new revolutionary era, expressed above in ‘Radical Emergence Year One,’ it behooves us to return to the question of ‘what happens *after* our revolution succeeds?’ This means investigating the underlying causes that make liberating mass revolutions degenerate and eventually turn into their own opposites. It means thinking of ways to avoid such perils. So we must ask ourselves, ‘given the democratic, egalitarian, participative society we seek as an *end*, what *means* are best suited to get us there?’ My argument is that in politics the means themselves determine the end in the last analysis. So we can rephrase our question as follows: ‘What form(s) of organization(s) will best enable the working people of the planet to unite, overthrow the existing order, take charge of the economy, reclaim the political sphere and create an egalitarian world?’

Since the 1990s, the concept of ‘Horizontalism’ has arisen out of the radical social movements in Latin America, particularly with relation to the experience of self-organized peasant and indigenous movements like the *Zapatistas*. It is rooted in the mass revolts that broke out in Argentina during the IMF-imposed debt crisis, when *piqueteros*, neighborhood assemblies and mass demonstrations drove out one government after another, rejecting the old parties with the slogan “Out With the Lot of ‘Em!” (*¡Qué se vayan todos!*). Some Argentinean workers also occupied their closed factories and started them up again as self-managed enterprises, trading their products with other occupied factories. One

such occupation is the subject of Naomi Klein's documentary film, *The Taking*, and radical sociologist Marina Sitrin has edited a collection of testimony and analysis under the title *Horizontalism: Voices of Popular Power in Latin America*.³⁴

Perhaps the most influential proponent of what has become known as the 'Horizontalist' current is the Marxist-oriented sociologist John Holloway, who has resided in Mexico since 1991. Holloway's 2002 book, *Change the World Without Taking Power*, is a brief for the horizontal cause based on his observations among the *Zapatistas* and Argentine *piqueteros*. His thesis has stimulated much debate on the Left, and an anthology of paired polemics by the most articulate representatives of both sides has been published under the title, *Take Power to Change the World: Globalization and the Debate on Power*.³⁵

Holloway makes a very useful distinction between 'power over' (the bosses, cops and bureaucrats), 'power against' (the revolt of the 99%) and 'power to' (the potential of humans to create, to build, to organize themselves). What he rejects is 'power over' other people, that is to say oppression, exploitation, economic and political dictatorship. I agree that we must get rid of oppressive 'power over,' both now and in any future society. However, I fear Holloway speaks out of a deep-seated (and not-unjustified) pessimism about the perspective for revolution; this *angst* makes his 'anti-power,' which he calls '*the scream*' against injustice, all the more poignant.

This dark view leads Holloway to stress the need of eternal resistance with no positive end in sight, neglecting possible scenarios where masses of people using forceful non-violent tactics (not violent 'power over') might break the strangle-hold of capitalism and institute a new society based on their 'power to' self-manage the economy. Since the rolling revolutions of 2011, it is now possible to visualize scenarios of masses gathering their 'power against' in strikes and boycotts and occupations, to topple not just the political dictators, but the *economic* dictators, the 1% for whom the tyrants and politicians front.

Sound good? The problem is "how to get *there* from *here*?" We can start by asking: "What form(s) of organization(s) will

³⁴ AKPress, 2006.

³⁵ Edited with an Introduction by Phil Hearse, www.socialistresistance.net

best enable the working people of the planet to unite, overthrow the existing order, take charge of the economy, reclaim the political sphere and create such a world?" Note that we are *not* asking the question "what form of organization is likely to be most effective in enabling a revolutionary group to seize and hold power?" That is another question, which Robespierre, Lenin and Mao (as well as Mussolini, Hitler and the Ayatollah) have all answered concretely at different times and places.

Our question includes the problematic of what happens *after* the revolution: "How to take power without ending up under yet another new form of exploitative tyranny?" The issue is one of ends and means, but not in the moralistic sense of whether not positive ends 'justify' the use of negative means, but practical consequences of certain means as observed in history. In politics, means and ends are inseparable because the ends you get have inevitably been shaped and affected, if not determined, by the means employed to get there.³⁶

With this relationship in mind, let us proceed with the unraveling of what Marxists used to call "the organizational question."

Spontaneity vs. Organization: a False Dichotomy

Among Marxists, the debate between Horizontalists and Verticalists is usually framed in terms of 'spontaneity *versus* organization.' This opposition is really rather simplistic and begs the question — nobody is suggesting that humanity can unite to change society without getting organized! Organization is our strongest weapon, anarchists, syndicalists and socialists all agree on that point. "Don't mourn for me, organize!" were the famous last words of IWW Wobbly organizer and songwriter Joe Hill. Today, the name of the game is "billions *versus* billionaires," and the only way for us 99%-ers to win is to *organize*.

The question is not one of organization, but of self-organization from below versus bureaucratic organization from above. The Polish-born revolutionary internationalist Rosa Luxemburg cut the Gordian knot of this false opposition with her analysis of *The Mass Strike*, based on her experience with the waves of gen-

³⁶ This principle is the core of the debate between Victor Serge and Leon Trotsky over Kronstadt the creation of the Cheka, discussed in Part V .

eral strikes that spread across the Russian Empire during the Revolution of 1905. She demonstrated that ‘spontaneous’ strikes (organized from below by the workers) were in most cases *more likely to succeed* than strikes organized by leaders of trade unions or socialist parties (including Lenin’s Bolsheviks).

Once past the false dichotomy ‘spontaneity/organization’ we are free to compare and contrast different *forms* of organization as they have appeared in history. On the one hand, we find the traditional political party with a permanent apparatus and a definite program. On the other, we have the ephemeral *self*-organization of the masses into workers’ councils, soviets, mass assemblies, federated strike-committees and the like. These two *forms* have very different characteristics as they develop historically.

Party and State

The obvious great advantage of the party-form of organization is its enduring existence through time, its ability to absorb the lessons of past defeats and prepare itself for future struggles during periods when the mass movement has subsided. This advantage is particularly important in countries where dictatorship and repression make it necessary to maintain an underground network. Thus it is not surprising that over history, revolutionary workers have attempted to incarnate their will and intelligence in the more permanent and structured parties, associations and organizations that have sprung up to represent them in various countries at various times, with greater and lesser success.

The problem is that often the masses have not been able to control these organizations, which become alienated as bureaucracies and turn against them. The classic historic example dates back to 1914, when the leaders of the Socialist parties in France and Germany each voted to support their imperialist government and led the French and German workers into a fratricidal slaughter. In our time, living in France, I observed how the Socialist, Communist, and trade unions worked to contain the spontaneous general strikes of 1968 (restoring Gaullist normality via negotiations), the runaway wildcat strike of 1995 (that nonetheless succeeded in forcing the new conservative government to abandon its neoliberal legislative ‘reforms’), the nationwide mass revolt against pension ‘reform’ of 2002 and, more recently, the

heartbreaker of 2010 which weeks of repeated one-day general strikes got diverted into the meaningless Presidential electoral campaign.³⁷ The problem is not that such bureaucratic organizations ‘fail.’ It is that they succeed far too well — as agents of the class enemy among the workers. ‘Labor lieutenants of the bourgeoisie’ is what the American Socialist Daniel De Leon called them in my grandfather’s time.

Of course the word ‘party’ didn’t always mean a bureaucratic organization like the Socialists and the Communists or the Democrats and the Republicans. In the 19th Century, people often spoke of the ‘party’ of labor, the anti-slavery ‘party,’ the ‘party’ of capital, even the ‘party’ of caution using a small ‘p’ to indicate general opposing forces in society. This is how Marx and Engels used the word in their correspondence. For us moderns, the word refers exclusively to political Parties (large ‘P’), whether ‘Revolutionary’ or merely electoral. This difference in usage has led to ideological distortions. Thus the Stalinist Communists read Marx retrospectively through the lens of their vertical vanguard party fetish, when the context makes it clear that he was talking about the general movement of the workers’ self-organized struggle.

In this sense, the ‘actual movement,’ the historical party (small ‘p’) of worker socialism persists through time. It throws up its own thinkers (or co-opts professional intellectuals from other classes), develops its own world-view, theorizes its own struggles, and learns from its defeats and partial victories while attempting to unite to struggle for immediate objectives. Such critical thinkers are the ‘organic’ intellectuals of the oppressed class, their writings the record of its experience. They are, collectively, ‘of the party’ — the party of revolution — whatever their historical relation to the existing political parties of their place and time. They are part of what I call the invisible international.

Modern political parties — whether parliamentary or revolutionary — tend to be organized vertically, like pyramids, with information and power flowing downward from leaders. Parties thus reproduce the *bourgeois* division of labor, exalting the intelligence and will of the leaders (CEOs, Commissars, Ayatollahs).

³⁷ See my ‘General Strikes and Mass Demonstrations Challenge Neo-liberalism in France’ <http://www.stateofnature.org/generalStrikesMassive.html>

They encourage passivity and unthinking acceptance among the members ('party discipline,' 'orthodoxy,' 'company loyalty'). Party leaders may be more or less democratically selected, but they tend to perpetuate themselves in office, where they are apt to accumulate privileges and special interests.

Furthermore, all such parties develop through their relation to the *state*. Their ultimate aim is to control the government's monopoly of legal violence. Marx and Engels defined the 'state' as 'special bodies of armed men, police, prisons *etc.*' whose historical purpose has been to defend the power of the 1% — aristocrats, priests, capitalists, bureaucrats — over the 99%. Parties generally either aim at sharing state power through their influence in parliamentary and governmental institutions (electoralism, reformism, social-democracy) or at taking over state power through insurrection (as practiced by Blanquists, Bakunists, Maoists, Castro/Guevarists on the Left, and, nationalists, fascists, and religious fundamentalists on the Right). The ever-flexible Lenin used both tactics successfully, with Bolshevik representatives in the *Duma*³⁸ and an underground cadre of professional revolutionaries. The Moslem Brothers also are adept at playing in both registers.

The Russian Revolution of 1917 proved that world capitalism was so ripe for revolution that a proletarian socialist party, backed by the peasantry, could take power in a semi-feudal country. It also proved that Engels was 1000 times right in his dire warning that "the *worst possible thing*" that could happen to a proletarian party would be to take power where conditions were not "ripe." Engels predicted that this party would inevitably be turned into the instrument of other, powerful forces which it could not resist. And, indeed, the Leninist Party/State did become the historical instrument by means of which Russian capital developed rapidly using the police methods rather than market methods to drive the peasants off the land and into the factories. Lenin's Party/State was such an ideal instrument for this historic task that, despite Stalin's bloody mismanagement, it was able to build a Russian war machine powerful enough to defeat the most advanced and powerful capitalist nation in Europe — Nazi Germany.

³⁸ Russia's first parliament, granted by the Czar in response to the revolution of 1905. It was as powerless as today's Duma under Putin.

The defenders of this Russian (and later Chinese) form of totalitarian state-capitalism described it as ‘actually existing socialism’ and thus distorted and degraded the word and the ideal for a whole epoch. The obvious conclusion drawn by the majority of workers of the 20th Century from the Russian experience was this: ‘Socialism equals shortages and a totalitarian police state. Never mind the excuses. We’ve seen the broken eggs. Now show us your omelette.’ Thus, by taking and holding power in backward Russia in the name of socialism, Lenin’s party inadvertently succeeded in closing off the revolutionary socialist alternative for a whole historic period and ended up paving the way for fascism. It is said that “power corrupts.” Once the Bolsheviks tasted power, they could never give it up. Subjectively, Lenin remained a libertarian. His last struggles were against Stalin’s brutality, bureaucracy, and what he called the “*Commu-Lies*” printed in the official press. Yet he remained unyielding on the dictatorship of the Communist Party — the only legal party in the state — and on the exclusion of contending factions *within* the official state Party. It fell to the bloody-minded Stalin to demonstrate that “absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

The Russian Revolution teaches that the anarchists were 1000 times right to condemn the state as *necessarily* oppressive and to fear “workers’ dictators.” It is high time for all socialists to stop using Marx’s misleading (because ironic) phrase “dictatorship of the proletariat” as our goal. As if any intelligent 21st century worker hearing the word “dictatorship” would stay around long enough to listen to the explanation of what this phrase *really* means!³⁹ What socialists *should* be doing is reaffirming the lessons that Marx AND the anarchists drew from the Paris Commune: Revolution doesn’t mean taking over the state. It means smashing the state and replacing it with expansive, democratic, self-created organs of workers’ power. Organs like the Commune,

³⁹ ‘The dictatorship of the proletariat,’ Marx’s ponderous academico-Germanic paradox was intended to describe the broadest, freest democracy that would result from workers, the 99%, at last taking power. It was a play on words meant to satirize big-money domination of parliamentary democracy, which Marx scornfully labelled ‘the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.’ When his joke was misunderstood and the concept criticised, Marx stopped using the phrase and begged Engels to bury it. Alas, Engels brought it back into use after Marx’s death, and it was then used by Stalin to justify his dictatorship over the proletariat.

the Soviets, assemblies and workers' councils under popular control with elected delegates paid workers' wages and subject to recall.

A Near-Forgotten Lesson of Struggle

For Horizontalists, the essential lesson of 1917 was the discovery that workers' councils (*soviets* in the Russian language) were the self-created *form* of workers' power, the means by which the revolutionary masses could direct their own destiny. Just as the 1871 Commune finally answered, *in practice*, the question of the state in Marx's time, so the new edition of the Commune, the federation of Soviets — self-organized workers', peasants' and soldiers' councils — answered it in the 20th century.

The Russian workers themselves created this new *Soviet* form of mass self-activity and self-organization during the 1905 Revolution, but it was not 'discovered' by Marxist theoreticians like Lenin, Luxembourg or even Trotsky, who was President of the Petersburg Soviet in 1905, until it resurfaced in 1917. Lenin's greatest theoretical contribution was to recognize this on the eve of revolution when he updated Marx's study of the Paris Commune in his pamphlet *State and Revolution* at very the moment when the workers', peasants' and soldiers' soviets were contending against the Provisional Government in a situation of dual power. Indeed, the greatest deed in Lenin's life was to carry out the program of *State and Revolution* by placing "All Power to the Soviets" on the banner of a reluctant Russian Social-Democratic Party (*Bolshevik*).

Unfortunately the discovery of workers' councils was NOT the lesson that the historical Left — from Lenin on down through Stalin, Trotsky, and their present-day epigones — drew from the victory of the *Soviets* in 1917. Quite the contrary... For decades the Left neglected the importance of this precious example of worker self-organization. It buried the actual proof that socialism, defined as worker self-management, is possible; the full-scale example of how the socialist project flows from the *actual movement* of the developing working class rather than being spun from the heads of leaders. Instead, what we have heard repeated a thousand times as the lesson of 1917 is "The Party, The Party, The Party" — as if the example of Bolshevism could provide a magic formula for revolution in the 21st Century.

Indeed, “The Party, The Party, The Party” was already the *wrong* lesson when Lenin and the Bolsheviks founded the Comintern in Moscow 1919. As we show below in ‘The Invisible International,’ instead of spreading the idea of workers’ councils (which the German workers had already attempted to imitate, somewhat feebly), Lenin’s Party attempted to impose the Russian “magic formula” of the Party on European workers’ movements which were locked in combat, not with a crumbling semi-feudal autocracy but with vigorous modern capitalist states, with no huge masses of land-hungry peasants for a workers’ movement to ally with.

It is humbling to recall that as early as the 1920s there were lucid Marxists like the Dutch Communists Anton Pannekoek and Herman Gorter who clearly saw these contradictions, developed the concept of “Council Communism,” and predicted that Lenin’s government could only lead to state-capitalism. I have never understood why later Marxists like Tony Cliff and Raya Dunayevskaya — once they had broken with the Trotskyist position of defending Russia as some form of “workers’ state” and analyzed the full-blown Stalinist regime as “state-capitalist” — did not return to or even pay much tribute to those veterans of the early Communist movement who had seen state-capitalism coming and resisted it 20 years earlier. Perhaps it was because the so-called ‘Infantile Leftists’ of the 1920s were expelled from the Comintern not by Stalin, but by *Lenin*, thus breaking the fetishistic taboos of Communist ancestor-worship and offending the religious Leninism of those theoretical leaders.

Perhaps it was also because the Council Communists rejected, not only state-capitalism, but also the Leninist concept of the *Party*, considered as a bureaucratic, anti-socialist, ultimately *bourgeois* restrictive power over the workers who had created their own form of democratic, expansive self-organization historically beginning with the Soviets of 1905. This *form* of self-organization, rediscovered as we have seen during 1917-1921 in Russian and Germany, was yet again rediscovered in the 1956 Hungarian Workers Councils, the *form* taken by the first full-scale workers’ revolution against Stalinist state-capitalism. Perhaps it was because Tony Cliff and even Raya Dunayevskaya were, despite their profound critique of Russian state-capitalism masquerading as Communism, the leaders of Leninist-type

parties (or sects) unconsciously hoping to franchise a monopoly on the revolutionary truth, even as they consciously struggled for democracy and against totalitarianism.

Marxism Discredited?

Paradoxical as it may seem, I believe that the collapse of Stalinist 'Communism' in 1989, its subsequent transformation into *nomenklatura* capitalism, and its incorporation into the system of globalized neo-liberal capitalism have simplified many questions that have divided the Left for years. Although it *appears* that the fall of "Communism" has discredited both Marxism and the very idea of revolution — the media take this as dogma — it is only the *appearance* of fact. As I argue below in Part V, Stalinist Communism was the very opposite of Marxism — an exploitative, oppressive, anti-worker bureaucratic tyranny. Indeed, the collapse of this totalitarian system actually *vindicates* genuine Marxism as well as anarchism and all the other revolutionary philosophies which analyzed and criticized the bureaucratic system from the beginning.

The fact that the Stalinist-type systems in Russia, China and elsewhere were able to make smooth transitions to market capitalism without a bloody, restorationist counter-revolution is proof that these systems were already based on the exploitation of labor by a privileged minority. Indeed, the discrediting of the state-capitalist model of what was euphemistically called "actually existing socialism" by its Left apologists may prove to have been the necessary pre-condition for the emergence of a genuine socialist alternative. But only on the condition that we socialists rethink our organizational models, in particular the role of the vanguard party.

The discrediting of Stalinism opens a space for revolutionaries to revisit the dissident revolutionary tendencies which opposed vanguardism in the past, beginning with the anarchists, the council communists, the Dutch Left, and the Luxembourgests who were already critical in Lenin's time. It compels us to reconsider the ambivalent history of Trotskyism, which both criticized and tail-ended Stalinism for 60 years. It invites us to study the positions of the post-Trotskyists from B. Rizzi and Max Shachtman to Raya Dunayevskaya, C.L.R. James, Cornelius Castoriadis, Tony Cliff, and company who, beginning in the 1940s, at-

tempted to analyze the exploitative Stalinist system through the lens of Marxist economic and social theory.

To return to the ‘party-principle,’ all political parties aim at mobilizing the masses to put their leaders in power — whether by “the bullet or the ballot” as Malcolm X succinctly put it. Theoretically, the benefits of power should flow back or trickle down to the masses as reforms or as revolutionary decrees overthrowing capitalism and instituting socialism. The leaders can begin raising wages and cutting hours, improving the status of women, providing housing for the poor, feeding the hungry, improving health and education, protecting the environment. And indeed, reformist or revolutionary governments can and do accomplish many positive social objectives. But their fidelity to the original egalitarian cause depends to a great extent on the degree of internal democracy, the honesty of the leadership, and its commitment to principle as well as on the level of pressure from below. These leaders are also severely limited by outside pressures like the world market and from the U.S. imperialism and recent rival imperialisms, like China. The ultimate solutions to these problems can only be international. The new alliance of Left-leaning Latin American countries has challenged U.S. hegemony in the region, which is a historical achievement of momentous proportions. On the other hand, class tensions are obvious today in struggles within Brazil, Bolivia and Venezuela. For example, economic powerhouse Brazil’s new pretensions as a regional hegemon, Venezuela’s Populist President Chavez’s embrace of Libya’s Khadaffi and Syria’s unspeakable Assad, and Evo Morales’ conflicts with indigenous peoples protecting the rain forest from corporate development are all indications of the inner malaise of these regimes.

Horizontal Self-Organization

Now let us look at the organizational pyramid from the base up. Here we find various horizontal forms of self-organization like strike committees, councils, networks, committees of correspondence and mass assemblies. Their basic mode of operation is that information and power flow upward from the base and that information circulates both horizontally and vertically. Such assemblies, for example, the revolutionary Paris *sections* in the

1791-93 French Revolution, the Paris Commune of 1871, the self-organized Russian soviets of 1905 and 1917, the sit-in strikers of 1936 and 1968, the Argentine *piqueteros* and assemblies, and, most recently, the Occupiers of 2011 often remain in permanent session. Their participants are able to pool their information, analyze it, come to decisions and respond to changing circumstances rapidly and flexibly. They unite thinking and doing, combining “legislative” and “executive” functions (as Marx said of the Paris Commune). They are in direct connection with the mass movement. They sense its moods and can respond rapidly to changes, take advantage of favorable moods, or fall back when militancy declines. Their activists are part of an emergent whole, a self-constituted movement larger than themselves, yet they retain their autonomy — like individual dancers in a group dance, as I suggested above in my Manifesto.

Such forms of self-organization encourage, develop and depend on the initiative and clear thinking of their participants; they thus overcome the ‘let-George-do-it’ passivity of many union and party members who are tempted to look to the leadership for direction instead of thinking for themselves. Luxemburg first observed these initiatives spreading during the great strike waves of 1905. Today, we are able to recognize, in the social phenomenon Luxemburg analyzed a century ago as a form of what scientists call ‘emergent’ behavior: self-organization from below. Over the past twenty years in fields as far-ranging as subatomic physics, cosmology, biochemistry, brain physiology and cybernetics, the Newtonian/Cartesian Positivist model of cause/effect, conductor/orchestra has been superseded by the more dialectical paradigm of order emerging — under certain conditions — out of the chaos of myriad interactions. Like the Internet, for which today’s global movements have an affinity, bottom-up forms of social self-organization are by nature expansive.

Horizontal Power: Federation and Delegation.

On this Horizontal model, when social movements grow beyond the factory or local level, they learn to network and federate on the industry, regional, national and now (with Internet and airplanes) global levels — without any need for a pre-existing bureaucratic structure likely to become a locus of power. This was

the concept behind the first International Workers Association of 1863 (discussed below in ‘The Invisible International’) as well as of the revolutionary anarcho-syndicalist groups like the French CGT and the American Wobblies that emerged around 1905, just when the Russian workers were inventing their first *soviets*.

To be sure, in order to federate, councils and assemblies must delegate authority. But delegation does not necessarily mean creating a new ruling elite; not when delegates are chosen from the ranks for specific purposes with limited mandates to express their comrades' views at regional assemblies and to bring back reports of what is happening elsewhere. In principle, such delegates are paid at normal workers' wages, and their mission accomplished, they rejoin the mass, while others replace them, thus developing leadership skills of confidence, communication, and strategizing. As has been observed repeatedly at the assemblies and occupations of 2011, such responsible activities are truly ‘schools of communism’ — not for an elite leadership but for the participants as individuals and as a group, be they workers, farmers, neighbors, student activists, etc. These practical ‘schools’ develop the confidence and self-reliance which alone can turn multitudinous individuals into a revolutionary force.

Today, scientists study such feedback-loops by means of which amalgamations of individual cells learn to learn. They are observed for example in development of the infant human brain, the growth of cities in history, and the algorithms of ‘smart’ computer programs designed to model such emergent behavior. The only problem is, such organizational forms have proven ephemeral. When the mass movement ebbs, they tend to disappear or get pushed aside by more centralized, structured groups, like the Islamicists in Iran in 1979 and, most recently, in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011, as structured groups like the Moslem Brotherhood upstaged the democratic mass movement and filled the power-vacuum the mass demonstrations (from which they held aloof) had created by forcing out a dictator.

Weaknesses of the Horizontal Model

As we have seen, the tragic history of Leninist-type parties shows, in the starkest terms, the fatal flaws in the vertical model of organization. But we must also look at the weaknesses of the

workers' council model of organization. The most obvious weakness is precisely that such phenomena tend to be ephemeral. They mainly spring up in periods of intense militancy, in pre-revolutionary and revolutionary situations, and they tend to dissolve when this militancy declines or is defeated. They may remain as informal networks of workers and in the memory of the participants, as they did in Russia between 1906 and 1917. But otherwise, they left no trace except in workers' memories in the theories of the 'Council Communists.' Workers' councils, mass assemblies and strike committees are creatures of revolution, like the legendary salamander that lives only in fire. They must either triumph as they did in 1917 — in which case they become the nerves and lineaments of the new society to which they have given birth — or disappear into history, perhaps to rise again from their ashes like that other creature of fire, the phoenix. They are the incandescent incarnation of the socialist project, illuminating future possibilities. Short of a victorious revolution (which in a globalized economy must be planetary), they remain ephemeral.

Let us not, for all of that, despair. The *Soviets* of 1905, forgotten by Bolshevik and Menshevik socialists alike, came spontaneously to life again in 1917, and that year they overthrew Czarism and then pushed aside the pro-Allied bourgeois Provisional Government in order to achieve 'Bread, Peace, and Land.' So, not to worry. As Rosa Luxemburg wrote, "The revolution says I am, I was, I will be." She also wrote, 'Every revolution is doomed to fail ... except the last one.' And that 'last one' must, to succeed, be global. It is to that problem we turn to next in 'The Invisible International.'



The Invisible International

The Franco-Russian revolutionary and novelist Victor Serge⁴⁰ coined the phrase ‘invisible international’ at a dark moment in history. In 1940, he found himself stateless, penniless, trapped in Vichy, France, where he was on the murder-list of the KGB and the Gestapo. Serge survived and eventually escaped, thanks to the solidarity of what he called an ‘invisible international’ of comrades around the world. Serge was part of a fraternity of survivors of shipwrecked revolutions who were struggling to stay afloat in the rising tide of fascism. Scattered between Vichy France (a trap), Mexico (welcoming to political refugees and to KGB assassins alike), and New York, they maintained contact by the thin thread of the mail — when Serge could find enough money for stamps — sending political analyses along with money orders, lending support in the battle for visas in ‘a planet without a visa.’⁴¹

Serge’s comrades were themselves persecuted dissident re-

⁴⁰ Victor Serge (1890-1947) See “Who Was Victor Serge and Why Do We Have to Ask?” in Part V below.

⁴¹ The phrase was Trotsky’s.

volutionaries — Spanish Republican refugees of the POUM⁴²; antifascist and anti-Stalinist refugees from Italy, Germany, Austria; Russian Left Oppositionists still resisting in Stalin's camps; a few socialists and leftist intellectuals in NY.⁴³ Serge's comrades were also battling for the survival of their shipwrecked ideals, creating small exile reviews when they could, arguing, exchanging their Marxist 'theses' — even within the Gulag. These independent socialists and revolutionaries had resisted Stalin's hijacking of the Russian Revolution and fought the rise of fascism. Now, they wanted to understand their defeats, and, if possible, trace new perspectives. If they were unable to prevent Communism's betrayal and fascism's triumph, they could at least be lucid and search for the right terms to understand these events theoretically. Forged in the heat of a great world crisis, their analyses remain critical.

The Historical Invisible International

What if we took the liberty of extending Serge's 'invisible international' backward historically, including revolutionary dissidents of the past, and to include what remains relevant in their writings and their example? This 'Historical Invisible International' would be composed of persecuted, marginalized socialist and anarchist minorities, revolutionary heretics like Serge whose critical thought and experience as fighters against the totalitarianisms of the Right and so-called Left still have great value.

Let's picture our imaginary 'Historical Invisible International' convened in a large virtual meeting hall where holograms of the world's outstanding radicals and socialists of every clime and epoch stand assembled. At this assembly of rebels and rabble-rousers, we might encounter figures dating back to the revolt of the Roman slave Spartacus and extending across the planet to

⁴² POUM (Partido obrero de unificación marxista): Anti-Stalinist left, mainly Marxist party, active in Catalonia during the Spanish revolution of 1936-1939. The story of their tragic heroism has been told by George Orwell in his memoir *Homage to Catalonia*. Driven out of Spain by Franco, stabbed in the back by the Communists, interned in the concentration camps of the French Republic, many Spanish anarchists and POUMist fought in the French Resistance.

⁴³ Notably Nancy and Dwight Macdonald, who generously supported Serge's near-miraculous escape from occupied Europe.

every movement from A to Z — from Autonomists to Zapatistas. Imagine if we could listen in on their conversations, even ask them questions: Learn from them whatever there is to know about class struggle down through the ages. Whom would we find in this crowded hall of defeated heroes? Here are *some* of the faces I know well enough to point out in the crowd:

- See, over there, those guys with long bows? That's Wat Tyler, John Ball and the other peasant revolutionaries of 14th Century England. And that's Jan of Leyden who took over Münster Utopian Anabaptists in the 16th Century. In the corner stand Winstanley and a band of 17th Century English and *Levelers* who believed in equality and *Diggers* who held all in common. In the French Revolutionary corner, we find *sans culottes*, *enragés* and Babeuf who organized a *Conspiracy of Equals*. And there's Tom Paine who agitated in three countries and Mary Wollstonecraft who fought for womens' equality. I see Ludites, Chartists, *Canuts* from Lyon, *Teipings* from China, and, of course, over in the corner a bunch of Wobblies from Montana hanging out with Joe Hill.
- Down in front there, I see some great American rebels, like Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Susan B. Anthony, Mother Jones, E.V. Debbs, One-Eyed Big Bill Haywood.
- Among the Utopians, I see jolly old François Rabelais, a somewhat primmer Thomas More, Fourier, Saint Simon, Robert Owen, William Morris and Oscar Wilde arguing about esthetics with Edward Bellamy, as well as friends and contemporaries like Paul Goodman, Starhawk, Ernest Callenbach ... and, is that Manny Wallerstein lecturing about Utopistics over there?
- In the Anarchists circle, I can make out Montaigne's friend La Boétie who wrote that all servitude is voluntary, and farther along Proudhon, Fourier, St-Simon, Bakunin, Louise Michel, Kropotkin, Marius Jacob, Mexico's Flores

Magón, Durruti who perished fighting Franco in 1936, Emma Goldman (my hero among them all), Voline and Makhno of the Ukrainian rebellion, and a few I knew in the flesh: Marcel Body, Russell Blackwell, Daniel Guérin, Sam and Esther Dolgoff . . .

- Among the intellectuals reading in the hall's library, I see critical socialists like Antonio Gramsci, Georg Lukacs, and, of course, Karl Marx, suffering like Job with boils as he studies world labor statistics on the hard seats of the British museum.
- Among the Russians over by that wall, we find several different types of revolutionary opponents of Communist totalitarianism: Left Social-Revolutionaries, Anarchists, Left Mensheviks and dissident Communists, members of the Workers' Opposition (Kollontai, Shliapnikov), the Left Opposition (Preobrezhenski, Joffe, Trotsky, Smilga, Victor Serge), Sapronov and the Democratic Centralists as well as the dissidents of Third International (Balabanova, Bordiga, Souvarine, Sneevliet) . . .
- Over there's another group speaking German with the martyred Spartacist leaders Karl Leibnecht and Rosa Luxemburg. Around them I see the Dutch and German Council Communists with Anton Pannekoek, Paul Mattick and Karl Korsch.
- And, of course, there are the post-Trotskyist revolutionaries some of whom I have talked (and argued) with in the flesh as well as in their books: among them Raya Dunayevskaya, Cornelius Castoriadis, Tony Cliff, Hal Draper, Maximilien Rubel, Daniel Guérin, Ngo Van, Paul Mattick and many others. . .

I used to dream that if my comrades and I could enter that imaginary meeting hall and participate in the discussions among these revolutionaries of every era, perhaps we might pick up the red thread that would lead us out of the political labyrinth in which we are lost.

Well, *Halleluiah!* Today we can, thanks to the Internet! Today

any curious teenager in Vietnam or Vermont can check into an Internet café, hook up to the nets, and visit all these historical rebels through Wikipedia and at their sites, often run by active disciples eager to network with new people. Today, revolutionary texts that previously could only be found in the great libraries of Paris, London and New York are two or three clicks away on the Internet. As a student eager to read Victor Serge, I traveled to Paris and hand copied his writings at the *Bibliothèque nationale*. Now Serge is on Facebook! Today, our imaginary Historical Invisible International meeting hall virtually exists, on a platform wide as the planet itself, with sites and Wikipedia articles devoted to all these visionaries whom we are free to visit, to argue with and to learn from whenever we wish.

Occult Learning

I've often wondered if a consensus could emerge in this great assembly among rebels of every time and place. Could we imagine these anti-totalitarian revolutionaries evolving some sort of synthesis of their common ideas and social experiences? Could we imagine them agreeing on a minimum program, a Virtual Charter which today's internationalists might find illuminating? What would such a Charter look like? Perhaps like a 21st Century globalized version of the Charter of the International Workers' Association (Ist International) or the *Preamble* of the Wobblies (IWW) which was written over a three or four day period in a hall in Chicago in 1905 by an assembly of about a hundred men and women, Marxists, socialists, syndicalists, labor organizers, anarchists and working stiff? They got off to a good start by agreeing that:

“The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of the working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all

the good things of life. Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the earth and the machinery of production, and abolish the wage system.”

Not a bad perspective for the 99%-ers and Occupiers of 2011 to start with!

One thing is sure: if these witnesses to revolution cannot give us an infallible formulas for getting to a socialist society in the future, they can, by their critical thought, put us on guard against *what we must not do* if we want to get there. The lessons, however negative, that they bring us from their defeats, are an unavoidable point of departure. These hard-won lessons constitute a treasure of Occult Learning built up by the working class in its victories and its defeats, analyzed by its best surviving thinkers, distilled in the alembic of historical experience, purified by critical spirit. This knowledge remains ‘occult’ because it has long been marginalized, forgotten, buried under party lines and official lies. But as Victor Serge wrote, ‘nothing is ever lost.’ The Occult Learning of yesterday’s rebels is still there to discover. Their example and their writings survive. It’s up to us to extract its quintessence! So let’s begin by looking backward at the three historical Workers’ Internationals to see what lessons they might hold for the 21st Century.

The Example of the Multi-tendency IWA

The First International, known at the time as the International Workingmen’s Association (IWA), came together in 1863 and fell apart not long after the defeat of the Paris Commune a decade later. I would like to propose the IWA as a model horizontal bottom up worker self-organization with long-term goals and ramifications among organized workers in many lands. Essentially a correspondence network, the IWA served a practical function in keeping workers informed of each others’ struggles in the various

countries and of organizing solidarity where possible. At the same time, the IWA fulfilled the two functions which, according to the Marx-Engels 1848 *Communist Manifesto*, distinguishes the activities of ‘communists’ (we should say ‘socialists’ today) from other participants in the class struggle: 1) in every local struggle, to look out for the interests of the working class as a whole, worldwide 2) in every partial struggle, to look toward the long run, the ultimate historical goal of total worker self-emancipation.

In contrast to the ‘vanguard,’ ‘hub-and-spokes,’ ‘general staff’ models of organization exemplified by the bureaucratic parties of the Second (or Socialist), Third (or Communist) and Fourth (Trotskyist) Internationals, let us look at the structure of the IWA and at the actual practice of Marx himself, who served as its General Secretary. The IWA's Charter stated its purpose was to ‘establish relations between the different associations of workers in such a manner that workers in each country would be constantly informed of the movements of their class in other countries.’ In other

words, the IWA was, first of all, an international workers' information network with an extremely practical purpose (a purpose I believe can be greatly facilitated by a network which exploits the information-sharing technology of the Internet).

Further, the original IWA was also a socialist organization defined by its Statutes and Congresses and a General Council. Let us recall that membership and voting at congresses were restricted to ‘workingmen’ which excluded both women workers (regrettably) and intellectuals (perhaps correctly). It was when the organizers couldn't find the right words to express their aims in a Preamble that they appealed to ‘the eminent writer Dr. Marx’ whose position was that of unpaid volunteer secretary and ‘sci-

International Working Men's Association.

CENTRAL COUNCIL,

18 GREEK STREET, LONDON, W.

Trade, Friendly, or any Working Men's Societies are invited to join in their corporate capacity, the only conditions being that the Members subscribe to the principles of the Association, and pay for the declaration of their enrolment (which is varnished and mounted on canvas and roller), the sum of 5s. No contributions are demanded from Societies joining, it being left to their means and discretion to contribute or not, or as they may from time to time deem the efforts of the Association worthy of support.

The Central Council will be pleased to send the Address and Rules, which fully explain the principles and aims of the Association, to any Society applying for them: and, if within the London district, deputations will gladly attend to afford any further information that may be required. Societies joining are entitled to send a representative to the Central Council. The amount of contribution for individual members is 1s. per annum, with 1d. for Card of Membership; which may be obtained, with every information concerning the Association, by applying to the Honorary Secretary, or at the Central Council's Meetings, which are held every Tuesday Evening, at 18 Greek Street, from Eight to Ten o'clock.

E. DUBOIS, Corresponding Secretary for France.

K. MARK, " " Germany.

E. HANNOY, " " Poland.

H. LENO, " " Switzerland.

L. LEWA, " " America.

G. ODGER, President of Central Council.

G. W. WHEELER, Hon. Treasurer.

W. R. CREMER, Hon. Gen. Sec.

entific' advisor (through his Addresses to the Council on history, economics, politics).

Far from being a 'Marxist' organization, the IWA was a broad, multi-tendency coalition of worker groups reflecting the theoretical level of the organized workers of its time. In the beginning, the followers of the French socialist Proud'hon were in the majority. The Proud'honists believed in a socialism based on mutual credit, and they opposed strikes, revolutions and women's rights. The IWA did not really take off until the economic crisis and strike wave of 1868, and it was 'not the International who threw the workers into the strikes, but the strikes that threw the workers into the International.' Only then did Marx's ideas win general acceptance. In 1869, Bakunin and his anarchist followers were accepted into the IWA and introduced yet another political current, federalism.

Two years later, the Paris Commune, the first workers' government, was created by French workers and soldiers in the wake of Napoleon III's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War. Although Proud'honists and Internationalists of the IWA were members of the Commune, it was an improvised affair rather than the application of anyone's theory. After the Commune's tragic defeat, it was Marx who was assigned by the IWA's London Committee to sum up the basic lesson learned through experience by the Paris workers for future generations of workers. They were 'anarchist' lessons: smash the state and replace it with the armed people governing themselves through elected, revocable representatives paid at workers' wages. Marx was the first to acknowledge that it was not he, the revolutionary intellectual, who created this essential model of workers' self-government, but the workers themselves through experience. Further, Marx made an important change in his major theoretical work, *Capital*, after observing that the actions of the Parisian workers had 'stripped the fetish off commodities' and revealed their essence. In May 1871, the short-lived Commune was brutally repressed by the French Republic with the help of the Prussians. The capitalist repression spread to every land with massive police repression of workers' associations. Thus, the First International was effectively destroyed as a practical movement, but only after having 'stormed the heavens' with the first practical workers' government.

Nothing fails like failure. It was later, during the repression, following the defeat of 1871 — in the midst of the subsequent quarrels and factionalism among demoralized, embittered, exiled revolutionary intellectuals fighting over what remained of the IWA — that the famous split took place between the so-called "Marxists" (Marx famously denied he was a 'Marxist'!) and the anarchists following Bakunin. In this ugly aftermath, the conspiratorial "libertarian" Bakunin maneuvered to raid the moribund rump of the IWA and take over the name. He was outmaneuvered by the wily Marx, who sent the General Council across the Atlantic to New York to wither and die. In retrospect, this 'battle of titans' seems like a battle of pygmies revealing the small side of these two bearded, 19th Century patriarchs blinded by national prejudices (Bakunin's anti-Semitism, Marx's fear of Russia). Unfortunately, the split remained permanent between the two great branches of the socialist family, still sharply divided between "anarchists" and "socialists." Sadly, all that people remember today about the IWA is the nasty factional split between two factions of a half-dead exile group, rather than the vigorous and suggestive history of this first and highly successful attempt of working people to organize themselves internationally. But the living history of the IWA, rather than its ugly postmortem, remains rich in lessons for workers today who wish to unite in an international network.

Rich Lessons of the First International

The first lesson is that collective experience and self-activity, rather than doctrines, lead working people to their revolutionary discoveries. As Marx put it, self-activity is the workers' 'method of cognition' which the revolutionary intellectual can only later formulate, not prescribe. In other words, there is a movement from practice to theory which precedes the movement from theory to practice. Marx caught it, as did Luxemburg in 1905. Karl Kautsky, the main theoretician of the Socialist Second International, could only see the movement *from* theory and it was Kautsky who taught Lenin that socialism is imported into the working class by party intellectuals. In reality, what takes place is a two-way road between theory and practice, ending in the unity of workers and intellectuals, as Raya Dunayevskaya demonstrated

in her 1958 *Marxism and Freedom*.

The second lesson is that such an international network must, from the beginning, offer practical advantages by providing facilities for the exchange of information about workers' struggles, the gathering of statistics about conditions of labor, and the linking of organized workers for international action. With the Internet, this becomes a practical possibility. The third lesson is that genuine international workers' organizations must be horizontal rather than vertical, multi-tendency and democratic, rather than top-down authoritarian, if they are to leave room for the development of class consciousness through lessons drawn from experience.

Thus, we can be sure that we are on the right track when we imagine the emergence of an international network. But it is equally certain that it is not we, a few thousand *Altermundialistas*, but billions acting together, who can create a vast international movement and unleash the human power necessary to uproot capitalism and save the planet if it can be saved. So, for the moment, let us agree on two main points borrowed from the *Communist Manifesto*: 1) that the emancipation of the working people can only be the result of the activity of the working people themselves and 2) that this emancipation will take place on the planetary scale or it will not take place at all.

Rule of Thumb Internationalism

How then do we as revolutionary internationalists differ from other working men and women in struggle? What do we have to add? What is our role? Certainly not that of chiefs, but perhaps the more modest roles of leaven, of yeast helping the dough to rise; of idea-viruses spreading the contagion of revolutionary thought; of memory-cells and teachers in the movement, making the lessons of the past actual in the present. Like the 'communists' in the 1848 *Communist Manifesto*, our role is two-fold: 1) In every particular, local or national struggle, we pose the question: 'How does this struggle increase international/planetary worker solidarity?' 2) In every partial, limited, immediate struggle, we pose the question: 'How does this struggle advance the historical perspective of the abolition of wage-labor and capitalism?' These are the questions, the historical and the planetary, that we internationalists seek to bring to the fore in every struggle. From this

follows a relatively simple rule-of-thumb that can be applied to nearly any situation or movement:

The Internationalist Rule of Thumb: 'Every tactic is good that unites us globally, that promotes solidarity among working and unemployed, among men and women of all nationalities. Every tactic that divides us by race, sex, or nation is destructive.'

The Mighty Second International Collapses

Based on rule-of-thumb internationalism, we see that the failures of the Second (Socialist) International and the Third (Communist) Internationals derive in a large measure precisely from their lack of consistent, thoroughgoing internationalism. Sectarians are perennially trying to create new Internationals based on 'revolutionary Marxism.' But ideology is not enough. The powerful Socialist International was officially based on 'revolutionary Marxism,' and it organized millions of workers within a vast network of Socialist parties and trade-unions with a mass press, and important youth and women's sections in Germany, France, Belgium, Holland, Austria, and Russia. During the previous international Congress, the revolutionary tendency spearheaded by Rosa Luxemburg had gained the majority over the 'revisionist' faction led by Bernstein, and, in the event of war, the Socialist Parties pledged to respond by a general strike. Yet this powerful international Socialist party collapsed like a house of cards in August 1914 when the majority of the German and French socialists supported their capitalist governments at the outbreak of the First imperialist World War — turning millions of workers into fratricidal murderers. The Second International was so firmly based in 'revolutionary Marxism' that, at the outbreak of War in August 1914, Lenin himself still looked upon its chief theoretician Kautsky as his 'master' and literally *refused to believe* the press reports of the German Socialists' betrayal. (At first he imagined that the reports were 'planted' as part of an Imperial disinformation campaign rather than admit the truth.)

The Third International Promotes Counter-Revolution

The same rule-of-thumb exposes the sham of the Third International, also firmly based on a bureaucratic, Russo-centric version of 'revolutionary Marxist internationalism.' It, too, founded on the rock of chauvinism by identifying the interests of the working people of the planet with the interests of the Russian state. In the end, the international-minded Trotsky concluded that under Stalin the Moscow-directed Third International or 'Comintern' had been degraded to the role of 'border guards' protecting the interests of Russia. The Comintern had also become an active agent of international counter-revolution. Ken Loach's recent film *Land and Freedom* shows how the Comintern, during the Spanish Revolution of 1936, allied itself with the Spanish Republican bourgeoisie and introduced police-state methods to crush the magnificent social revolution of the Spanish workers and peasants whose self-activity was creating a new society and fighting Franco. While the POUMist and anarchist militias were going up to the front to battle against Franco fascists, occupying and self-managing the land, the war industries, the telephone, the streetcars in Catalonia, the Spanish Communists under the order of Stalin were preparing to destroy them.

Moreover, the Moscow-centered Comintern under Zinoviev, with its bureaucratized structure, bullying and manipulative methods was tainted from the start. Consider the fiasco of the 1923 Communist *putsch* in Germany. Victor Serge, an eyewitness, recounts in his *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, how the Comintern held back the workers' insurrectionary mood of the summer so as to 'order' a German revolution to coincide with the anniversary of the Russian October Revolution. But when October came around, Moscow panicked and gave the order to call off the German uprising at the last minute, exposing the German Party and particularly the workers of Hamburg (who didn't get the message in time and took over the city) to violent repression. But instead of drawing the lessons of this Moscow-directed disaster, the 'revolutionary Marxist' Comintern placed the responsibility on the local German leaders (some of whom had not even been kept informed of the insurrectionary plans!) and purged them. It could be argued that this Russian-engineered

disaster of 1923 closed the period of international revolutionary struggle that had opened with the Soviet victory in 1917, and ushered in the era of fascism. This is a practical example of how the ‘hub-and-spokes’ model of an international network functioned from its inception, well before Stalinism.

The Fourth and (Virtual) ‘Fifth’ Internationals

Stalin took over Russia and the Third International in 1928, and one of his first acts was to exile his arch-rival Leon Trotsky, who since 1923 had been criticizing the Soviet regime as bureaucratic and nationalistic. During the Thirties, Trotsky attempted to create a rival Fourth International based on ‘Bolshevik-Leninism’ from the top down and in the absence of existing anti-Stalinist national labor parties. The inevitable result was an ideological sect, which immediately split into two factions, and has not stopped splitting since.

Does our imaginary Invisible International include present-day disciples of these micro-parties? Of course — as long as they have not sunk into stagnant and fanatical sectarianisms, as long as they go on searching and asking questions. In spite of the sectarianism that often divides and embitters the factions of the international far left, these groups include many possessors of Occult Wisdom, bearers of revolutionary ideas who continue to defend and expound them. Alas, Dear Comrades, all our efforts for uniting into an ultimate international have sunk into sectarian power-struggles and squabbles over the ‘correct political line,’ as if any group could have a monopoly on the truth.

Yet the mini-parties and radical sects so many of my generation devoted ourselves to building and defending over so many lonely and difficult years were not necessarily sterile. They exposed thousands if not millions of young people to revolutionary ideas for the first time. We preserved, disseminated and developed these ideas during a difficult and confusing period when such ideas were basically ‘underground,’ even where they were legal. We were a transmission-belt passing on the Occult Wisdom we received, often by oral tradition, from surviving revolutionaries of Serge’s generation who remembered back even further. Our groups were the hard nut-shells which preserved the germ of radical critique of the world through the winter of its defeats.

Today, we need to crack open those shells, to liberate the revolution, to join what Marx called the ‘actual movement’ — not to lead it or to take it over, but to bring to it organizational skills, socialist ideals, a form of analysis based on historical experience, a perspective for another possible world. In other words, to break open the hard shells of our splinter groups and liberate the Occult Wisdom jealously preserved inside. If the Left of the Left remains with its sectarian shell, it will dry up and die. If it has the courage to break out of its shell, it will fulfill its biological function by procreating, something most people find to be fun.

Among such activities, let me propose using our experience and Occult Wisdom in a playful and imaginative mode. Instead of *arguing* about whose political line is more correct, let's hold a contest for the best fictional Path to Utopia that shows us *how* that political line gets us to a new society and what the new society looks like. I've participated in various attempts to form networks, alliances and the like on the basis of some sort of Manifesto, and they have all crashed upon the rocks of sectarian power struggles. After my disappointment at the latest failure to form a 'Fifth' International (the 1997 Capetown, South Africa Conference for International Network for a Socialist Alternative) I came to the conclusion that as long as there was *power* to be had in an organizational structure, people will fight over it and mask their power-hunger with doctrinal differences. It was then that I came across the phrase 'invisible international' in Serge and began to think in terms of a *virtual* Charter. What if we made an online game of it? Each player or player-group picks an identity. I'll be Rosa Luxembour, you be Bakunin. What if we all met in a

virtual meeting hall on a Wiki and try to hammer out a *virtual* Charter, adding on ideas in the open-source spirit rather than treating ideas as private property to fight over. The Wiki is ready and waiting at <http://billionairesandbillions.wikispaces.com/>

So come on all you Marxists, anarchists, socialists, post-Trotskyists, Situationists, libertarians, communists, latter-day Sixty-Eighters — to your computers! Let's take time off from collecting signatures, publishing unreadable articles and holding interminable meetings, to think about Utopia! Let's dream, and take our dreams for realities once again! Let's bet on Utopia while there's still a planet to save!

The Invisible International of the 'Alter-mondialistes' of the '90s

This young invisible international seemed to spring out of nowhere, in the middle of the neo-liberal celebration of globalized capital's eternal reign. Its diversity was its strength. It brought together movements organized around single issues from torture in prisons to the nuclear threat, from indigenous rights and water rights to saving the environment. It spoke many languages and speaks with many voices, including voices heretofore un-heard: feminine, third world, peasant voices. It answered capitalism's arrogant TINA ('There Is No Alternative') with a loud 'Another World Is Possible.' Not only did it speak, it listened.

Throughout the world it attracted critical spirits and passionate activists, for the most part young, who were looking for a way out of this dying capitalist society. It was present whenever the representatives of global capitalism come together to divide up the world's resources among themselves. In the name of the human community and the biosphere, it dares confront the financial power of multinational capital and the might of the state. It organized the world's first global antiwar demonstrations (against Bush's 2003 invasion of Iraq) massively supported in many countries. Its struggle to save the planet from destruction, now forgot-

ten, was historic.

In 2002-2003, faced with the threat to the peace posed by the aggressive arrogance of the Bush administration in Iraq, this new movement mobilized millions in the first global demonstration in history. The *N.Y. Times* spoke of the birth of a 'second superpower:' global opinion. In another dramatic development, from the heart of a U.S. still in the grip of post-September 11, 2001 patriotic hysteria, a million Americans poured into the streets, braving FBI cameras, Army helicopters and police charges to show their opposition to the war and demand regime change in Washington. We could not stop the war, but we recognized our strength, our identity as a planetary movement, an invisible antiwar international.

This young invisible international developed its own Occult Learning. The World Social Forum, which met for the first time in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2001, has become an annual event bringing together activists from social movements around the globe, a kind of 'movement of movements.' The participants go to forums to learn, to pose old questions in a new way, to develop original forms of collective action, and especially to weave ties among people of other countries, other movements. They invite radical specialists from agronomy and economics. They exchange experience among peasant groups from three continents, and network around the planet to resist corporate capitalist globalization in the name of humanity and the environment.

Many participants in this 'invisible international' grew up with the computer and the Internet, and they were among the first to make use of them to inform themselves and to weave their networks. Their skill in researching, accessing facts, statistics and studies is impressive. Their use of the Internet as an organizing tool has opened up new possibilities for global action. Like the Internet itself, The Invisible International takes the form of a sprawling web linking individuals, local groups, political organizations, and various networks organized around issues like ecology, war, AIDS, hunger, human rights, capitalist globalization. Along that web, information is exchanged to fertilize discussions; international encounters are planned.

The 1999 anti-IMF protests in Seattle surpassed all expectations and drew the attention of the whole world to the problem of capitalist globalization. Seen marching there side by side for the first time were timber-industry unionists and tree-hugging eco-

gists, bare-breasted feminists and members of religious orders, anarchists and professional societies. Subsequent meetings in Rio, Porto Alegre, Genoa and elsewhere brought thousands of militants and thinkers in struggle and dialogue. Among them: ecologists, native peoples, trade unionists, anti-nuclears, feminists, gays, human rights militants, peasant and ethnic communities, enraged scientists, radicals and protesters of every stripe.

In these new global movements, nobody dominated. No party line was imposed. Rather, a highly organized chaos of organizations, websites, networks. Sites loaded with detailed information on each issue intertwined by an infinity of links with other sites. A proliferation of projects and ideas. A discussion open to all. A circle, a web instead of an authoritarian center or group of experts handing down information and commands to the rank and file. Enough to drive old politicians and disciplined militants to despair. But when it comes to mobilizing — what boldness! What initiative!

All these characteristics apply even more so to the rolling revolutions and radical occupations of 2011, analyzed above in ‘Radical Emergence 2011.’

For many, Internet contact with this new invisible international represented the first experience with organized protest. Caring about the earth, about peace and social justice, in love with a simple, sane life, its members seek a way out of a cruel, destructive, and irrational system. This invisible international could not help being anti-capitalist. The same multinationals blocked the way forward of every reform desired by its constituents, be it preventing war, eliminating poverty, saving the environment, protecting human rights, or blocking the capitalist privatization of the planet’s resources. ‘The World is not for sale’ is its motto. Its slogan is at once Utopian and revolutionary: ‘Another world is possible!’

At the February, 2009 meeting of the World Social Forum at Belem, Brazil the members of the Assembly of Social Movements spelled out their aims in the following Declaration which deserves the widest attention:

“We the social movements from all over the world came together on the occasion of the 8th

World Social Forum in Belem, Amazonia, where the peoples have been resisting attempts to usurp nature, their lands and their cultures. We are here in Latin America, where over the last decade the social movements and the indigenous movements have joined forces and radically question the capitalist system from their *cosmovision*. Over the last few years, in Latin America highly radical social struggles have resulted in the overthrow of neoliberal governments and the empowerment of governments that have carried out many positive reforms such as the nationalisation of core sectors of the economy and democratic constitutional reforms.

“The social emancipation process carried by the feminist, environmentalist and socialist movements in the 21st century aims at liberating society from capitalist domination of the means of production, communication and services, achieved by supporting forms of ownership that favor the social interest: small family freehold, public, cooperative, communal and collective property.

“Such an alternative will necessarily be feminist since it is impossible to build a society based on social justice and equality of rights when half of humankind is oppressed and exploited. Lastly, we commit ourselves to enriching the construction of a society based on a life lived in harmony with oneself, others and the world around (*el buen vivir*) by acknowledging the active participation and contribution of the native peoples.”

We, the social movements, are faced with a historic opportunity to develop emancipatory initiatives on a global scale. Only through the social struggle of the masses can populations overcome the crisis. In order to promote this struggle, it is essential to work on consciousness-raising and mobilization from the grassroots. The challenge for the social movements is to achieve a convergence of global mobilization. It is also to strengthen our ability to act by supporting the convergence of all movements striving to withstand oppression and exploitation.

The Workers' Invisible International

This huge Invisible International, still in search of its identity, includes all the workers and poor people across the planet who struggle against the power of the banks, multinationals and governments who stand between them and a living wage. [Today we would say the 'International of the 99%-ers.'] We're talking about the crew-members of Spaceship Earth. They run all the machinery, clean and repair the cabins, prepare all the food and are made to slave for the officers and serve them. Most of the passengers are their families, deep down in steerage where it stinks, where it's cold and disease is rife and there aren't enough rations to keep everyone alive. They have the most incentive to overthrow the officers. They also have the power to STOP the machinery AND the know-how to run the ship afterwards. They have been the backbone of every previous revolution. The officers know this, and use all their force and guile to keep them down. Yet they continue to rebel, notably in Communist China where a police-state apparatus in the service of sweat-shop capitalists working for U.S. corporations has not been able to prevent the eighty or ninety thousand violent strikes and uprisings recorded every year.

These working men and women are slowly and painfully learning, through frustrating struggles at the local and national levels, that they are facing a formidable global adversary. They are beginning to recognize how their unsievable, ubiquitous enemy thwarts their every effort to improve their lot in one place or another. They are observing how this adversary divides them, the better to rule and exploit them. They are experiencing the effects of a globalized 'free market' which defines itself by international

borders pried open for the penetration of foreign capital and slammed shut against migrants searching for work. Some examples, among many:

- Brazilian *seigneurs*, tapers of wild rubber defending their living and that of the Amazon forest.
- The Korean proletariat whose general strikes overthrew the dictatorship of the generals and industrial monopolies like Hyundai and Daewoo.
- Chinese peasants revolting against arbitrary taxes and driving Communist Party profiteers out of their village councils. More than eighty-thousand officially counted strikes or uprisings requiring police or army intervention in the single year 2007 (after which date the officials stopped counting).
- Super-exploited Mexican workers in the *maquiladoras* (free trade zones on the American border) organizing with the help of U.S. unionists.
- The workers and unemployed of Europe and the U.S. struggling against the take-backs, speedups, downsizing, plant closures, out-sourcing, automation, flexi-time, safety violations, degraded working conditions and stress imposed in the name of globalization.

These workers see the multinationals taking over everywhere. Overworked, underpaid Asian workers feel themselves being squeezed dry by local subcontractors competing to offer the lowest prices to foreign corporations. In the multinationals' home countries, workers are forced to submit to wage cuts, factory closings, privatization of public services, deterioration of their living conditions, their standard of living swept away in a global race towards the bottom of the lowest labor costs — all this justified by the global market and 'foreign' competition.

Similarly, farmers of Africa, Latin America and Asia are watching themselves being ruined by low agricultural prices while the governments of rich countries give gross subsidies to giant multinational agribusinesses like Monsanto. Billions of Africans, Asians and Latin Americans are seeing themselves deprived of schools, hospitals and infrastructures by reductions in

social budgets and privatizations imposed by the IMF and World Bank — all in the name of ‘free trade!’ At the risk of extinction, these folks on the bottom need to organize themselves on the planetary level.

The way will not be easy. National pride, racial and religious prejudices will remain obstacles. Existing trade unions, narrowly focused on local fiefdoms and marginal improvements, will prove unable or unwilling to address their members’ most pressing problem: the decline of wages to the worldwide lowest common denominator through globalization. Only international solidarity can possibly solve this problem, but the union bureaucracy, locked into the wage-system and the legal system, sanctioned and often subsidized by each of Europe’s national governments, is unlikely to jeopardize its privileged situation as intermediary between labor, business, and government within the national territory. Ditto for the political parties of the Left, to which unions here are often affiliated.

Established unions, American or European, will by their nature resist any kind of global activity that might violate sacrosanct contracts and labor legislation, subjecting them to fines, etc. Most of the unions fight losing rear-guard actions, attempting to rescue pensions and a few jobs out of factory closings, locking the barn door after the horses have been stolen.

The situation in the U.S., where readers must be envious of the European tradition of general strikes, is best described by the laborer turned teacher-writer, my late comrade Robert Fitch in the title of his must-read book *Solidarity for Sale: How corruption destroyed the labor movement and undermined America’s promise* (2006). Fitch points out that U.S. unions function as parochial feudal fiefdoms, monopolizing the labor supply in a certain field and location and selling it to the bosses as the workers’ ‘representatives’ (on whom individual workers depend to find or keep their jobs). With such a blatant conflict of interest built into U.S. labor law, it is small wonder that bosses buy sweetheart contracts by kicking back under the table to union leaders, who often are related to organized crime, and use union pension-funds for their private enrichment. Because of this very structure, valiant attempts over the years by rank-and-file to take over their unions, get rid of the gangsters, and stand united against the bosses have proved extremely difficult and prone to cooptation by the bureau-

crazy.

Since 2006, the different rival union ‘internationals’ in the U.S. seem to be engaged in a race to the bottom, signing up low-paid workers only to hand them over, bound as it were by a contract, to their employers, with little or no improvement and dues to pay. On the other hand, where the Right has been attacking the unions of teachers and other government workers, it is in order to deprive them of any defense against de-professionalizing of their work and driving down wages. The rallying of the public to these organized workers, as in Madison Wisconsin in 2011, is an extremely hopeful sign.

There are hopeful signs among Latino workers and agricultural workers, with laudable attempts at cross-border organizing with Mexico. However, only a few maverick unions show signs of going global, and the first planetary solidarity actions will have to be organized without the ‘help’ of the labor bureaucrats, if not over their opposition. There is no other choice for labor.

The reports coming out of Occupy Oakland, which carried off a general strike in November 2011 and shut down the Port of Oakland with the complicity of the traditionally left-wing Longshoremen’s Union, are significant. At a later point, at the invitation of rank and file workers, the Occupiers came to the aid of a dockers’ local that was under attack but which was *not* supported by the Union. Thus the ambiguous complementarity of the social movement and the labor movement. One hopes and foresees that continued fraternization between organized rank-and-file workers, on the one hand, and community occupiers and activists on the other, may provide a way out of the paradoxical situation of U.S. unionism.

Since the Crash of 2008, governments everywhere are imposing ‘austerity’ programs designed to make the working class pay for the bailouts of the bankers, who continue to live high off the hog on public subsidies. There have been repeated general strikes here in France, as well as in Spain (simultaneously at one point) and in Greece, all suffering under European Union-imposed austerity cutbacks. Yet I am unaware of any serious effort to link up the anti-austerity and ‘indignant’ movements here in the European Union because of the bureaucratic nature of the left parties and unions, so tightly focused on local (national) elections and parochial, sectorial struggles *within* the system.

Nor did any international network emerge out of the great electoral victory of the NO vote against the neo-liberal European Constitution (supported by both the Right and the (officially) Socialist Left in the 2005 European referendum). Instead of uniting the NOs, the French far-Left fielded seven (count 'em 7) competing candidates during the following election, and no one reached out to the Dutch voters, who had also rejected the neo-liberal Constitution.

On the French labor front, ever since the victorious week-long runaway (wildcat) general strike of 1995 that made the government withdraw its 'reforms,' whenever the French massively demonstrate and go on national strikes in opposition to government attacks on their labor and welfare rights (as in 2003, 2008 and 2009), the official leaders of the unions impose the delaying tactic of spaced one-day national work-stoppages and demonstrations — marches and counter-marches designed quite precisely to 'demonstrate' to the government their ability to call out their troops (and thus presumably to reign them in and prove their 'respectability'). These demonstrations are great for letting off steam, but inevitably they run out of steam. Time is always on the side of the government and the capitalists in the class struggle. All the energy is then turned into the ritual of elections, 'Left' versus 'Right' scheduled for 2012. Not a word about the monumental struggles a few hundred miles away in Greece.

In Greece, the working class, the youth and large segments of the newly-dispossessed middle class have been taking to the streets striking, demonstrating, occupying public buildings for months in an attempt to defend their living conditions against the massive layoffs, 25% wage cuts, and huge new taxes on poor households (under threat of losing electricity.) Yet the unions have remained aloof from the popular movement, holding their protests separately, refusing to sanction occupations, putting off decisions on general strikes until after the momentum as died down. Meanwhile, rank-and-file workers have occupied their own union.

Conclusion

The Invisible International is a living tradition that goes back to Spartacus and includes the experience of all the doomed revolutions of the centuries, with survivors passing on from one

generation to the next the precious formulas of Occult Wisdom often earned at a terrible price. Since the '90s, and especially since 2011, new openly anti-capitalist movements have arisen, first among the youth and now generalized among the population. Their demonstrations and occupations have shaken the establishment to its core, especially when they were backed by workers' strikes, as in Iran during the 2009 'Green' demonstrations, and in Egypt in February 2011, where they were instrumental in overthrowing Mubarak. Clearly, the alliance of workers, those who produce and reproduce the life of society, and the social movements of the 99%-ers for democracy, justice and equality, is the wave of the future. Labor is the backbone of society, and workers must find a way past the narrow parochialism of trade unions and return to their tradition of international struggle. When they do so, they will find a supportive community, ready to back them and to face the final conflict with world capital.

Today, workers around the globe are reaching out, groping toward international solutions to the international problems posed by global corporations. For the first time, the Internet gives them the technical ability to do so. Also the ability to access the wisdom of previous generations of rebels and revolutionaries. Chinese dissidents, Korean trade-unionists, and striking British dockers have already made use of the Internet to communicate, organize solidarity, tell the world about their struggles and develop links with other movements. This virtual and alas still-invisible international will eventually find its organizational form and come to life. [What is *implicit* in the internationalism that is blooming since 2011 will be made *explicit* bye and bye.] One day working people will be led to organize the first global strike against a multinational, and, thanks to the Internet, they will be able to bring it off.

On that day, when all the employees, subcontractors and subsidiaries of a multinational like Daewoo, Nike, Montsano, BP, or Airbus Industries go on strike simultaneously in every country — backed by community action and consumer boycotts — the invisible international of the workers will stop being a dream or an 'occult conspiracy.' It will take on the flesh and bones of a waking giant, and its rising will be the beginning of the end of capitalist exploitation — *if* capitalism does not make the planet we live on uninhabitable first.



Part II

**CAPITALIST
SHARKS**

Capitalism's 'Terminal' Crisis?

Remember the Great Crash of 2008? Or have soothing siren songs about 'recovery' lulled you to the point where you see it fading into history like the financial shocks of 2001 (the dot-com bubble), 1994 (the Mexican debt crisis), 1989 (the Savings & Loan crisis), 1987 (the Black Monday stock market crash), 1973-74 (the oil crisis and stock market crash) and the Crash of 1929 (ancient history, irrelevant)? Before recollection fades, let me refresh your memory . . . and remind you of a few remaining problems.

According to the neo-liberal, free-market orthodoxy, a crisis like the Crash of 2008 was theoretically impossible because capitalism had achieved equilibrium of un-ending growth. Small wonder no one — outside of a handful of old-fashioned classical Marxists like this author — saw the Crash of 2008 coming. Yet as my Slovenian friend, the Groucho Marxist Slavoj Zizek, quipped: 'The only truly surprising thing about the 2008 financial meltdown is how easily the idea was accepted that its happening was unpredictable.'

Indeed, we anti-capitalist, anti-IMF globalization protesters have been denouncing the banks and warning of an impending crash for over a decade, only to be met by ridicule, tear-gas and mass arrests. "The police were used to literally stifle the truth," concludes Zizek⁴⁴ The questions that remain are these: Does the Crash of 2008 validate the Marxist assumption that the underlying cause of capitalism's crisis is structural, or rather systemic? And, if so, can the much-vaunted 'recovery' of 2009 be expected to last? Or, for that matter, capitalism itself?

⁴⁴ *Harpers*, October 2009.

Summary: ★ *The Crash of 2008* ★ *Obama and the Jobless 'Recovery' of 2010* ★ *Blowing New Bubbles* ★ *The Great Recession* ★ *Can Capitalism Reform?* ★ *So Marx Was Wrong?* ★ *Overproduction and the Decline in the Rate of Profit* ★ *Historical and Geographical Limits to Capitalist Growth* ★ *Why Hasn't Capitalism, with its Alleged 'Contradictions' Already Collapsed?* ★ *Military Keynesianism* ★ *The Devil in the Zeros Advertising* ★ *Death on the Installment Plan* ★ *Capitalism's 'Final' Crisis?* ★ *What Next?*

The Crash of 2008

It was just two years ago when global capitalism's entire financial edifice appeared to be collapsing into a bottomless pit of self-destruction. The bursting of the housing bubble in 2007 had already exposed the financial markets as a vast pyramid scheme built on a foundation of leveraged debt and fictitious capital. Within months, credit evaporated and trillions of dollars in securities began melting as fast as the Wicked Witch of Oz when the Scarecrow threw the bucket of water on her.

By October 2008, prominent financiers, economists and statesmen in the U.S. and Europe were using expressions like 'an economic Pearl Harbor' (financier Warren Buffet), 'the edge of the abyss' (economist Paul Krugman), 'an approaching tsunami' (Jacques Attali, former President of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development), and a 'financial September 11' (Laurence Parisot, head of the French business association).⁴⁵ That month, Alan Greenspan, the revered neo-liberal guru who ran the Federal Reserve Bank for 18



⁴⁵ Quoted in *Revue internationale* No. 136, Paris, premier trimestre 2009.

years, was being hauled before Congress and forced to confess that he had been “mistaken” in his faith in self-regulating free markets and “wrong” to have encouraged the housing and financial bubbles by lowering the interest rates and lending billions of freshly-printed U.S. dollars to the big banks.⁴⁶ According to *The New Yorker*, Wall Street traders were talking about “nuclear winter” in the credit markets: “nothing moves or grows.”⁴⁷ Desperate, the Bush Administration, supported by both Presidential candidates, pushed through a seven hundred billion dollar bailout to save the high-rolling Wall Street bankers, financiers, traders and hedge-fund operators: the very speculators who in their greed and recklessness had piled up unsecured debt and gambled with other peoples’ money, provoking what will be known throughout history as the ‘Crash of 2008.’⁴⁸ Moreover, there were no regulatory strings attached to the bailout funds, inviting the big profiteers to go back to doing what they were doing before: speculating, buying up smaller banks, and paying themselves huge bonuses.

Less noted at the time was Treasury Secretary Paulson’s announcement of what amounted to an open-ended drawing account to *continue* re-floating troubled banks with fresh-printed Treasury notes running, the former Goldman-Sachs CEO admitted, into the ‘trillions.’ And that was only the beginning, as one bailout followed another. Yet despite this humongous infusion of taxpayer cash, by March 2009, the DOW industrial average had declined to half its October 2007 value.⁴⁹ Standard and Poor’s Index, adjusted for inflation, was down about 50% for the 10-year period from Feb. 17, 1999 to Feb. 17, 2009 — matching the worst 10 years of the Depression — and the prestigious OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) was referring to the economic crisis as ‘the worst in human memory.’⁵⁰ Eventually, massive transfusions of cash revived the swooning financial sector. Securities began to rise again and ‘recovery’ was officially declared.

⁴⁶ *New York Times*, Oct. 23, 2008.

⁴⁷ *The New Yorker*, Oct. 20, 2008.

⁴⁸ The combined government and Fed bailout of banks and corporations came to far more, according to economist Michael Hudson, “How a \$13 Trillion Cover Story was Written,” June 17, 2011, <http://michael-hudson.com/>.

⁴⁹ *DemocracyNow.Org*, March 3, 2009.

⁵⁰ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development interim report, March 2009.

Obama and the Jobless ‘Recovery’ of 2010

Will bailing out the billionaires save the economy? In 2008, Wall Street’s representatives basically took over the White House and used the power of the government to re-inflate the financial balloon at taxpayer expense — without even patching up the holes caused by deregulation. As a result, Goldman-Sachs, Smith-Barney and the other investment banks were able to resume paying their traders million-dollar bonuses, and ‘recovery’ was declared. Jobless ‘recovery’ to be sure. Can this new bubble last? If the immediate cause of the 2008 financial melt-down was speculation based on excessive borrowing, it is hard to see how borrowing even more money could do more than compound the problem by pushing it into the future. Indeed, new balloons are already looming on the horizon, among them precious metals, sovereign debt, emerging markets and a newly-created market for trading permits to keep pumping carbon into the atmosphere.



Concerning the billionaire banker bailouts (or BBBs), we are all aware that the trillions of dollars of future debt they represent are not going to be repaid by the speculators who caused the problem, but by the victims of their greed — working middle-class taxpayers and our descendants over the next decades! The BBBs quite simply represent a government-imposed redistribution of wealth upward from the struggling many to the plutocratic few. Moreover, since employee retirement savings and pensions plans have now shrunk to as little as half their pre-Crash value, many of us will have to keep working — and paying taxes — long into our 60s and 70s to pay this debt off. (Didn’t Karl Marx say that the only part of the nation the working people actually owned was the national debt?) Indeed, when the shit hit the fan in 2008, middle-aged working taxpayers were still paying off the

Chrysler and Savings-and-Loan bailouts of the '80s and '90s!

The terms of the Bush-Obama BBB's were 'heads I win/tails you lose' as far as the Billionaires were concerned. John Q. Public got to bankroll Mr. Too-Big-To-Fail, who, still unregulated, went right back to the casino and resumed gambling. What a deal! If bank profits go up, the brokers and speculators get to keep the profits. If not, John Q. gets to pay the tab. No wonder some bailout recipients reportedly went pheasant hunting the day after they got their first payments! According to economist John Kenneth Galbraith, the true name of the 'free enterprise system' we have been living under is 'socialism for the rich' — privatized profit and socialized debt. So great was the shock of the Crash of 2008 that TV pundits openly began questioning the system, and *Newsweek* famously headlined: 'We Are All Socialists.' Remember?

After his stunning victory in the 2008 elections, there were great expectations that Obama would pay his dues to the voters who elected him in an historic moment of unity among the working people of all so-called 'races' in our race-besotted nation. Liberal hopes were high that he would perhaps 'do a Roosevelt,' that is to say save capitalism for the capitalists by regulating their excesses and staving off mass revolt through populist reforms. But times have changed, and Obama was dependent on his Wall Street backers, whereas the Roosevelts were opulent scions of 17th century Dutch patrons who had their own money. Teddy Roosevelt was rich enough to snub the lobbies and play the 'Trust Buster.' FDR could afford to denounce the bankers of his day as 'economic royalists' and 'malefactors of great wealth.' Barack Obama was no Ross Perot. He couldn't afford to turn on his backers and 'bite the hand that feeds him.' Quite the opposite: as President, Obama's hope was to square the circle by convincing the public that Summers, Geithner and the other financial sharks he is swimming among are vegetarians — all the while throwing them huge chunks of red meat in the hope of appeasing them.

Of course, the financial sharks, being sharks, turned on him, loudly complaining about a few paper 'restrictions' on their arcane speculative activities, insisting on maintaining tax cuts for the top brackets, and spending millions of the bailout dollars campaigning against him! This well-financed right-wing campaign has been so successful that, according to polls, nearly half of American think Obama is a 'socialist'! (Most of the rest of us know he isn't and

wish he were — according to another poll more than a third of Americans prefer ‘socialism’ to capitalism!) Never mind that Wall St. financed candidate Obama’s campaigns from the gitgo: this nice-cop/mean-cop strategy keeps President Obama paralyzed while preserving his image as a progressive Democrat who would do more for the Common Man if he only could.

Despite candidate Obama’s popular appeal, his true loyalties were already clear during the final weeks of the 2008 Election campaign, when reports from Congressional offices indicated constituents’ calls running ‘roughly one hundred to one’ *against* Bush’s no-strings Billionaire Bailouts.⁵¹ You might have thought that such an overwhelming demonstration of voter opinion less than three weeks before a crucial Presidential election would have galvanized the two campaigns — normally ultra-sensitive to the slightest ripple in the polls. But McCain steadfastly ignored the Crash, and Obama, the Great White Hope of the liberals and progressives, not only went along with Bush’s three hundred billion dollar boondoggle, he openly opposed throwing in a few goodies for the working people, “kneecap[ing] the efforts of progressives [in the Democratic Party] to force much-needed provisions like reform of bankruptcy law, publicly stating that this (minor) concession shouldn’t be in the law.”⁵²

Remember that in November 2008, Obama’s coattails (combined with public revulsion against Bush and the Republicans) had swept a solid Democratic majority of Representatives and Senators into office. The financial crisis was at its height, and their constituents, who had just pulled off an astounding electoral victory, were feeling the hurt. The political capital for reform was there. Even cynical old Marxists like me expected a Democratic administration to appear ‘even-handed’ by giving some minimal relief to foreclosed homeowners on Main Street while continuing to bail out giant Wall Street speculators like Goldman Sachs and Smith-Barney/CitiBank. However, Obama showed his hand immediately after his overwhelming popular victory at the polls by choosing to reassure his Wall Street backers rather than his electorate. The then President-elect declared there could be ‘only one president’ and wove what he called a ‘seamless transition’ during

⁵¹ As reported in *The Nation*, Oct. 20, 2008

⁵² See Christopher Hays, "Democracy Inaction", *The Nation*, Oct. 20, 2008.

which he acquiesced to more BBB's and nominated staunch friends of Wall Street to run the economy, including the two men most responsible for the Crash of 2008: Larry Summers (whose great achievement was passing the law that deregulated derivatives, those risky securities that led to the downfall of AIG, costing \$180 billion) and Tim Geithner (who as head of the New York Federal Reserve Board failed to oversee New York's banks). "He who pays the piper calls the tune." You can't say that Mr. Obama — whose primary campaign had received more Wall Street money than Hilary Clinton's and whose election war chest far surpassed McCain's — wasn't loyal to his campaign contributors.

Blowing New Bubbles

Thus the banks and brokerage houses, still unregulated, were re-inflated with tax-payer money, and securities' prices rose from the dead, like a latter-day Lazarus galvanized by an injection of capital liquidity. What have the banks done with all our hard-earned billions? One thing for certain: they haven't reinvested it in the working economy. In order to stimulate investment, the Fed is lending money to the banks at record low rates around 1%, but try to get a small business loan! 'Cheap Debt for Corporations Fails to Spur Economy' was the lead in the *Times*' Business Section on Oct. 9, 2010. Apparently, most of those freshly-printed billions the Fed turned over to the banks and brokerage houses have gone to speculation, much of it overseas. January 2010 saw the rise of new speculative 'bubbles' in Chinese real estate and commodities like pork and copper (whose price went from \$2,800 a ton in Dec. 2008 to \$7,500 on Jan. 21, 2010).⁵³ And according to an October 14, 2010 *N.Y. Times* Editorial entitled 'The Next Bubble,' emerging economies like Brazil are next on the speculators' hit-and-run list with potentially highly-disruptive results.⁵⁴

If you've ever been sucked into joining a chain letter or, worse still, Amway, you already know the difference between 'investment' (think Savings Bonds) and 'speculation' ('send a dollar to the top names on this list and you will receive \$3000 in the next month'). Chain letters and Amway, like financial bubbles,

⁵³ Alan Faujas, "Les bulles spéculatives menacent à nouveau.

⁵⁴ "The Next Bubble," *N.Y. Times* Editorial, October 13, 2010.

are essentially ‘pyramid schemes’ (also known as ‘Ponzi schemes’ after the eponymous Boston swindler.) As long as more and more people keep buying in at the bottom of the pyramid, those at the top keep getting richer (and the insiders at Goldman-Sachs are always at the top of the pyramid). Investment, on the other hand, can be defined as follows: ‘investing your money (saved or borrowed) means buying raw materials, hiring workers, leasing machinery and renting space in order to produce goods or services for sale on the market in the hope of recouping your expenses and making a profit.’ Bonds, stocks (shares in corporations) and other financial products can be bought for the purposes of either investment (to earn long term interest or dividends) or speculation. With regard to the latter, Mark Twain famously remarked that playing the stock market is easy: you buy a stock and sell it when it goes up. ‘But what if it doesn’t go up?’ ‘Then you shouldn’t have bought it in the first place!’ Traditional investment counselors considered that the value of the total shares in a company should not exceed the value of its total working capital by a factor of more than five or six. Marxists also distinguish between ‘working capital’ (invested in industrial plant and wages) and ‘fictitious capital’ (highly leveraged financial products with little or no collateral behind them). By 2007, stocks whose price represented twenty or thirty times the value of the companies of which they were shares were considered good buys!

How do bubbles happen? Put yourself in the well-polished shoes of a trader at Goldman-Sachs for a minute. Your job is to figure out what to do with all of this fresh money in order to maximize quarterly returns. (A quick hint: you’re not going to lend it to a shoe manufacturer in Kentucky in the hope that his factory will turn a profit over the years.) So you buy ‘copper futures’ on a rumor that the price is going to go up. Other traders also hear this rumor or notice your buy, and now the price really *is* rising. So you buy more copper futures and so do the others and in a short while the price has tripled. By bidding up copper futures you’ve made a fortune for Goldman-Sachs (and a nice pile for yourself, not to mention guaranteed bonuses).

Weren’t you worried the copper bubble would burst? Not really. First of all, you had hedged your risk by quietly making a side-bet that copper prices will *fall*. In any case, you’re not buying tons of actual copper, for none of this money is going to be

invested in actual copper mines. You're just placing a bet on what the future price will be in the form of an option to buy or sell X thousand tons at a given future date. (This is more like placing \$2.00 on the nose of a horse at ten-to-one as opposed to buying a horse and racing it). In any case, you're not playing with your own money, but with other peoples' money: millions of dollars that individual depositors, pension funds (and now the government) have placed in the trust of Goldman-Sachs for you to 'manage' (for big fees and a nice percentage of the profits).

As you count your winnings, you once again thank Congress for repealing the Depression-era laws placing a firewall between regular business banks and speculative investment brokerage houses to prevent you from gambling with depositors' cash. You remind yourself to have your secretary send contributions to both Democratic and Republican candidates. What's that? You just heard copper futures crashed in Hong Kong over the weekend when you were out sailing? No matter! Remember, you put in that bet *against* copper futures before embarking on your yacht. In any case it wasn't your money in the first place, and the FDIC will bail out the depositors in case of default. So what do you care?

Of course, it is the nature of speculative bubbles to burst, like the 2007 housing bubble and the 2001 dot.com bubble before it. It all goes back to Amsterdam in 1637, when a speculative craze drove the price of tulip bulbs to fantastic heights before it collapsed, ruining thousands of investors. As Paul Krugman frankly admitted at the time of Bernie Madoff's pyramid scandal, there is no essential difference between today's financial markets and such fraudulent Ponzi schemes: everyone keeps winning as long as new investors keep enlarging the base of the pyramid.⁵⁵

A particularly sinister innovation in the re-inflated financial markets came in March 2010 with the news that the newest target of speculative capital was the outstanding debt of the weaker European economies, like Greece, Portugal and Spain. Apparently, big investment banks like Goldman Sachs were betting *against* the price of the sovereign debt of these countries, thus undermining confidence in their ability to pay. Remember that if buying copper futures can actually *create* an upward trend, so attacking a foreign currency or sovereign debt can undermine that nation's credit, accelerating a

⁵⁵ Paul Krugman, 'The Madoff Economy,' *NYT* Dec. 19, 2008.

downward trend. The targets of these ghoulish speculators are the nations hit hardest by the recession, those who naturally have the highest debt-to-income ratio.⁵⁶ Mediterranean countries like Greece were already suffering from poverty and high unemployment. Default provoked by speculative attacks would mean a social catastrophe: the bankrupting of all the social services that make life possible for poor and working class people. For naturally the poor bear the burden of the financial irresponsibility of the rich. The cream of the jest is that in 2007 Goldman Sachs (among others) were selling great bundles of subprime-tainted mortgage-backed securities to these very countries (while secretly betting against their own mortgage-backs on the re-insurance market as a hedge!)⁵⁷

The Great Recession

To return to the question “Will bailing out the billionaires save the economy?,” my guess is that the chances are slim. The Great Recession continues to paralyze the economy, which keeps shedding jobs while bankers remain shy of lending to businesses that want to make productive investments. And so un-working capital piles up in the banks, inflating ever new bubbles which keep expanding until they inevitably pop. In any case, if betting against the bankruptcy of Greece — the cradle of Western Civilization — is the best use the bankers can find for their capital, then capitalism is in big trouble. The unforeseen and too-soon-forgotten Great Crash of 2008 has left in its wake a twilight spectacle of ghoulish speculative capital destroying whole economies so as to feast on their corpses.

In any case, if the financial crisis has been temporarily stabilized, the economic crisis has only just begun to bore its way into the real economy. Official unemployment remains at nearly 10% (closer to 17% if ‘discouraged’ workers and part-timers are counted) and every month tens of thousands more employees are laid off as businesses cut back. As a result, millions of Americans — including one child in five — have sunk into poverty, according

⁵⁶ Actually, the U.S. has the highest debt-to-income ratio as a result of military spending and the bailouts.

⁵⁷ “Low Road to High Finance: McClatchy Expose Reveals How Goldman Sachs Sold Off Billions in Mortgage Securities After Anticipating Housing Collapse,” *Democracy Now!*, November 4, 2009.

to the latest (September 2010) U.S. Census report: 'With the country in its worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, four million additional Americans found themselves in poverty in 2009, with the total reaching 44 million, or one in seven residents. Millions more were surviving only because of expanded unemployment insurance and other assistance.⁵⁸ Ten percent of white Americans are officially poor, while the percentage rises to 25% for Hispanics and African-Americans, who have been in Depression for a generation. One should also add another 2 or 3% to the unemployment rate to account for the nearly seven million mostly poor, mostly black and Hispanic Americans who are rotting in prison — many for the non-violent crime trading small quantities of contraband substances like marijuana, opium and cocaine.⁵⁹

Hunger such as the U.S. has not known since the '30s is widespread. Charitable food pantries are overwhelmed, and one American in seven is dependent on food stamps. To qualify for food stamps, your income must fall below the official 'poverty threshold' of about \$11,000 (or \$210 a week) if you are single. A couple must fall below \$14,000 (or \$270 a week — the government apparently figures 'two can live as cheaply as one') and a family of four must fall under \$22,000 (\$423 a week) to qualify for food assistance. With rents skyrocketing and millions of homes foreclosed, there's no way people at that level of income can pay for housing *and* food. (Indeed, the government's method of calculating the official poverty threshold is now based on the price of food, having been 'reformed' to exclude housing.) Small wonder that millions, including full-time minimum wage workers, have experienced homelessness and that countless more are jammed in with relatives or living four to a room like the slum-dwellers of the 19th and early 20th Centuries. A whole blighted generation of young men and women (the hardest hit by today's new poverty) now lack the privacy to experience normal sexual relationships, and their lives will be getting worse, not better, since historically poverty tends to linger even after employment revives (assuming it will). These young

⁵⁸ "Recession Raises Poverty Rate to a 15-Year High," *N.Y. Times* Sept. 16, 2010.

⁵⁹ As the spy-novelist John Le Carré and others have long pointed out, the big banks routinely and knowingly 'launder' with impunity huge amounts of drug money deposited by the big criminal syndicates.

Americans are experiencing what a generation of Japanese have been living through since the late 1980s and early '90s when the Tokyo stock market and real estate bubbles crashed and Japan fell into a slow but relentless decline that neither enormous budget deficits nor a flood of easy money has reversed. According to the *N.Y. Times*, 'For nearly a generation now, the nation has been trapped in low growth and a corrosive downward spiral of prices, known as deflation, in the process shriveling from an economic Godzilla to little more than an afterthought in the global economy. Now, as the United States and other Western nations struggle to recover from a debt and property bubble of their own, a growing number of economists are pointing to Japan as a dark vision of the future.'⁶⁰

Can Capitalism Reform?

As for putting regulatory patches on the re-inflated balloon, the Obama Administration, having turned over its finances to the gentlemen from Goldman Sachs, shows little interest in regulating bankers, traders and insurance companies (or for that matter energy, drug or arms companies). Nonetheless, re-regulation and a watered-down version of New Deal Keynesian deficit spending remain the remedies favored by serious economists like Joseph Stiglitz and Paul Krugman as well as by the unions and by most of the self-designated Marxists and socialists I know.⁶¹ They all seem to believe in 'state intervention' as an effective remedy to capitalism's current crisis. This reformist Left forgets, in its desire for a solution, that neo-Keynesian state-intervention, designed to save capitalism during the Depression of the 1930's, arguably didn't actually succeed, since it took war production to end the Depression.

Certainly Green Jobs is something to fight for,⁶² but such Keynesian remedies are not even on the radar, much less on the

⁶⁰ Martin Fackler, "The Great Deflation: Japan Goes From Dynamic to Disheartened," *N.Y. Times*, October 16, 2010.

⁶¹ This was the consensus of the academic Marxist economists presenting at the *Historical Materialism* Conference I attended in London in November 2009 in the wake of the Crash. Their main worry seemed to be that, through state intervention, the capitalist system would recover before the Left could make an issue of the recession and rally the workers to socialism.

⁶² My eco-socialist comrade, the historian and novelist Jonathan Neale, is heading up such a campaign in Britain, and we need one in the U.S.

agenda of today's neo-liberal governments, whether of the 'left' (Obama), 'right' (Sarkozy) or 'center' (Merkel). In the words of Nobel economist Joseph Stiglitz: "There was a moment after Lehman Brothers fell, the world came together. We were all Keynesians. That is to say, we all knew that what the economy needed was each country had to stimulate their economy. That moment of global consensus is gone. And what is going on now is, in a very large number of countries, that we're going back to what I call Hooverite policies."⁶³ In any case, should the U.S. (or any other G20 government like Germany or Brazil) suddenly turn populist and actually attempt to regulate the out-of-control securities markets, that government would be subject to huge fines and penalties from the World Trade Organization.⁶⁴

Likewise, massive deficit spending to rebuild infrastructure, even if it were politically possible, would also violate international norms and be subject to IMF 'discipline.' The Left has not yet understood that under today's globalized capitalism, the only permissible form of state intervention is when governments — or supra-governmental organizations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organization (WTO) and the World Bank — use state power to 'open closed markets' and enforce 'free trade.' In practice, state-sponsored 'free trade' means enforcing monopoly control over local economies by multinationals like Monsanto; it means the appropriation by international capital of the last vestiges of the natural environment and the natural economies (peasants, forest peoples, artisans, small producers) as well as privatizing the remains of public services and social welfare structures.

Far from reverting to Rooseveltian remedies, the capitalist medicine of choice today is a policy of austerity so severe it makes the much-maligned Herbert Hoover look good. Look at

⁶³ "Nobel Laureate Joseph Stiglitz: Foreclosure Moratorium, Government Stimulus Needed to Revive US Economy," *Democracy Now*, October 20, 2010.

⁶⁴ According to Lori Wallach, the director of Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch division, interviewed on *DemocracyNow.org* on Sept. 20, 2009. Such international sanctions are not just theoretical. For example, Canadian producers of dirty-burning gasoline won a suit against the State of California, whose anti-pollution laws prevented them from entering that market. California was forced by the WTO to 'reimburse' these Canadian companies for the potential profits they would have made selling their banned product.

the bitter pill the bankers made the Greeks swallow (after selling them tainted bonds!). Moreover, short of being forced to create Green Jobs by a powerful mass movement (including global boycotts and workplace occupations), the bankers who dominate today's politicians will continue to veto such New Dealish initiatives and keep us addicted to petroleum, coal and nukes. This veto even includes desperately-needed infrastructures, like the proposed railroad tunnel between New York City (the financial capital of the world) and New Jersey (from which most Wall St. employees commute) which the Governor of New Jersey recently vetoed.

Today Keynesian state intervention, whether or not it worked in the '30s, is 'history' (as they say). What actual history tells us is that during the Twenties and Thirties, private capitalism, faced with the first truly international economic crisis following WWI, used state intervention to transmute itself into various forms of bureaucratic state capitalism — extreme totalitarian forms in the case of Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, Imperial Japan and Stalinist Russia, as well as mild democratic forms in Pop Front France and New Deal America. All these national governments disciplined their markets in order to impose the more general and long-term interests of their respective national capitals. Back then, the state was not afraid to take power over the economy and bend the bankers and industrialists to its will — albeit in their own interests. Today, in the first half of the 21st Century, it is the bankers who have taken power directly in the state, which they control more or less directly through representatives in high office, through the massive corruption of elected officials via legal and illegal contributions, and through near-monopoly control of the mass media.

Thus, to escape from the last Great Depression, strong governments of all political persuasions adopted state-capitalist policies so as to subordinate the immediate interests of individual capitalists and interest groups to the long term interests of their nation's capital taken as a whole. Today, the situation is reversed: the various corporate lobbies (energy, finance, agrobiz, military-industrial-security complex) manipulate the state to protect or promote the short-term interests (maximizing quarterly profits) at whatever cost to the national interest — indeed to the interests of the system itself. In this topsy-turvy brave new world, billionaire U.S. corporations now enjoy unlimited 'freedom of speech' to

buy elections, while peaceful citizens who attempt to demonstrate in the public square are spied upon by the FBI, shuttled off to distant 'free speech areas' and routinely arrested as potential 'terrorists.' To summarize: instead of subjecting the 'anarchy of the market' to the rationality of the state, today the market subjects the state to its anarchy, arming its very irrationality with the force of law. So much for 'reform.'

So Marx Was Wrong?

Before the Crash of 2008, the consensus of business analysts and economists, both academic and governmental, was nearly unanimous: generalized economic crises were theoretically impossible because 'free markets' (meaning monopolistic corporations and unregulated financial markets) have the capacity to automatically adjust themselves. The only danger to unending prosperity was well-intentioned but misconceived 'government interference' in the marketplace — for example the laws banning usury and the financial regulations put in place by the New Deal to prevent another 1929 by prohibiting banks from speculating with depositors' money and by forcing them to keep a minimum amount of capital on deposit in case of a panic. Once the last of these constraints on the freedom of capital were abolished under Clinton, the neo-liberal consensus was unanimous: capitalist markets had entered an age of equilibrium and un-ending growth. Of course economists, pundits and stock market analysts were saying precisely the same thing in early 1929, but nobody in 2007 seemed to remember.⁶⁵

Indeed, in 2007, even the few surviving neo-Keynesians who still believed in the need for a minimum of government regulation (like Nobel Prize economist and *N.Y. Times* columnist Paul Krugman) agreed that the world economic system was 'fundamentally sound.' With rare exceptions, even avowed Marxists and socialists were no longer expecting the return of the type of generalized capitalist crisis that Marx and Engels had analyzed in the

⁶⁵ A few savvy Wall Street analysts remained skeptical of the endless Bull Market, notably Peter Schiff, President of Euro-Pacific and author of *Crash Proof*, who saw it all coming and steered his clients into gold and unglamorous diversified non-dollar investments, for example in Australian or Swedish utilities.

19th Century and that the 1929 Crash had seemed to confirm.⁶⁶ So how come Richard Wolff,⁶⁷ Immanuel Wallerstein, Robert Fitch, Paul Mattick, Bertell Ollman, Richard Greeman and a few other die-hard classical Marxists saw the Crash of 2008 coming? How come we were right when almost everyone else was wrong?

Could it be that Marx was right in believing that the underlying cause of capitalism's crises (the boom-and-bust 'business cycle') is systemic? We old fashioned Marxists do not claim to be smarter than all those professional economists working complicated mathematical models on their computers in the brokerage houses, the Fed, the business media, the universities and the think tanks, all of whom agreed that the bubble could only get bigger. We're funnier perhaps, more independent-minded certainly, but not really smarter. However, we do have the advantage of not being blinded by the self-interested optimism of the professional economists on Wall St., in government and in business-supported universities, who need to convince themselves and everyone else to keep believing in the endless growth of that vast financial pyramid known as the securities market.

Marx wasn't just being funny when he called the official economists of Victorian Britain 'paid prize-fighters for the bourgeoisie' (after they 'proved,' for the benefit of the Manchester factory owners, that the Bill to shorten the working day from 12 to 10 hours would destroy the economy, as all the profit came in 'the 11th hour'). As we have seen, Bull Markets depend on continuing public confidence, and nay-sayers are not likely to get promoted. Adolph Berle's classic economics textbook defined stocks as 'a bundle of expectations' and as long as everybody expects stock or housing prices to rise, they apparently do — until the bubbles burst. But the self-delusions of these pro-capitalist experts doesn't necessarily imply that we Marxists are any less deluded in our own way, even if our theory is apparently more predictive of macro-economic behavior. After all, astrologers occasionally make correct predictions, and even a broken clock is 'right'

⁶⁶ Notable exceptions: Richard Wolff, editor of *Rethinking Marxism*, Paul Mattick, Jr. (aka 'the Last Marxist'), the late Bob Fitch (author of *Solidarity for Sale*) and my old friend, the sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein, Director the Ferdinand Braudel Institute, who since the '70s has been plotting the historical curve of capitalism's 500-year rise and decline.

⁶⁷ See Wolff's articles and video "Capitalism Hits the Fan," <http://www.rdwolff.com>.

twice a day. Indeed, as the old self-deprecating in-joke goes, 'We Marxists have correctly predicted five of the last three recessions.'⁶⁸

On the other hand, maybe Marx's theories actually do work.

Overproduction and the Decline in the Rate of Profit

This is not the place to summarize the complexities of the three volumes of Marx's *Capital*.⁶⁹ To simplify, let's say that corporations make their money by paying us salaried and waged workers as little as possible, extracting from us the maximum in effort, and then selling us back the resultant products and services at a profit. In the short run it's a great deal (for the capitalists), but obviously such closed cycle can't go on indefinitely.⁷⁰ On the one hand, the capitalists can't make a profit if they pay us enough to actually 'buy back' what we produce as employees. Quite the contrary: employers are always speeding up production, automating, off-shoring, downsizing and laying off to keep down their labor costs. But with fewer and fewer workers getting paid less and less for making more and more products, the inevitable long-term results are overproduction (glutted markets) on the one hand and, on the other, under-consumption (masses of poor and unemployed workers). This leads to a vicious cycle. On Main Street, small businesses close their doors as their downsized customers tighten their belts. On Wall Street, paper profits pile up in the form of fictitious capital — pieces of paper called 'options,' 'mortgage-backed securities,' or 'credit-default swaps' with little or no actual wealth backing them up. Eventually, these financial bubbles burst, and suddenly credit evaporates. According to this theory, the resulting depression becomes generalized and the whole economy lies fallow until a new investment cycle begins or a war revives it, as in the late '30s.

⁶⁸ For one such prediction, see the 'Conclusion' of my 1988 article "Twenty Years After: 1968 in Historical Perspective," reprinted in *Beware of Vegetarian Sharks* by Richard Greeman, Praxis 2008. Online at www.lulu.com.

⁶⁹ The best introduction remains Raya Dunayevskaya's chapters on *Capital* in her 1958 *Marxism and Freedom*, which has gone through many editions.

⁷⁰ In fact, much of capitalist production consists of 'capital goods' — means of production like factories, raw materials, machines that make machines — sold to other capitalists who produce consumer goods. This huge increase in productive capacity, typical of capitalism, eventually leads to unemployment and overproduction as we see below.

With respect to unemployment, capitalism differs fundamentally from previous economic systems under which unemployment was unknown. For example, under the slave system, masters normally provided at least minimum subsistence for their slaves or other domestic animals they exploited. A rational master would no sooner let his slave or serf starve or fall ill than he would his horse. For a corporation, however, individual employees are like drops of water from a tap, to be turned on only when needed and only when it's profitable to do so. Otherwise, workers are free to live on air. Or go to jail for stealing.⁷¹ The capitalist free market treats 'labor' abstractly as one element of production, the other being 'materials' (the Earth). The market is utterly indifferent to the fate of either (considered as 'externals' to be thrown away). Thus the actual laborers (you and me) being 'free' (unlike serfs or slaves) are effectively free to starve if we are unable to find a capitalist who can make a profit by employing us.

Indeed, according to Marx, unemployment itself — the availability of a supply of idle, needy men, women and children obliged to sell their labor-power to survive from day to day — is a necessary pre-condition for capital to perform its profitable miracles. And globalized capitalism, by driving the peasantry of the Third World off the land and into mega-slums, creates millions of new unemployed every year. Marx called this, the maintenance of this 'reserve army' of unemployed workers, capitalism's 'iron law.' And the more the supply of labor (unemployed workers) exceeds demand (jobs), the cheaper becomes the price of labor-power. For example, an Indonesian seamstress, interviewed by Naomi Klein, must sell ten hours of sweated labor for two dollars a day, during which she stitches dozens of anoraks that sell in stores for a hundred dollars.⁷² The problem for capitalism is that as wages fall and joblessness rises and credit-cards max out, fewer and fewer people are able to pay for \$100 anoraks even in the 'rich' countries. So why hire anyone to stitch them? Capital itself becomes a glut on the market. Hence, the growth of speculative

⁷¹ Thus U.S. capitalism 'solves' the problem of joblessness by locking up million of its citizens. 7.3 million Americans is in prison, on parole or probation, or about 3% of the population, at an annual cost to the taxpayers greater than the budgets for education, transportation and public assistance combined, according to the latest Pew study, *N.Y. Times*, March 2, 2009.

⁷² Cf. Naomi Klein, *No Logo* (HarperCollins, 2000).

bubbles examined above.⁷³

From this obvious contradiction in the profit system, Marx derived his famous theory of the tendency for the *rate* of profit to decline — a theory which academic economists laughed at when the economy was growing and the *mass* of profits was rising. To be sure, the professional economists were apparently ‘right’ and we Marxists were ‘wrong’ during the extraordinary post-WWII period of economic growth. During those Thirty Glorious Years, the tendency for the *rate* of profit to decline remained just that, a tendency, invisible in the market place where the *mass* of profits was accumulating at an accelerated rate. But, since the 1970s, increasing capitalist global competition has been led to lower and lower prices of manufactured goods, and the *rate* of profit, based on the amount of labor value added to each product, has been getting lower and lower. Moreover, according to Andrew Kliman, the academic economists who thought they had disproved empirically Marx’s theory of the ‘decline in the rate of profit’ made a fundamental methodological error in their calculations. They forgot to account for the slow decline in the value of a capitalist’s initial capital investment (factories, machines) through wear and obsolescence over a given production cycle, say a fiscal year.⁷⁴

Of course, Marx’s ‘decline in the rate of profit’ was only theorized as a general abstract tendency. In practice, manufacturers historically compensated for this hidden decline through economies of scale and through ever-increasing the volume of sales. The mass of profits kept growing even though the profit margins kept getting smaller. Take, for example, the prices of today’s more and more powerful new computers which quickly become obsolete and are discounted in stores and on the Internet after only a year or so on the market. Today, a \$500 computer gives you twenty times the power you got ten years ago with a \$5000 computer. And with less and less money in consumers’ pockets and computer sales declining, the value of obsolete inventory is shrinking and outlets and manufacturers are shutting down or laying off salespeople in a diminishing cycle that keeps repeating itself as the economy slides deeper and deeper into depression.

⁷³ Cf. Paul Krugman, ‘Revenge of the Glut,’ *N.Y. Times* March 2, 2009.

⁷⁴ Andrew Kliman, *Reclaiming Marx's "Capital" A Refutation of the Myth of Inconsistency*, 2009.

So much for Marxist theory. But if the system was fundamentally contradictory from the start, how come it worked so well all these years? In other words, Mr. Smarty-pants Marxist, why didn't capitalism collapse earlier?

Historical and Geographical Limits to Capitalist Growth

To begin with, in the 19th Century, there were frequent and prolonged crises, with as many years of bust as there were boom years. Moreover, the world economy actually *did* collapse following the crash of 1929, and most economists today are agreed that it was not Roosevelt's New Deal but WWII arms production that got the U.S. out of the last Depression. Capitalism thrives on war, and WWII destroyed vast amounts of previously existing wealth. As the result of this 'creative destruction,' the endemic plagues of over-production and excess capital were not a problem during capital's 'glorious' thirty-year post-War recovery. But by the late 1960s, the defeated Axis powers, Japan and Germany, having rebuilt their industries using the latest technology, were once again serious capitalist competitors for U.S. manufacturers, and the race to the bottom began again, leading to major recessions in 1973 and 1981. Capital's response in the '80s was to squeeze more value out of its employees in order to keep up the rate of profit. Thatcher and Reagan tore up the post-war social contract, declared class war on labor unions, shredded the social safety net, and privatized everything in sight. As a result, wages stagnated for the next 25 years, while corporate salaries and profits soared. Yet recession struck again in 1989-90 and 2001. Meanwhile, capitalist competition had become truly global with the arrival in the market place of the Asian Tigers and a 900-pound gorilla named China spewing out mass quantities of ever cheaper manufactured goods.

For this newly globalized capitalism to thrive, the aggregate *mass* of profits had to keep growing, whatever the human or ecological cost. One solution was to appropriate new values from *outside* the system. Through outright government intervention (under IMF and World Bank pressure), profit-hungry banks and multinational corporations were able to expropriate and or privatize much of the world's wealth still held in common by indigenous communities in the Third World, by so-called socialist col-

lectives in the ex-Communist Second World and by public institutions in the First. Through these 'new enclosures,' everything held in common from forests and oceans to ideas, transportation and healthcare, cultural practices and the genetic codes of life itself was transformed into merchandise to be bought and sold for profit. Bourgeois civilization, once the bearer of enlightenment, regressed to barbarism. Africa was stripped of its gold, diamonds, oil and precious ores leaving its peoples in a chaos of famine, rape and civil war. Huge fortunes were made, yet markets still remained unstable with currency crashes, regional crises and major countries like Argentina going bankrupt.

Today, according to my old friend Immanuel Wallerstein, who studies the economic 'long waves' of history at the Braudel Institute, capitalism has finally reached its global limits after a life-cycle of 500 years. From the time of its birth in Europe — roughly since 1492 and the discovery of gold and silver in the Americas — capitalism has kept itself profitable over the centuries by expanding into the non-capitalist areas of the planet, enclosing what was previously held in common and searching out new markets and new sources of cheap labor. Yet since the globalization of the 90's, even these new world markets are becoming more and more saturated. Capital itself has become a glut, and there are no new continents to exploit or new forms of natural wealth to be profitably extracted from the half-ruined global environment. Capitalism has expanded to the earth's limits and industrialized to the point where yesterday's poorest and most backward country, China, is today the principal competitor of the U.S, the world's richest and most modern. From now on, there will be less wealth coming into the world capitalist market from *outside* the system, hence today's feeding frenzy to gobble up the last surviving stands of rain forest, the last surviving schools of ocean fish, the last reserves of fossil fuels without regard to the obvious environmental consequences.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Please see my *Taxonomy of Capitalist Sharks* for an allegory of this 500 year economic history.

Why Hasn't Capitalism, with its Alleged 'Contradictions,' Already Collapsed?

Let us recall that the 19th century, the period of capitalism's greatest growth, was also a period of relative international peace. But by the 1890s, competition among British, French and late-blooming German capitalism for new colonies and markets had become fierce, precipitating an imperialist World War of unprecedented duration (1914-1918) and savagery which signaled the end of capitalism's progressive era. 'We now know that civilizations are mortal,' wrote French poet Paul Valéry. 'Socialism or Barbarism,' wrote the revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg. During 1917-1919, a wave of revolutions spread from Russia across Germany and Hungary and threatened capitalism's world hegemony. But the new industrial giants, America and Japan, saved the day for international capitalism and turned back the red tide, leaving economically backward Soviet Russia to degenerate in isolation.

This impasse set the stage for the Great Depression, the rise of fascism and the outbreak of another imperialist World War — this one truly global and even more barbarous than the First. In turn, the destruction by massive aerial bombardment of huge amounts of productive capital during WWII paved the way for the postwar 'economic miracle' led by the defeated Axis powers Germany and Japan. Economically speaking, the losers were the winners. As we have seen, growthmanship — the competition-driven race for increased economic growth — leads mathematically to global overproduction and eventually to global conflict, up to and including war. The perennial problem for capitalist corporations is how to stimulate what bourgeois economists call 'effective demand.' In other words, how to find people with money in their pockets to buy, and more importantly, to *pay* for all the unnecessary shit they manufacture with the single purpose of making a profit?

In Marxist terms, the problem is defined as how to 'realize' (*i.e.* cash in on) the 'surplus value' (unpaid labor) embodied in the surplus products constantly thrown onto the world market. The classic capitalist solution to this problem has been expansion into the non-capitalist world, but since the globalization of the '90s this expansionism has reached its geographical limits with China and India transformed from prey into capitalist tigers, and no place left for expansion and growth other than outer space. So

how to solve the problem of 'effective demand' in order to 'realize' the surplus value embodied in commodities and make it profitable? Post-war capitalism came up with three main ways to get us consumers and taxpayers to pay for all this stuff we don't need and can't afford: war production, advertising and credit.

Military Keynesianism

Let's start with war production, also known as 'military Keynesianism' — an ironic reference to the progressive 1930s economist who advocated major government spending on public works like bridges and highways as a solution to recession. As early as 1960, outgoing Republican President and former WWII Allied Commander Dwight Eisenhower, no peacenik he, sounded a solemn warning that a 'military-industrial complex' was taking over the government and the economy. Under Obama, the official military budget — not including the un-counted pieces of it stashed among other agencies like Homeland Security, the CIA, the Energy Department, and the State Department — amounts to nearly a quarter of federal expenditures, more like a third if we include the interest on the debt produced by the 'Three Trillion Dollar War' in Iraq (also not included in the official military budget presented to Congress).⁷⁶

From a capitalist viewpoint, government-financed war production is a great business for the corporations like Grumman, Boeing, and Halliburton. Think 'cost-plus contracts' and 'cost over-runs.' In Marxist terms, the 'means of destruction' (tanks, guns planes, etc) are ideal commodities for realizing surplus value. No matter how many bombs the weapons' corporations manufacture, there is no problem of 'overproduction' because the market is virtually limitless. Surplus arms can also be exported and sold to U.S.-friendly kings and dictators who need them to repress their subjects or invade their neighbors. The U.S. lavishes 'foreign aid' (at tax-payer expense) on these despots, and most of the money comes right back to the U.S. in arms purchases. Once sold, weapons either go 'bang' or become obsolete. In either case, they have to be replaced. Even foreign competition (the arms race) is a boon, rather than a threat, because it justifies constant

⁷⁶ 2009 U.S. Federal Budget.

increases in peacetime military spending.

In any case, the military contractors have a revolving-door relationship with the brass in the Pentagon, who allow them to overcharge shamelessly and further boost their rate of profit. To be sure, in 1989, the end of the forty-year Cold War arms race with the Soviet superpower did pose a small problem for the military lobby. (Remember the promised ‘peace dividend’ earmarked for increased spending on public goods?) But new ‘threats’ like drugs and terrorism were soon mobilized to replace the threat of Communism and justify endless profitable wars. Bush II’s Iraqi War alone cost us tax-payers an estimated three trillion dollars.⁷⁷ How much of that mind-boggling sum ended up as profits for the stockholders of Halliburton, Blackwater, Brown & Root, MacDonnell-Douglas and the rest of the war-profiteering cost-overrun contractors? A trillion? No wonder there was no money left for body armor for the troops or veterans’ benefits for the wounded. So we elected Mr. Obama, who promised to withdraw our troops — many of them reservists serving their second, third or even fourth tour of duty — from the Iraqi quagmire. Who imagined he was sending them into an even deeper quagmire in Afghanistan, while leaving as many as 50,000 behind to get shot at by angry Iraqis who want them out? Nor did our erstwhile peace candidate mention he would continue, indeed escalate, Bush’s mindless ‘war on terror.’ Or put Bush’s Defense Secretary Robert Gates back in charge of it. Forget that Afghanistan is famous for swallowing up foreign armies from the time of the ancient Persians and Greeks to the 19th Century British and the 20th Century Russians. Forget that massacring Pakistani civilians from the safety of predator drones is probably not the best way to win the hearts and minds of that nuclear-armed nation teetering on the brink of chaos. Let’s just stick with the cost, that is, with the profits. The top brass expect us to remain in Afghanistan until 2025. How many more trillions will be paid to the military contractors over the next 15 years?

The Devil in the Zeros

I suspect one reason the public lets the military-industrial

⁷⁷ According to Nobel-prize economist Joseph Stiglitz’s *Three Trillion Dollar War*.

complex get away with this boondoggle is that most people's eyes fog over when they see all those zeros. The sums involved are literally mind-boggling. Does three trillion dollars mean \$3,000,000,000,000? Or merely \$3,000,000,000? The devil is in all those zeros, girls and boys, and the difference between millions, billions, and trillions can kill you. Here's how to keep them straight. According to a math-for-dummies book entitled *Innumeracy*, a million seconds in time add up to about 12 days. A billion seconds, on the other hand, equal nearly 32 years or half a lifetime. As for a trillion seconds, that makes 32 thousand years, which would take us back to the early Stone Age (or to 27 thousand years *before* the Creation if you don't believe in Evolution). If the three trillion dollars spent on the Iraqi war were seconds, they would stretch back in time to before the emergence of the first modern humans.

Now let's review: A million=12 days, a billion=32 years, a trillion=Back to the Stone Age. Try and remember these differences of scale as the latest budget figures flicker over your TV screen. And while you remembering, ask yourself who will pay the bill? The answer is: you, the average taxpayer — that is to say, the 'working middle class' of salaried people subject to involuntary payroll taxes.

A word about taxes. As most of us have long suspected, the once 'graduated' income tax has been stood on its head. Thanks to loopholes, massive tax cuts for the super-rich, off-shore tax havens, and 'corporate welfare' in the form of government incentives and bailouts, many corporations and wealthy individuals pay zero net taxes. Moreover, IRS investigative and enforcement personnel have been drastically cut back, and the remaining inspectors are too busy to mount elaborate cases against the complicated tax-dodges of billion-dollar corporations. Trillions of corporate taxes go uncollected, while inspectors concentrate on individual taxpayers' 'do-able' cases like tracking down waitresses' unreported tips and teachers' home office exemptions.

As a result, today's 'working middle class' (which Marxists used to call 'the proletariat') with its small and shrinking share of the national wealth, pays an astounding 85% of the nation's taxes.

⁷⁸ 2009 U.S. Federal Budget Receipts of which corporate taxes accounted for only 7% (\$138B) as opposed to 85% (\$1,806B). For more analysis, see *Free*

Thus, in macro-economic terms, military spending is an indirect transfer of wealth from the poor (employees) to the rich (owners) via government intervention. Another miracle of our free enterprise system! Moreover, as we have seen the enormous portion of the total national capital invested in government-financed military production is sheltered from the normal capitalist plague of overproduction and shrinking markets. Its rate of profit is correspondingly high, which helps raise the overall capitalist average. Moreover, military products are not only profitable, they are useful in defending corporate interests abroad and for putting down the rabble at home when they finally get wise to the corporate scam and start fighting back, as I imagine they will in the not-so-distant future.⁷⁹ Thus, for the last 60 years, military Keynesianism has helped stave off capitalist collapse by absorbing a huge share of the nation's excess industrial production at taxpayer expense, in effect transferring wealth from the bottom of the economic pyramid to the top. And military spending is only the first of capitalism's post-war tricks, which also include advertising, consumer glut and credit.

Advertising

Next let's look at how advertising helps prolong capitalism's continuing vampire after-life. Conceived by the most subtle psychologists and sociologists, designed and produced by the most talented and highest paid writers and artists, incessantly beamed at us through media that celebrate consumerism, modern advertising creates a culture in which people's sense of status depends less on what they really are than on what they wear, eat, drink, or drive. More than competition between brands, all advertising is objectively 'capitalist propaganda' — that is to say propaganda in favor of consumer capitalism. Don't laugh at my 'crude Marxist caricature.' 'Propaganda' was the precise word used by Edward Bernays, the genius of modern advertising, who considered it

Lunch: How the Wealthiest Americans Enrich Themselves at Government Expense and Stick You With The Bill by 2001 Pulitzer-prizing-winning former N.Y. Times senior reporter, David Cay Johnson.

⁷⁹ Apparently the CIA imagines the same scenario. In its first report to the new President, the CIA placed the threat of 'domestic unrest' in a higher category than that of foreign terrorism.

‘necessary in a democratic society’ and invented a new name for it: ‘public relations.’⁸⁰

Old-style Russian Communist propaganda was easy enough to recognize (from the outside). It glorified the state, presented an heroic picture of happy workers, and blared its message out of tinny loudspeakers on nearly every corner. Capitalist propaganda is harder to recognize (from the inside). Yet every day the pervasive capitalist message — buy! — blares out at us through high-tech speakers of TVs and car radios. With product placement, the medium *is* the message. Standardized commercial entertainments are everywhere replacing participatory activities like dancing, bowling, music-making, amateur sport, story-telling, reading and conversation, leaving a cultural void to be filled through consumption.

Basically, advertising aims at making us feel insecure unless we buy more garbage than we can afford or even use. I use the term ‘garbage’ advisedly. More than 50% of U.S. consumer production ends up as garbage within one year of its purchase. Indeed, in our throwaway economy, waste products are the leading U.S. export — second only to armaments.⁸¹ It turns out there is more surplus value embodied in the throwaway plastic container than there is in the sandwich inside, and that’s where the corporate profit comes from. Garbage glut is another of post-war capitalism’s ruses for avoiding the consequences of overproduction.

Postwar advertising and marketing were successful in creating new internal markets up through the ’70s. They got lots of people *wanting* to buy things they never knew they couldn’t do without. But with downsizing, union-busting, automation, rising prices and stagnating wages, people no longer had the cash. No problem: capitalism had an answer. ‘Can’t afford that new car? Don’t worry. You don’t have to pay for it ... *now*. Step right over to our Credit Department. That smiley gentleman in the sharkskin suit is waiting to take care of you. What our brilliantly creative advertising department has cleverly seduced you into buying, Mr. Loanshark, in our friendly credit department, will cheerfully help

⁸⁰ See *Propaganda*, Bernays’ seminal 1928 book. During WWI, Bernays had brought the techniques of modern advertising to the manufacture of patriotic propaganda.

⁸¹ See Heather Rogers’ splendid and readable book: *Gone Tomorrow: The Hidden Life of Garbage*, The New Press, N.Y. and London, 2005.

you pay over time for a small monthly fee. No need to read all that *teensy little* fine print at the bottom where it says “interest annualizes at an average of 31.6%.”



Death on the Installment Plan

All through the roaring '80s and beyond, financialized U.S. capital gorged on double-dip profits, making people work for less and loaning them money at interest to keep consuming. Thanks to Our Mr. Loanshark, it was another win/win situation for the capitalists, who convinced themselves that this debt-fueled economy could go on forever and that 'over-production' was a Marxist myth. So, let's take another look at credit, or rather at its dark twin, debt. It's a subject that makes everybody cringe, so let's start with a simple definition: 'debt' means 'bank profits'. The more they lend, the richer they get. And thanks to the 'miracle of compound interest,' bank profits pile up quickly and soon overtake 'principle' (the original amount you borrowed). If you have trouble paying, Mr. Loanshark will happily offer you new loans to 'consolidate' your previous obligations and spread them over time, thus multiplying your debt ob-

ligation. As long as the payments keep coming in, and ballooning, the loansharks don't care if they ever get their principle back. (The same principle applies to the IMF/World Bank-imposed debts of the so-called developing nations).

Moreover, since Congress recently 'reformed' personal bankruptcy, the finance companies can attach your salary indefinitely so that you actually end up working for *them*. This practice used to be known as 'debt peonage,' and was illegal in many states. Today, according to Joseph Stiglitz, if you go broke, the lenders can garnish 25% of your salary, while still charging you 30% interest so that you *never* get out of debt.⁸² On the global scale, many 'developing' nations have ended up in debt peonage, paying out more than half their annual GNP year after year in debt service to international banks. As for the national debt in the U.S. (remember, you own it), the first five and a half months of the annual taxes deducted from your paychecks go directly into paying it off. In other words, bank profits account for all your taxes from January to mid-June, after which you start paying for such 'extras' as the Army, the government and a few social services. So whenever you hear the word 'debt,' just keep reciting this mantra: *'debt means bank profits, debt means bank profits, debt means bank profits. . .'*

The Gilded Age, which we (or rather the wealthy among us) have just lived through, was based on credit, that is to say on debt (keep thinking '*bank profits*'). The little people down below were all working harder and harder (those who hadn't already been downsized) to support the banking, insurance and finance industry (billionaire speculators and institutional loan sharks). These financial wizards kept the *mass* of profits artificially high by lending out the same money several times over, piling risk upon risk through derivatives. Their gamut of slick financial products ran from common credit card debt (stimulating consumption while piling up vastly profitable interest) to homeowner debt, bank debt, leveraged buyout debt, corporate debt, 'sovereign' (government) debt and to opaque financial products like toxic mortgage-backed securities and credit-default swaps.

By 2007, the U.S. financial sector had grown to 1.8 times the size of the manufacturing sector. The economy was like an inver-

⁸² Joseph Stiglitz, *Democracy Now!*, October 20, 2010.

ted pyramid of debt (keep thinking ‘bank profits’) precariously balanced on a narrowing tip of actual productive economic activity. Every leveraged buyout meant that a company’s employees had to produce not just a regular annual profit of 5% or 10% for the original stockholders, but another 5% or 10% on top of that to pay off the financial corporations who had become the new owners. Think of yourself as a tiny worker ant struggling to drag food back to the nest with a big fat drone of a banker-ant riding on your back, and you get the picture.

Eventually, the credit bubble popped, leaving millions of Americans high and dry with half-empty retirement funds, homes worth less than the outstanding mortgage, shuttered businesses and no jobs. As we have seen, the principal effect of the Great Bailout was to transform accumulated capitalist debt into taxpayer debt. Debts to be repaid — I don’t know how — by you and me and all those other little people who used to have productive jobs. And since the ‘reform’ of personal bankruptcy laws, debtors will have to keep paying installments indefinitely on their educations, cars and houses, even after they have been forced to sell them at a loss. Apparently the Crash of 2008 was caused by their fecklessness. According to the *Times*: “A growing chorus in conservative circles is trying to shift the blame for the current crisis to the poor and advocates for the poor.”⁸³ In any case, having been reliquidified at public expense in order to get them lending again, the big banks have raised interest on consumer credit cards to new heights — up to 33% annualized. Even Barack ‘the Banker’s Friend’ has been obliged to sternly scold them (if not actually to regulate them).

Capitalism’s ‘Terminal’ Crisis?

As we have seen, by capitalism, vigorous and progressive in the 19th Century, was already decadent by the early 20th. It was already financialized, monopolized, and dependent on colonial expansion in 1914, when its imperialist rivalries exploded into the first of two World Wars whose barbarism — applying capitalist mass production methods to the destruction of civilian facilities and populations — arguably surpassed that of Attila the Hun.

⁸³ “Poor Homeowners, Good Loans,” *N.Y. Times*, Oct. 17, 2008.

Between the two global holocausts, capitalism engendered the first true world-wide depression, which hit Europe long before it affected the U.S. and engendered state-capitalist 'solutions' as varied as Roosevelt's New Deal, Stalin's Five Year Plan and Hitler's Thousand-Year Reich.

Capitalism sprung back to life during the glorious thirty-year period of post-WWII reconstruction with its social contract with labor, but faltered again in the early '70s with low growth, stagflation and oil shocks. Since the '80s, neo-liberal capitalism has been successfully waging a one-sided class war against labor, tearing up the social contract, downsizing, and outsourcing to the Third World producing a net up-flow of wealth in the form of increased inequality both between rich and poor nations and rich and poor within each nation. If the official Left and most workers no longer talk about 'class consciousness,' the capitalists have no such qualms. When it comes to breaking unions or eliminating social services, they know which side they are on. 'The unacknowledged Marxism of the enemies of Marxism,' Victor Serge



called it. Thus, for roughly the last thirty years, and despite increasingly frequent financial shocks, neo-liberal capitalism was able to overcome the underlying tendency for the rate of profit to decline by increasing the mass of profits thanks to continued automation, penetration of new markets (globalization), military spending, advertising-driven consumerism, credit, and speculation. But all such expedients have their limit. The shit hit the fan in 2008.

I get no *schadenfreude*⁸⁴ out of having foreseen this awesome crisis, which will bring untold suffering to the poorest, most exposed members of the human family. Obviously, there is no way for me to ‘prove’ that the Crash of 2008 has provoked capitalism’s fabled Final Crisis. That can only be known through hindsight, and, in twenty or thirty years, the question may be moot. Existentially and ecologically speaking, it’s now or never in terms of the survival of many species, including humans.

For a century and a half, Marxists and socialists have closely followed capitalism’s boom and bust cycles while dreaming of capitalism’s ‘final’ collapse — a debacle which they supposed would usher in the New Society — a commonwealth organized for mutual aid and cooperation as opposed to competition and profit. From the 1860’s on, Marx’s friend and collaborator Friedrich Engels fondly imagined a revolution arising every time the London stock exchange went bust. He and would get himself ready to man the barricades as he had during the Revolution of 1848.⁸⁵ But these were revolutionary pipe dreams. In his major work *Capital*, Marx made it very clear that his theoretical model was meant to apply only to a ‘single,’ ‘closed’ capitalist society, abstracted from international trade. It followed that British and European capitalism were in no danger of internal collapse as long as they could keep expanding into Africa, Asia and the Americas and as long as they continued to reap imperialist super-profits through unequal treaties, dumping of excess production or outright plunder abroad.

Only when capitalism was fully developed on the world scale, that is to say only when globalized capitalism could be treated as a ‘single’ or ‘closed capitalist society,’ would Marx’s internal crisis theory apply. Heretofore, overproduction, mass unemployment and the resultant decline in the rate of profit had only been *tendencies*. They could be and were countered by another tendency: the constant increase in the mass of profits through colonial expansion and imperial plunder. Nowadays, with China, India and Brazil looming as major capitalist competitors, that day has

⁸⁴ Untranslatable German expression meaning “sick pleasure derived from others’ discomfiture”

⁸⁵ See the latest Engels’ biography, *Marx’s General* by Tristram Hunt (N.Y. 2009)

clearly arrived. For the first time in history, world capitalism's ultimate collapse has become theoretically possible from a strict Marxist perspective.

Collapse is not inevitable of course, but neither bailouts nor re-regulation nor even nationalization of banks and industries in and of themselves can bring recovery since the problem is systemic. Neither Roosevelt's New Deal nor France's state-managed economy were able to overcome capitalism's contradictions. Bureaucratic state capitalism was tried for 70 years in the U.S.S.R. under the name of 'Communism' and ultimately failed. Despite totalitarian political controls, the Russian command economy, destabilized by inefficiency and undermined by class conflicts, eventually collapsed. Nationalization is beside the point because the systemic cause of capitalism's crisis is not lack of government regulations but, as we have seen, global economic inequality, and that keeps increasing. Today, hitherto unheard of wealth piles up in the world's financial centers while the 'industrial reserve army' of unemployed (that Marx considered the hallmark of capitalism as opposed to earlier systems of exploitation) is now estimated at two billion around the planet living on a dollar or less. Billions *vs.* billionaires, what could be simpler?

To sum up, for the moment, global capitalism, although teetering on the brink, continues to outlive itself thanks to the expedients that have kept it profitable since the 1950's: global expansion (now at a limit), war production, wasteful consumerism, speculation, and debt (say it one more time, kids: '*bank profits*'). The latest innovation in this field, as we have seen, is ghoulish speculation on the debt of whole national economies teetering on the brink of bankruptcy. There are even 'Vulture Capitalists' who buy up the already forgiven debt certificates of countries like Liberia for pennies and then successfully sue for payment in U.S. courts and end up with millions.⁸⁶ Capitalism, decadent and destructive since 1914, reeks today with the stench of death. How can such inner rot not lead to collapse? If the capitalists themselves are betting on their own destruction, it would ill-behoove a Marxist to bet on recovery. Today's capitalist society is definitely sick, indeed moribund. Capitalist imperialism is addicted to oil,

⁸⁶ "From New York to Liberia, Investigative Journalist Greg Palast Tracks Vulture Funds Preying on African Debt," *Democracy Now*, March 3, 2010.

addicted to gambling (dependence on speculative bubbles to keep up its rate of profit) and addicted to violence (domination by the military-industrial-prison complex). It is like a senile miser who is in denial of his own death and who piles up hordes of riches, marries ever-younger bimbos, and disinherits his children. Capitalism is knowingly destroying the planet's environment in a last orgy of plunder. If the system is not overthrown soon, the children of today's Billionaires will inherit a climate holocaust.

Today's barbarous regressions are as much symptoms of capitalism's terminal crisis as a high temperature is a symptom of critical illness. Of course, it is a logical conundrum to speak of a crisis as 'terminal' until after the patient has died. On the other hand, if we wait 20 or 30 years for capitalism's theoretical recovery, there probably won't be any fresh water to drink or fresh air to breathe. This outcome would be a case of 'the operation was a success, but the patient died.' Since there is clearly no cure for global ecoside under capitalism, existentially speaking this *is* capitalism's terminal crisis. Metaphorically, today's over-ripe capitalism is like a cancer which has metastasized. Financially, it is eating off itself in an uncontrolled multiplication of paper profits. Materially, capitalism's cancer is rapidly spreading through the body of its host, the earth, replacing its healthy tissue with lifeless commodities, devouring the biosphere, snuffing out its life. If capitalism were a literal cancer, the oncologists would not hesitate to prognosticate its terminal crisis.

The ruling class has no collective vision. Global capitalism's leaders — the likes of Bush, Berlusconi, Sarkozy, Blair — are grotesque clowns compared to the statesmen of my youth like Roosevelt, Churchill, De Gaulle. As mentioned above, according to Immanuel Wallerstein, global capitalism has apparently reached the end of its 500-year historical cycle of birth (1492), growth and death. Having reached its limits as a global productive system, 21st Century capitalism is returning to its 1492 methods of 'primitive accumulation:' plunder, debt slavery, usury and other regressive forms of appropriating wealth. Today, more than ever, the alternatives are socialism or barbarism — high-tech, market-driven barbarism, a mechanical monster without a heart that kills at a distance via drones and toxic mudslides. It will take a global mass movement of 'billions against billionaires' to overthrow it from within and replace it with a saner, more peaceful,

cooperative, earth-friendly society.

What Next?

Can the present feverish 'recovery' last? Of course, despite the tendency of the rate of profit to decline, it is *theoretically* possible that the world capitalist economy will eventually recover as it did, with many false starts, after the 1929 Crash. Indeed, if the Crash of 2008 is not followed by more aftershocks, full-scale production might slowly resume after sufficient existing inventory of values has been liquidated through use and obsolescence. Or, more rapidly through full-scale war, as in 1939-45. In either case, this process would take time. According to statistics, in the wake of the 1929 Crash, the U.S. stock market took until 1953 (24 years) to recover its original value adjusted for inflation. So the best optimistic prediction would be for full recovery by 2032.

On the other hand, if we don't replace this decadent system soon, I doubt many of us will be around in 24 years to enjoy that hypothetical 2034 recovery given capitalism's second major crisis: the environment. Global warming keeps accelerating, and we are probably very close to the tipping point, when it will be impossible to slow or stop catastrophic climate change. In 2008, scientists began reporting that the arctic glaciers and frozen tundra are rapidly melting, releasing mega-tons of methane — a greenhouse gas twenty times more dangerous than CO₂. Worse still, all that brilliant white ice and snow that used to reflect the sun's heat back into space is melting, exposing brown and green earth that absorbs solar heat — thus raising the earth's temperature and causing more ice and snow to melt — a classic vicious cycle. Another accelerating vicious cycle is caused by an overheated atmosphere warming the very oceans that normally cool it. Obviously, these vicious cycles reinforce and accelerate each other in horrific synergy.

Yet capitalism's solution to the climate crisis is to bail out the auto industry (rather than build mass transit), burn more allegedly 'clean' coal (rather than going solar), to build new nuclear generators (as the old ones explode), and to institute pro-business 'cap and trade' credits which finance fiscal flummery (rather than affect controls). The failure of the December 2009 Copenhagen cli-

mate summit indicates that none of the major capitalist governments has the slightest intention of damaging its competitive economic advantage by enforcing even the mildest limits on CO₂ emissions. Period. After 1914, the only choices left for humanity were ‘socialism’ or ‘barbarism.’ Today, after two world wars and countless massacres, the choices are ‘ecosocialism’ or ‘eco-suicide.’

Humanity is entering a phase of titanic social struggles — perhaps the ‘final conflict’ evoked in the chorus of the traditional workers anthem, the *Internationale*.⁸⁷ Food riots in Asia; Left governments and popular movements in Latin America; youth uprisings in Greece; a general strike in Guadalupe and Martinique; organized resistance to plant closings and foreclosure evictions in the U.S.; a new global Climate Justice movement in the wake of the Copenhagen *fiasco*; and, most recently, the rolling rebellions of the Arab youth, women and workers — we can already hear the first rumblings. By demanding justice and equality, these class struggles carry within them the only true solution to capitalism’s endemic crisis of boom and bust, overproduction and unemployment, obscene wealth and desperate poverty.

Whatever the outcome, one thing is certain: to succeed, future struggles will have to be international. There is no other way to beat the globalized capitalist banks and multi-national corporations we are up against. We must act locally, but think globally. The multinationals are masters at pitting one group of workers against another and delocalizing to avoid paying a decent wage, and at playing ‘race’ against ‘race’ and nationality against nationality. For the employee class, it’s either global unity or the race to the bottom. The worker socialist movement has a long tradition of international solidarity. It began in 1848 with the slogan ‘working people of all countries unite,’ but this unity was not possible to coordinate in practice. Today, with modern communications technology (Internet), working people can organize global strikes and boycotts against corporations like Monsanto in real time and bring capitalism to its knees. The century-and-a-half-old dream has become practical reality. Take that, Mr. Capitalist Shark.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Written in 1871 by Eugène Pottier, a member of the revolutionary Paris Commune, the *Internationale* has been sung (off key in 27 languages) by workers and socialists around the world.

⁸⁸ Original contribution to the Encuentro Intercontinental ‘Against Neo-Liberalism and for Humanity,’ (Barcelona, Spain, August 1997) Parts of this text

Dangerous Shortcuts and Vegetarian Sharks

*Original contribution to the
Encuentro Intercontinental*

*'Against Neo-Liberalism and for Humanity,'
(Barcelona, Spain, August 1997)*⁸⁹

Neo-Liberalism or Capitalism?



Compañeros, as someone who has been an activist since the late 1950's, I find it both inspiring and refreshing to participate in this *Encuentro* organized at the suggestion of the

were originally published in French as " Dangereux raccourcis et requins végétariens: Zapatisme et néolibéralisme," *Oiseau-tempête printemps* 1998. Also, more completely, in *Temps critique* No. 11, hiver 1999

⁸⁹ Parts of this text were originally published in French as *Dangereux raccourcis et requins végétariens: Zapatisme et néolibéralisme* in *Oiseau-tempête printemps* 1998. Also, more completely, in *Temps critique* No. 11, hiver 1999

Zapatistas in an attempt to ‘re-invent’ a politics of resistance in an atmosphere of inclusiveness, mutual respect and humanism. Here at the *Encuentro*, I have been hearing many interesting ideas put forward about alternative economies, new forms of resistance and ongoing attempts to resist globalization and the commodification of life. However, I have also sensed a good deal of confusion over the fundamental question of whether we (‘Humanity,’ our movement) are supposed to be just ‘against neo-liberalism’ or against capitalism itself. I am beginning to worry that using the phrase ‘neo-liberalism’ as an ideological short-cut to designate the global economic system may prove in the end to be imprecise, if not dangerously misleading.

First, let us ask ourselves: what is the difference between neo-liberalism and capitalism? Strictly speaking, the term ‘neo-liberalism’ refers either to an economic *theory* or to a *policy* based on that theory. The word ‘capitalism,’ on the other hand, designates an actual economic reality: the profit system we live under.

What Is Neo-Liberalism?

Neo-liberal economic *theory* is market fundamentalism based on Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations*, published in 1776. Smith’s *laissez-faire* free trade liberalism was updated (hence the ‘Neo’) by Milton Friedman and his disciples at the University of Chicago — the famous ‘Chicago Boys’ who so disastrously advised Pinochet and Yeltsin in the 80s and 90s. It states that the ‘invisible hand’ of the market will, in all circumstances, inevitably lead to maximum happiness (‘the greatest good of the greatest number’ through capitalist competition unbridled by government regulation).

Market fundamentalism fell into disfavor after the stock market crashed in 1929, and, in the 30s, it was supplanted by Keynesian theory as exemplified by Roosevelt’s New Deal and the post-war European Social Contract. Under the influence of Keynes and his disciples, the welfare state, government regulation of markets, and government investment in infrastructure, were implemented in order to enable capitalism to survive the Depression, win WWII, reconstruct capitalist Europe, and win the Cold War. However, in the 1980s, neo-liberal *policies* were re-introduced by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan in order to

smash the power of trade unions, dismantle the welfare state, de-regulate markets, privatize basic industry, privatize social services and impose the same 'reforms' on the rest of the world through the international financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank.



Although today's neo-liberal theorists parade as throwbacks to Adam Smith and John Locke, true liberals who criticized royal monopolies, attacked censorship and other unfair restrictions. In fact, the *Neos* have twisted their predecessors' 18th Century progressive liberal ideas about fair markets and free trade into justifications for imposing the interests of monopolies (transnational corporations) and for wiping out small producers everywhere in the world. The only markets the *Neos* worship are the financial markets. (Don't think 'farmers' market,' think Chase Manhattan Bank.) Government intervention is 'bad' (welfare corrupts the poor and distorts the labor market) except when it comes to bailing out failing companies and giving out no-bid contracts (corporate welfare). National markets in poor lands must be 'opened,' but only to capital hungry for cheap labor. As for hungry laborers looking for work, the 'open' market stops at the border of the rich capitalist countries.

Market fundamentalism has become unquestionable dogma in the media and the universities. None dare dissent from Margaret Thatcher's famous proclamation 'There is no alternative' (TINA) to market capitalism. Designed to raise the rate of profit, neo-liberal *policies* have been highly successful in increasing the wealth of investors at the expense of workers and the environment. The mushrooming growth of de-regulated capital has now reached 1929 proportions. I wrote this one year before this speculative bubble burst.

What Is Capitalism?

Capitalism (*aka* Free Enterprise or the 'profit system') is not a *theory* or a *policy* but an economic system — one that has been around for hundreds of years. Capitalism was global from its inception five centuries ago, as we were reminded in 1992 by the protests of the indigenous peoples of the Americas at the celebra-

tion of their disastrous *Encuentro* with Columbus in 1492. The capitalist *system* is defined as commodity-production based on the exploitation of wage-labor and nature. Throughout its history, various *theories* have been advanced to explain the origin of capitalist wealth, and capitalism has adapted a variety of *policies*. These have ranged from mercantilism, free-trade, protectionism, monopoly-trust imperialism, welfare capitalism, to state-capitalism (with variations as diverse as Japanese feudal-trust capitalism, Stalinist ‘Communism’ and Nazi fascism) and now neo-liberalism. None of these *policies* changed capitalism's essence: the self-expansion of capital through the exploitation of nature and the extraction of unpaid labor-time from workers.

The danger of focusing exclusively on the apparently ‘new’ characteristics of 21st Century high-tech capitalism is that we tend to neglect its essential nature as the *system* — a *system* where profit derives exclusively from capital's ‘theft’ of unpaid labor (surplus value) and from the pillage of the land. Slogans like ‘Against Neo-Liberalism’ tend to distract from capitalism's systematic nature and focus peoples’ energies on opposing the most recent *manifestations* of capitalism — corporate takeovers, downsizing, conglomeration, restructuring, integrated global systems, free-trade dogmatism, globalization. As if we could somehow turn back to a ‘kinder, gentler capitalism.’

If sharks were men, they would build enormous boxes in the ocean for the little fish, with all kinds of food inside, both vegetable and animal. They would take care that the boxes always had fresh water, and in general they would make all kinds of sanitary arrangements. If, for example, a little fish were to injure a fin, it would immediately be bandaged, so that it would not die and be lost to the sharks before its time. So that the little fish would not become melancholy, there would be big water festivals from time to time, because cheerful fish taste better than melancholy ones. - **Bertolt Brecht**

In any case, none of these neo-liberal manifestations is really

new. Consolidation (big capital eating little capital) has always been the rule in the marketplace. The practice of downsizing to cut labor costs was seen by Marx as the 'absolute law of capitalist development' leading to a 'permanent reserve army of unemployed workers' at the disposal of capital. As far as 'globaliza-



tion' is concerned, gold and silver stolen from the Native Americans financed the initial development of European capitalism in the 16th Century. By the 18th Century, British imperialism had developed enormously profitable integrated global chains of production and distribution (examples: Indian cotton woven in England for sale in India; the Atlantic triangular trade of sugar, slaves, guns and rum). And, by 1900, Asia was producing fully 29% of the world's commodities, with Japanese ceramics flooding the Western markets.⁹⁰ By contrast, in 1996 Asia's share was only 22%. No wonder they call it 'Neo-liberalism'.

Substituting 'neo-liberalism' for 'capitalism' is not only imprecise, it may also be downright misleading — dangerously misleading for our Zapatista-inspired world social movements. If we are against neo-liberalism only, won't we be tempted to adopt a strategy of pressuring the powers-that-be to choose *another theory* (e.g. neo-Keynesianism) or *another economic policy* (e.g. protectionism)? Won't we be tempted to hope that under more benign policies, the oppression of Humanity and the destruction of Nature would be checked or at least significantly diminished? Won't we be tempted to tame the beast rather than to destroy it?

If such a reformist strategy were successful, it would certainly be a neat short-cut, and we wouldn't need to think about more frightening alternative scenarios. Most people would prefer to imagine that a harmless panacea like a Tobin-type tax on interna-

⁹⁰ Personal disclosure: in 1900, Louis Greeman, my paternal grandfather, (also Jewish) worked as a wholesale salesman for a Tokyo porcelain manufacturer exporting Japanese 'Chinaware' to U.S. department stores; it was a good job, and, in those days, the British and U.S. firms in N.Y. wouldn't hire Jews.

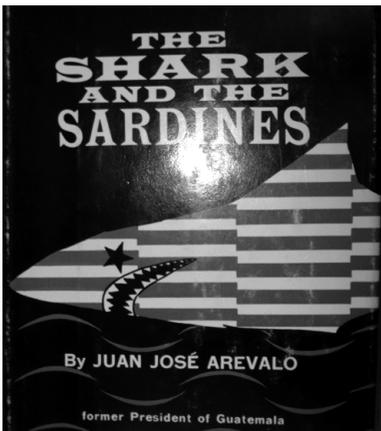
tional finance would save the world — rather than focus on scarier prospects like living through the final crisis of the global capitalist system and facing the necessity for humanity to uproot it and build a new world on its ruins. Hoping for reform is surely more reassuring than thinking about some kind of planetary revolution, with all the upheaval and suffering such a prospect necessarily entails. But is it realistic?

Reformist Shortcuts and Vegetarian Sharks

Alas, *compañeros*, I am afraid that such reformist ‘shortcuts’ are based on a dangerous illusion. They all tacitly assume that capitalism can be reformed. However, in my experience, trying to make capitalism change its nature makes about as much sense as trying to convert a shark to vegetarianism. It is also about as safe. By its nature, capitalism is no more capable of giving up the ruthless exploitation of humans and nature than the shark can give up blood and flesh. Just as a vegetarian shark would eventually starve to death, a capitalist corporation or nation that failed to pay its workers the minimum and extract the maximum would be eliminated by the competition of more ruthless ‘sharks’ in the world market. So would a ‘green’ capitalist who actually spent the necessary money to clean up his industrial wastes and raised his prices accordingly. I realize how scary it is to accept the fact that the only way out for humanity is to totally uproot the capitalist system. Taking the shortcut of being ‘Against Neo-liberalism’ is much easier and more popular. But, is it fair to invite people to

join us and dive into the troubled sea of social struggle without posting the warning: ‘*Danger! Shark-Infested Waters!??*’

One of my first political memories dates from 1954, when I heard my parents talking about how the CIA overthrew the democratically-elected reformist government of Guatemala. What were Guatemala’s crimes? A law recognizing workers’ right to organize and strike and a proposal



to buy up unused land at declared tax value and distribute it to the landless peasants. Unfortunately for the Guatemalans, the country's biggest employer, the United Fruit Company (Chiquita Banana), owned 85% of the land and had friends in Washington. So suddenly 'freedom' was at stake. After the CIA-directed *coup*, Guatemalan ex-President Juan Jose Arevalo published *The Fable of the Shark and the Sardines* concluding: 'Sharks will eat sardines forever and ever. But they should eat them plain, without doctrinal oil, without legal jelly, without the cellophane wrapping paper' of democratic ideology. I was too young to read his allegory at the time, but the cover image of a big U.S. shark eating little Latin American sardines has remained in my head to this day.

The next sardine I saw gobbled up was the Dominican Republic, which, after years of dictatorship, had elected a grandfatherly social-democrat named Juan Bosch. In 1965, Lyndon Johnson invaded the Dominican Republic with very little protest from the U.S. Left, already fixated on Vietnam. Yet all these tragic disasters didn't stop Chile's reformist President Salvador Allende from taking the same reformist shortcut a few years later. Only weeks before his government was overthrown in a bloody CIA-backed *coup*, Allende went on the radio urging Chileans to trust Chile's 'democratic army' and its chief of staff, General Pinochet, begging the organized peasants, workers' unions and militant students *not* to organize for self-defense. This time, *compañeros*, I was old enough not to believe in vegetarian sharks like 'democratic armies' and 'republican generals.' So it was with mixed feelings that I watched, impotent, when the inevitable army *coup* overthrew Allende in 1973. What to think about well-meaning reformist politicians whose tragic illusions consigned thousands of Chilean workers and intellectuals to decades of suffering under torture regimes?



The Welfare State

Some reformist opponents of neo-liberalism argue for a return to the welfare state as a goal for our Zapatista-inspired movements. They have an argument. During the Cold War period,

Western capitalism developed the welfare state as a way of stimulating consumption while building a bulwark against Russia and attempts by Communists in the West to exploit worker discontent. This 'social contract' was at the same time a historic victory for workers in the West. Unemployment insurance, retirement, the right to organize, public schools, health and transportation were granted only after the huge strike waves of 1936 and 1946. But the social contract in the West was guaranteed (or rather enforced) by the threat of 'Communism' in the East. Although the state-capitalist regimes in Russia and China were internally exploitative, they did represent an alternative to the Western profit system - an alternative which remained attractive (at a distance) to many Western workers and oppressed minorities, like Jews and Blacks in the U.S. Indeed, the imperialist Kennedy-Johnson regime was forced to grant voting rights to 'Negroes' because their protests (and the racist violence they uncovered) were 'helping the Russians' by making Amerikkka look bad.

Thus, thanks to the New Deal and welfare capitalism, it seemed logical to see the national state itself as a 'progressive' and protective institution for more than a half-century. However, once the threat of Communism collapsed in 1989, Western capitalists felt free to resume naked exploitation as in the pre-1917 period. Neo-liberals like Thatcher (the 'milk-snatcher') immediately proceeded to dismantle the welfare state, thus increasing the rate of profit by cheapening the price of labor and making workers more vulnerable. Historically speaking, today's neo-liberalism is capital's counter-offensive against labor in the class war. It is an offensive aimed at turning back the clock and wiping out the historic victory of European labor and returning to the long hours, dangerous work, low pay and crying poverty described by writers like Dickens and Engels in the early 19th Century.

This counter-offensive must be fought at every turn, and in every land. U.S. wages can never rise until Mexican wages rise. We must fight it - as the Zapatistas have been fighting since the introduction of NAFTA - through movement struggle, and without any illusions about the 'welfare state.' The Zapatistas certainly have no illusions about their adversary. Mexico is the world's oldest welfare state, ruled for generations by the dictatorial Institutional Revolutionary Party. The *PRI's* power is based on a police state and a corrupt welfare patronage system. Rather

than succumbing to the insanity of trying to work *within* the Mexican government system or even pressuring it to change its shark-like nature, our *compañeros* and *compañeras* in Chiapas have sanely chosen to *ignore* it, while concentrating on grounding their movement in *themselves* and inviting others — ourselves — to do likewise! An original strategy and a promising one that some of us are trying to model in very different circumstances.



Nationalist Shortcuts

Unfortunately, reformism and the welfare state aren't the only vegetarian sharks on the 'neat shortcuts' market. We also have protectionism. To the extent that 'Neo-Liberalism' is synonymous with free market globalization, the slogan 'Anti-Globalization' misleadingly suggests that humanity might be better off under some form of *national* capitalism. This strategy looks very good on paper. But, tactically, it is an open invitation to local activists in each country to form political alliances with protectionist elements among the 'patriotic' owning classes — who are also opposed to the penetration of 'globalized' capital. Such allies would include local exploiters defending their turf like landowners, businessmen, factory-owners, managers of state enterprises, religious leaders and military officers. All of the above groups have their own reasons to oppose multinational penetration (as well as to collaborate with it when their interest dictates). All are enemies of the rural poor, the workers and radicals like us.

The problem is that such protectionist or nationalist alliances in the name of 'Anti-Neo-Liberal-Globalization' can serve to camouflage the fundamental conflict between rich and poor within each country. For example, when my *compañeros* in the Detroit auto factories were attempting to organize solidarity with Japanese and Korean auto workers, the corporations, together with officials of the United Auto Workers Union, were urging workers to 'Buy American!' This patriotic frenzy did nothing to slow plant closings. Instead, it encouraged racism and war-mongering and led to the senseless vandalizing of Japanese cars in the workers'

parking lot. Small wonder the most consistent protectionist opponents of globalization today are semi-fascist nationalists like France's Le Pen and Amerikkka's Pat Buchanan, who is apparently courting anti-globalist NGO's with some success. Like these NGO's, the super-patriotic racist reactionaries are *also* fighting against Neo-Liberal Globalization in the name of 'national sovereignty.' People always say 'politics makes strange bedfellows,' but do we really want to go to bed with these racist sharks?⁹¹

"If sharks were men there would be an end to all little fish being equal, as is the case now. Some would be given important offices and be placed above the others. Those who were a little bigger would even be allowed to eat up the smaller ones. That would be altogether agreeable for the sharks, since they themselves would more often get bigger bites to eat. And the bigger little fish, occupying their posts, would ensure order among the little fish, become teachers, officers, engineers in box construction, etc." - **Bertolt Brecht**

Illusions about the national state can also be dangerous. Since every *national* capitalist economy competes with every other, the rich in each country will inevitably try to mobilize the poor for fratricidal slaughter in 'democratic' or 'patriotic' wars against the 'imperialist aims' of another *national* capitalist group. World War I was sold as a war to 'save democracy' from *German* imperialism. In fact, millions died to protect J.P. Morgan's British investments from German competition. During the 1930's, Hitler's NAZI's ('*National Socialist Workers Party*') used xenophobic propaganda to mobilize the *volk* against the 'stranglehold' of international *Jewish* capitalism and *British* imperialism. During the

⁹¹ **Update 2007.** Ten years later, there is no shortage of strange bedfellows on the political scene: Who, a few years ago, would have dreamed that Lula of the Brazilian PT would end up in bed with George Bush or that Venezuela's Bolivarian President Chavez would be seen cavorting in Teheran with Ahmadinejad, the reactionary President of the Islamic Republic of Iran?

same period, Japanese capital militarized to fight the penetration of Asia by *white, European* capital. In 1949, Mao-Tse Tung's 'Communist' Chinese regime was established on the basis of yet another neat shortcut: Mao's theory of the 'block of four classes' which united the workers and peasants behind the '*patriotic* landowners' and the '*nationalist* bourgeoisie' in the fight for *national* sovereignty against the foreign capitalists. The workers never got their rights under Mao, and today's 'Communist' China invites the foreign capitalist in to exploit them while the Party assures 'national sovereignty' in its claims on Hong Kong and Taiwan.



Jaws

Can we count on the nation-state as an ally for our new social movements? The day I see the state protecting strikers from goons and shielding demonstrators from fascists is the day I will start believing in *that* particular vegetarian shark. The state's main function down through history has been the repression of the poor majority in the interests of the rich minority. On this point, Anarchists, Marxists and even 'realist' political scientists are all agreed. The nation-state is the capitalists' ultimate weapon in the class struggle. Its essence is the monopoly of violence in a given (or contested) geographical area. If capitalism is a shark, the state represents its jaws — the jaws with which it rends the flesh of its prey in order to devour them. The modern state's jaws are double-lined with razor teeth, row upon row of police departments, prisons, oppressive administrations, standing armies and secret armies like the CIA.

Appealing to existing nation-states to save us from the depredations of neo-liberal policies (for which it is the chief enforcer both at home and abroad) is truly asking the capitalist shark not only to turn vegetarian but to have his teeth filed down as a sign of good will — especially as national states are becoming more and more violent and repressive. On the other hand, if the

majority of working people in a given country were to win the battle of democracy and gain power over the state, new opportunities might appear. But only on two conditions: 1) that popular democracy spreads quickly to other lands and breaks down national borders; and, 2) that the mass movement quickly dismantles the permanent apparatus of regular police, armies and prisons and replaces them with people power. Otherwise, the dangers of corruption, militarization and bureaucratization are apparently irresistible, as the tragic examples of Russia, China, post-colonial Africa, Vietnam and even Cuba seem to indicate.

Dangerous Shortcuts of the Past: Anti-Imperialism and Anti-Fascism

The danger of national revolutions turning sour after conquering state power reminds me of a shortcut which misled my own political generation: the anti-imperialism of the 1960s. Since our anti-war and anti-imperialist movements never focused on the capitalist system as the root cause of war and racism, they ended up getting lost in every imaginable short-cut. Some of us got sidetracked into supporting capitalist 'peace candidates' like U.S. Senator 'Clean-for-Gene' McCarthy. Others ended up cheer-leading for state-capitalist dictators like Enver Hoxa, Mao Tse-tung, Kim Il Sung, Colonel Quadaffi and Ho Chi Minh among other *bona fide* anti-imperialists. During those heady days of campaigns, marches and red brigades, no one had time to listen to the minority among us who had understood that 'imperialism' is not a *policy* but the *essence* of capitalism. No one heeded the voices of the anarchists and critical Marxists who understood that so-called 'Communism' was merely another name for totalitarian, and bureaucratic state-capitalism, and who saw that 'national liberation' might mean fighting and dying to replace a foreign oppressor with a native one.

Today, the 'anti-imperialist' rulers of liberated Vietnam and 'Communist' China, whose pictures some of us carried in demonstrations, are busy getting rich by shamelessly luring foreign capitalists to come over and exploit their workers under hideous sweat-shop conditions: conditions that vanished from the major industrial countries nearly a century ago. These profitable (for capitalism) conditions are held in place by a 'revolutionary' one-

party-state — celebrated by the editorialist of the *NY Times* under the headline: ‘Long live Mao's legacy and Merrill Lynch!’⁹² To be sure, ‘anti-imperialism’ was easier to explain than ‘anti-capitalism.’ For my generation, Ho Chi Minh was the George Washington of Vietnam and Mao the Great Helmsman — even when he undermined the Vietnamese resistance by cutting a deal with Nixon and Kissinger. Some shortcuts!



The Popular-Front anti-fascism of my parents’ generation, which I grew up on, also turned out to be a dangerous shortcut. Why did the anti-fascists fail to stop fascism in Spain (or elsewhere in Europe) in 1936-39? Why did the French Resistance lead to the re-establishment of French capitalism and the French colonial empire? Was it not in part because they took a short-cut, the co-called Popular Front? This anti-fascist alliance of Stalinist Communists, Social-Democrats and liberal-democratic capitalist parties, was broad, powerful and impressive. It mobilized mass trade-unions, youth and cultural organizations. But, after all the wonderful folk-songs were sung and the stirring rallies rallied, Pop Front ‘anti-fascist’ European socialists like French Socialist Premier Leon Blum sold out the Spanish Republic when General Franco (backed by Hitler and Mussolini) launched his fascist *coup*. Even the leaders of Spanish Anarcho-Syndicalism (CNT) and Anarchism (FIA) succumbed to the Communist-dominated United Front Against Fascism and betrayed their principles by becoming government Ministers, abstaining from all criticism, and printing pro-Russian propaganda in their newspapers — much to the dismay of the Russian-American Anarchist, Emma Goldman. Meanwhile, the workers and farmers of Spain were heroically combating both fascism *and* capitalism, only to be stabbed in the back by the Stalinist Communists.⁹³ Two years

⁹² *N.Y. Times*, June 3, 1997. Merrill Lynch was one of the biggest traders on Wall Street until the Crash of 2008.

⁹³ Ken Loache's 1995 movie *Land and Freedom* tells that tale most accurately, as did writers at the time like George Orwell (*Homage to Catalonia*), Emma Goldman (*Vision on Fire: Emma Goldman on the Spanish Revolution*) and

later, the French, demoralized by Republican Spain's defeat, caved in to Hitler at Munich. Finally, even the Communists abandoned anti-fascism when Stalin signed his infamous military pact with Hitler in 1939.

If sharks were men, they would, of course, also wage wars against one another, in order to conquer other fish boxes and other little fish. The wars would be waged by their own little fish. They would teach their little fish that there was an enormous difference between themselves and the little fish belonging to the other sharks. Little fish, they would announce, are well known to be mute, but they are silent in quite different languages and hence find it impossible to understand one another. Each little fish that, in a war, killed a couple of other little fish, enemy ones, silent in their own language, would have a little order made of seaweed pinned to it and be awarded the title of hero. — **Bertolt Brecht**

It took five years and 20 million dead in WWII to stop Hitler. After the war was won, the majority of French capitalists could and should have been expropriated (if not shot) for collaborating with the Nazi German occupiers. But thanks to a new Popular Front alliance, de Gaulle and the Communists took over the workers' and peasants' Resistance, substituted patriotism for the slogan 'From the Resistance to the Revolution,' and laid the basis for the post-war capitalist reconstruction of France and the reconquest of France's colonies. Capitalism itself was never called into question. As a result, the revolution was put off to *mañana*, the French CP and SP voted to send French troops to Indochina and Algeria, and government officials with the blood of deported Jews on their hands made an easy transition from Vichy France to high office in the IVth and Vth French Republics. Today, fascism and racism are on the rise again in Europe - in both France and post-Soviet Russia. Anti-fascism: some great shortcut!



Avoiding the C-word, the M-word and the R-word

Compañeros, I understand how the slogan ‘Against Neo-Liberalism’ — translated from a Latin American context rich in cultural resonances — came to be adopted by our new social movements in a new global context. I also sympathize with the desire of our movement to appear non-sectarian and to avoid ideologically ‘loaded’ expressions like ‘proletariat,’ ‘class struggle’ and ‘capitalism.’ On the other hand, I wonder why so many activists should resist using the correct term, capitalism, when even bourgeois economics text-books and conservative editorial writers are not afraid to use the C-word to designate the profit system we live under. Why should we be afraid to talk about ‘capitalism’ and ‘class’ when the *Wall Street Journal* screams ‘class struggle!’ every time the Democrats even consider taxing profits and when the most influential business magazine in the U.S. cheerfully advertises itself as ‘*FORBES: Capitalist Tool?*’

One explanation for the near-phobic avoidance of C-words like capitalism and class is that a certain Karl Marx used them, and we don't want to be labeled as ‘Marxists.’ Neither did Marx himself, who famously wrote: ‘If I know one thing, it is that I am not a Marxist.’ To be sure, many people today react to Marxist terminology as ideological, tainted, and, worst of all, *passé*. So we are forced to re-invent the wheel of ‘capitalism’ and awkwardly rename it ‘that neo-liberal round thing that rolls.’ If we continue to follow this politically correct logic, we will end up unable to refer to other basic realities like ‘evolution,’ ‘the unconscious mind,’ and ‘gravity.’ After all, Darwin, Freud and Newton are also ideological, tainted and *passé*. And we don't want to exclude or offend creationists, Pavlovians, and flat-earthers — much less appear ‘elitist.’

Kidding aside, to me the worst kind of elitism consists of talking down to people and sugar-coating unpleasant truths. I still remember the fellow-traveling French existentialists of the 1950s

hiding the truth about slave-labor in the Russian *gulag* from the French workers so as ‘not to lead Billancourt [the big auto factory near Paris] to despair.’ Maybe if the Left intellectuals of the 50’s had had the honesty to tell the truth about Stalinism, Billancourt workers wouldn’t be voting for Le Pen’s National Front - as many do precisely out of despair - and we wouldn’t have the neo-liberal Parisian ‘new philosophers’ dominating the intellectual scene. Today’s post-modern generation is justified in remaining highly suspicious of totalizing ideals and grand narratives inherited from the 18th and 19th Centuries. Concepts such as rationality, science and ‘progress’ have served to justify untold horrors under both free enterprise and Communism. The 20th Century, with its murderous eugenics, its totalitarian police states, its mechanized mass destruction of civilians, cities and whole peoples has revealed where such totalizing concepts can lead.

“If sharks were men, there would, of course, also be schools in the big boxes. In these schools, the little fish would learn how to swim into the sharks’ jaws. They would need to know geography, for example, so that they could find the big sharks, who lie idly around somewhere. The principal subject would, of course, be the moral education of the little fish. They would be taught that it would be the best and most beautiful thing in the world if a little fish sacrificed itself cheerfully and that they all had to believe the sharks, especially when the latter said they were providing for a beautiful future. The little fish would be taught that this future is assured only if they learned obedience. The little fish had to beware of all base, materialist, egotistical and Marxist inclinations, and if one of their number betrayed such inclinations they had to report it immediately to the sharks.” — **Bertolt Brecht**

Let us therefore remain suspicious, vigilant, critical, unafraid to analyze and deconstruct all such absolutist notions. But let’s

not throw out the baby of clarity with the bath water of long-dead totalizing ideas and grand narratives, tragically accepted at face value by earlier generations.

Calling things by their true name: that, in my opinion, is the beginning of wisdom and honesty, whether we're talking to our children about death and sex or to people in struggle about capitalism and revolution. In either case, there is no such thing as 'non-ideological' vocabulary. Every phrase betrays its underlying ideological context - religious or political. The dominant ideological dogma today is TINA: 'There Is No Alternative' (understood: to *capitalism*). This ideology is so pervasive as to be nearly invisible in the mainstream media and academic discourse, where alternative ideas are broached only to be ridiculed as 'Utopian.' This stifling context demands that we avoid such 'ideological' and *passé* words as 'capitalism,' 'class' and 'revolution.' So we talk about post-modernism, post-industrialism, post-Fordism, identity, subaltern groups, globalization, and neo-liberalism. Even those of us who consciously seek to create alternatives often unconsciously limit ourselves to alternatives *within* capitalism. But is it possible to cure the symptoms of neo-liberalism without attacking the disease — capitalism?

What Did Marx Really Say?

So let's let down our ideological guard for just a moment and take a quick look at what Marx (rather than his enemies or his degenerate disciples) actually had to say about capitalism and revolution. In 1867, Marx published his famous and unread book on *Capital*. In the first volume, Marx picked up the analysis of capitalism where the neo-liberals' idol Adam Smith had left off in 1776. Marx's only original addition to Smith's description of the capitalist market place was this: human labor, unlike its material products, is a living, feeling, creative being, not a commodity. Although, in a fair marketplace, all commodities are ideally exchanged at their value; human labor is not a fixed, lifeless object like other forms of merchandise. Not only does human labor feel and suffer, it also creates new value in the process of being 'consumed' by its purchaser, the capitalist, who gets to keep that new value created by the laborer. A day of human labor may routinely produce commodities worth two, three or twenty times more

value than the value of the wage the boss paid the worker for a day's work. Put another way, in the first two or four hours of her working day, the sewing machine operator creates a quantity of blue-jeans equivalent to the values her day's pay allows her to consume in food, heat, rent etc. For the rest of the day, which may be extended to eight or ten or twelve or more hours, she works free for the boss.



Marx identified this 'surplus' value as the true source of the capitalists' profit (assuming that the capitalists have already seized the land and are able to exploit nature at will). The search for surplus value is the reason why the capitalists are always trying to squeeze more labor out of their workers through mechanization, automation, longer hours and speedups, and why they are constantly scouring the planet for new sources of cheap labor to exploit. Unlike his command-economy Communist disciples, the real Marx had no problem with markets (where he bought his vegetables when he could afford them). What he rejected was the *labor market*, in which human creative activity (labor) is degraded into an object to be bought and sold for profit like a cup or a cabbage; what enraged him was capitalism's 'werewolf hunger' for cheaper and cheaper labor, including women and young children, which he saw devouring the European poor in his day as it devours the global poor in ours.

So when we chant 'I am not a commodity' or 'the world is not a commodity,' we are mouthing Marxist slogans without realizing it. Nor is there anything in Marx's economic analysis of *Capital* that Anarchists and other libertarians should object to. After all, didn't Marx's arch-enemy, the famous anarchist Bakunin, translate *Capital* into Russian? In the later volumes of *Capital*, Marx went on to analyze 19th Century capitalism's basic laws of motion: capitalism's need to constantly expand production and seek new markets; its ever-increasing concentration of wealth into fewer and fewer hands; the spread of poverty and inequality; the permanence of mass unemployment ('the absolute general law' of capitalist development). Do any of these economic tendencies

still sound relevant today?

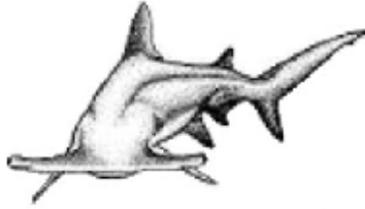
Moreover, before he died, Marx saw the rise of huge powerful trusts and realized that market capitalism might transform itself into its own opposite! If competition could turn into monopoly, if national rivalry could turn into international cartels, then theoretically, market capitalism could turn into a single capitalist economy *without changing its exploitative essence*. This 'state-capitalism' is precisely what developed in Russia in the 1930's after the 1917 Revolution, isolated and besieged, succumbed to the dictatorship of a brutal self-serving bureaucracy which had usurped the title 'Communist.' Stalin and his successors 'applied' Marx's original ideas the same way the Spanish Inquisition 'applied' the preachings of the historical Jesus. Just astoday's right-wing billionaire evangelists *claim* to be Christians in order to bilk the poor, dictators of every stripe will often *claim* to be Marxists in order to fool the poor into supporting them. Should we blame these travesties on Jesus and Marx?



Marx and the State

Far from being the prophet of the totalitarian state, Marx's analysis of politics led him to the same conclusion as the anarchists — that the essence of the state (whether parliamentary or dictatorial) was class violence. He defined the state as consisting of 'special bodies of armed men, prisons, etc.' organized for the purposes of repression in order to maintain the status quo in favor of the rich. Today, we face a new proliferation of such armies, police forces, militias, prisons and other repressive apparatuses multiplying in every land. In our age of increasing inequality, these 'special bodies' are necessary to protect the billionaires from the billions. Marx saw socialism as full democracy, spread to the economic sphere. He saw 'democratic' capitalist government as a kind of 'central committee' of the bourgeoisie, ruling in the interest of capital and arbitrating its inner quarrels via parliaments. Today, big money, in the form of huge political contributions and media ownership, more and more dominates 'democratic' politics

everywhere, while ‘reforms’ always end up making the rich richer and the poor poorer.



The War of the Classes

Finally, in his political writings (beginning with *The Communist Manifesto* of 1848) Marx developed the historical observation that the struggle between classes (masters *versus* slaves, landlords *versus* peasants, aristocrats *versus* bourgeois, capitalists *versus* workers, etc.) may, when the times are ripe, result in revolutionary changes in society. (He also noted that these struggles may also lead to mutual destruction.) Reviewing the historical transitions from ancient slave empires to feudalism and from feudalism to capitalism, Marx observed that each of these social systems — however ‘natural’, ‘permanent’, or ‘given’ they may have appeared to their contemporaries — was, in fact, transitory. From this, he concluded that capitalism, too, should be considered transitory and, that, hence, ‘another world’ was not just desirable, but historically *possible*.

As an activist, Marx devoted himself to the practical job of helping workers from many countries to organize themselves *internationally*. Precisely because he saw capitalism as a *global* system, he made ‘Working people of all countries unite!’ his motto. Like most 19th Century radicals, Marx saw cooperation and mutual aid as the principle of the emerging new society, which was commonly known as ‘socialism’ or ‘communism.’ Marx did not invent the terms nor did he ever propose a blueprint, leaving that to Utopians like Owen, Fourier and Saint-Simon. *Internationalism* was the essence of his teaching; *criticism* that of his method. Opposed to all sectarianism, he rejected the label ‘Marxist’ (invented by his opponents) and feared having his ideas distorted and dogmatized by his ‘followers.’ For these reasons, he and Engels never tried to form a ‘Marxist Party.’ It didn’t bother them that the vast majority of the members of the *Interna-*

tional Workers' Association, the organization to which Marx devoted his energies as Secretary, were followers of his rival, the French anarchist Proudhon. So, indeed, were most of the Communards of Paris, whom Marx hailed in 1871 as the creators of the first socialist society. For Marx, it was not doctrine that counted, it was the '*actual movement*' of the masses creating a new society in their own image.



Capitalist Crisis and Revolutionary Emergence

Marx saw the new world *emerging* from the ashes of the old — as bourgeois capitalism had emerged from the ruins of corrupt, decadent, bankrupt aristocracies. According to Marx, capitalism was a bloated system doomed to die of indigestion — that is to say, of overproduction. For Marx, capitalism's essential need constantly to expand production is in direct contradiction with its other essential need: to keep wages as low as possible and to eliminate 'surplus' workers in order to increase the rate of profit. But if there are fewer and fewer workers with money to spend, who is going to buy up all those mountains of commodities (most of them useless) the capitalists keep churning out? Marx saw depressions and wars as capitalism's way of getting rid of all those mountains of unsaleable commodities in order to wipe the slate clean and begin a new cycle of production. Not only is capitalism transitory, Marx believed, it is also in permanent crisis. Capitalism was therefore doomed to collapse as a result of its own inner contradiction, under the pressure of the emerging new society. It would be overthrown by the revolt of the oppressed - culminating in the global uprising of the true producers of social wealth, the working men and women of the world. Such was Marx's vision.

It is true that Marx saw the growing class of wage-workers created by capitalist expansion as capital's natural antagonist and its eventually 'grave-digger.' However, near the end of his life, Marx began to feel that the attachment of pre-capitalist peoples to their communal culture and economy (for example, the Russian peasants' *mir* or communal village) represented both a form of resistance to capitalism's degradation and — along with the or-

ganized workers — an embryo of a future society. To me, today's Zapatista movement represents just such an embryo.

The problem is that Marx (like ourselves) had no way of knowing *when* capitalism's collapse (and humanity's emergence) might occur. On the one hand, Marx assumed that the final crisis could come quickly, especially as capitalism's periodic boom and bust cycle seemed to be getting more severe as the 19th Century drew to a close. On the other hand, Marx's theory indicated that global capital would never stop expanding until it had taken over the whole earth, enclosed all the open lands, uprooted the last independent farmers and turned every human into a dependent consumer of commodities - whether as a wage-slave or a member of the 'unemployed reserve army.' For as long as capitalism can keep expanding and overproducing, it can compensate for the tendency of the *rate* of profit to decline, by an ever-increasing *mass* of profits.

As a revolutionary, Marx *hoped* that the workers would put an end to capitalism long before it devoured the whole planet. Unfortunately during the 20th Century, as capitalism careened from world war to depression to world war, the ultimate goal got lost while 'revolutionary' leaders (many of them self-described 'Marxists') led humanity into dangerous shortcuts like nationalism, reformism and state-capitalism. Will the coming 21st Century be able to stop capitalism before it devours the earth and its peoples? Not if we fail to call it by its name. Not if we keep on taking dangerous shortcuts and convincing ourselves that the capitalist shark can be converted to vegetarianism.



Back to 'Neo-liberalism' vs. 'Capitalism'

Although Marx's name remains anathema, his analyses seem more and more relevant (and are generally followed in practice by capitalists and stock market analysts!). So powerful is this anathema that even Sub-Commander Marcos, in his recent manifesto 'The Fourth World War Has Begun: Six Pieces of a Puzzle'

⁹⁴ *Le Monde diplomatique*, August 1997.

, expounds precisely the six Marxian points outlined above (unemployment, pauperization, concentration, accumulation, and globalization of capital) without once alluding to Marx or his theories. As a result, when the reader gets to the conclusion — the ‘Seventh Piece’ of the ‘Puzzle’ — we are no longer sure whether the ‘Fourth World War’ Marcos has declared is the war between the rich and the poor or the war between ‘Globalization’ and ‘National Sovereignty.’ This ambiguity remains a point of tension in our movements. To be sure, concepts like Globalization and Neo-Liberalism are illuminating and useful in describing aspects of our modern condition. But we must not allow them to become substitutes for its essence, capitalism, lest we be unconsciously led into ideological shortcuts like reformism, protectionism, the welfare-state, anti-fascism and anti-imperialism. Such shortcuts usually turn out to be roads to Hell, which, as George Bernard Shaw remarked, are always ‘paved with good intentions.’

Good Intentions

Our burgeoning Zapatista-inspired movements have already understood that ‘the world is not a commodity’ to be bought and sold. What needs to be understood next is that the commodity-culture cannot be overcome until wage-labor, the alienated human activity that produces commodities, is abolished. Only then can we live like human beings, as the Indigenous of Chiapas are attempting to do against terrible odds. This humanism contrasts with previous movements (Social-democratic, Communist, etc.) which often got stuck inside the capitalist game by simply demanding *more* for the workers or by assuming that if only the *state* would replace the market, capitalism would be different. In this respect, our Zapatistan analysis — based on the humanist philosophy of *pre-capitalist* indigenous people whose revolt is a refusal of wage-labor commodity society — is a thousand times closer to the original ideas of Marx than the analysis of most of the self-designated ‘Marxists.’ And we are light-years ahead of all the welfare state-ists, social-democrats, nationalizers and ‘communists’ with their bureaucratic panaceas.

The Chiapans have understood, as Marx himself did, that capital is not a *thing* but a *human relationship* — a power relationship which enables one person or class first to steal other

peoples' land, then to steal their labor, and finally to disguise this theft under the 'free and fair exchange' of money for labor power. Like the original Marx, they understand that this perverted, money-mediated relationship must be uprooted and replaced by *new human relationships* based on equality, cooperation and community. But can humanity accomplish this task without using the *name* of the beast we must face and conquer — capitalism?



Religion and Repression in the United States: A Case of Political Pathology [2005]⁹⁵

The Christian Right in the United States has for some time been waging — along with its ‘wars’ on vague but threatening abstractions like ‘drugs’ and ‘terrorism’ — an increasingly open war against reason itself. The latest frenzied episode in this war (April 2005) is the campaign of religious hysteria set in motion ostensibly to ‘save’ Terry Schiavo, the unfortunate young Florida woman kept alive against her wishes for fifteen years in an irreversible coma. Indeed, in the months since the contested electoral ‘victory’ of George W. Bush in November 2004, America seems more and more in the grip of a kind of religious psychosis.

In every sphere of American society, rational thought and science appear to be on the defensive, while superstition and magical thinking are routinely accepted as fact. Invisible WMDs in Iraq, imaginary conspiracies between arch-rivals like Osama bin Ladan and Saddam Hussein, fictitious military victories (‘Mission Accomplished’) and ‘Creation Science’ are passed off as factual. ‘We create our own reality,’ is the motto of the regime in Washington. Indeed, media-transmitted official lies and half-truths increasingly replace objectively verifiable realities in public discourse as well as in the news reporting that uncritically parrots it. Emperor Bush is visibly naked, but under a tacit agreement no one — neither the Democratic ‘opposition’ nor the mainstream media — is supposed to notice.

From a psychological perspective, this phenomenon can only

⁹⁵ Translated from the French, *Religion et Répression aux Etats-Unis*, originally a series of articles I wrote for the Montpellier leftwing daily *L’Hérault du Jour*.

be seen as a form of mass political pathology. If this be the case, can Psychoanalysis and Political Psychology help us understand the origins, etiology, inner dynamics, and eventual resolution of this American social disease?⁹⁶ I would like to begin this inquiry by proposing a paradigm borrowed from the field of family therapy: domestic abuse.



The most common syndrome revolves around an abusive parent, usually the father, who may be addicted to alcohol, drugs, gambling, stealing, violence, incest or other shameful behaviors and who typically suffers from low self-esteem. Such individuals dominate their families through overt or threatened violence and instrumentalize that domination to exploit family members (sexually, financially, emotionally) and to protect themselves both from outside criticism and from crippling self-awareness. In other words, such bullies hide their secret shame (from themselves and others) behind a false front which they maintain by seduction and intimidation.

The abuser typically rationalizes his denial of his obvious (to others) shameful behavior (e.g. his drinking, violence or incest) by means of an ideological front-story, which he uses to smother his own inner doubts and justify his domination of the family.

⁹⁶ The psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich, a former member of the Freudian circle in Vienna and an active Marxist, is considered to be the pioneer of political psychology with his analysis of the rise of Nazism. See his 'The Mass Psychology of Fascism.' (By contrast, the apolitical Freud ignored politics to such a degree that he found himself trapped in Vienna in 1938 after Hitler's takeover of Austria.)

Authoritarian religion and the image of a stern but loving parent (who only punishes the family members for their own good) are convenient ready-made ideological front-stories, but each abusive family has its own — often bizarre — rationalizations. Furthermore, the continued success of the abuser's defense-system of denial depends on closing off the family unit to outside influences. The abuser's inner shame, fear and violence are typically projected on the outside world, viewed as menacing and hostile to the family unit (when, in fact, it is only menacing to the abuser's front-story and to his domination of the family).⁹⁷

As family therapists and social workers are so painfully aware, the first problem in such cases is overcoming the tacit conspiracy of denial on the part of the abuser and his victims. Both the abusers and their victims themselves will routinely deny that a problem even exists. It's the old story of the elephant in the living-room. Whether the pathology takes the form of incest, alcoholism, kleptomania, gambling or violence, the family affected — or in our case the affected society — is intimidated by the abusive parent and becomes his/her accomplice through denial of the problem. The family members feel obliged to participate in the abuser's irrational world and to accept his lies and rationalizations in order to avoid confrontation; thus they often end up internalizing the abuser's oppressive pseudo-reality, which becomes the 'reality' they are forced to live in — repressing their own rationality in the process. The abuser may also maintain his false front with the help of 'enablers' (e.g. favored family members, cronies, neighbors, hirelings, even constituted authorities) who are complicit with the abuser and accept his rationalizations — sometimes out of intimidation and sometimes out of sympathy and perceived self-interest.

Now, let's see if this commonly-understood domestic abuse paradigm can serve as a useful lens through which to examine the pathology affecting what many recognize as our 'sick society.' If we extrapolate from the family to society, the role of the abusive father will perforce be played by the people in power — personi-

⁹⁷ My paradigm is based on the work of Dr. James Gilligan M.D. of Harvard Medical School. As head Psychiatrist of the Massachusetts prison system he was able to reduce inmate murders and suicides by 80%. He is the author of an accessible, humane and totally remarkable book which I recommend to one and all: *Violence*, Putnam and Sons, 1997.

fied by the President and his Party. Let us note in passing that the previous occupant of the White House, George W. Bush, has a typical abuser profile. Underachiever, dyslectic son of a successful father, bully in school, cocaine and alcohol addict, draft dodger/deserter, business failure, sadist who, as Governor of Texas, admitted taking satisfaction in signing death-warrants (he set a new record); George W. Bush is also a highly effective manipulator and a successful politician.

I am not arguing here from the point of view of a certain type of Psychohistory in which the personality of a leader (e.g. Hitler) becomes the key to historical events — although it is certainly poetic justice that a man like George W. Bush has become the incarnation and political representative of the American corporate class.⁹⁸ More to the point would be to compare the personality structure of the members of that class to that of the corporation itself, as was recently done in the film, *The Corporation*. After studying the objective behavior of those ‘legal persons’ known as Corporations, the documentary concluded that if they were actual persons they would be diagnosed as schizophrenic. Although George W. Bush’s personality is a convenient symbol for the societal abuser in our domestic violence paradigm, it is the class he represents (both politically and metaphorically) that profits from exploiting nature and abusing people in order to maintain its domination over society.

Continuing with our paradigm, the role of the abuser’s ‘enablers’ (e.g., favored family members, cronies, hirelings, even constituted authorities) would be played by the corporate media, the Democratic Party and Religious Right. Whether out of fear, out of self-interest or in return for favors or identification with the abuser, political enablers back up and perpetuate the abusive regime’s face-story, ideology and rationalizations. These enablers thus perpetuate and reinforce the state of denial in which the ‘family’ of American society is immersed. As for the ungrateful role of the ‘abused family members,’ we, the people, get stuck with that one. Like the members of regular families, some members of our societal ‘family’ identify with the abuser, buying into his rationalizations in order to seek his favor. Other members cri-

⁹⁸ I know the type personally, having attended Yale College in the years between the two Bushes.

ticize him and may suffer his ridicule, ostracism and violence. John Kerry's war record is trashed by a bogus Swift Boat Association, Administration dissenters and their relatives are persecuted (the outing of CIA operative Valerie Plame), peaceful citizens are subject to illegal wire-taps, and legal demonstrators are beaten and jailed.

The division (between those who identify with the abuser and those who rebel) keeps us 'children' fighting among ourselves and assures the continued domination of the abuser — and the perpetuation of our own exploitation. Official statistics indicate that most working class and middle-income people in the U.S. — whether Dems or Reps, born-again or atheistic, native or immigrant, male or female, Black or White, gay or straight — are working longer hours, earning less in real dollars, commuting longer distances, paying more for poorer healthcare. We are also experiencing a decline in our quality of life (pollution, decaying cities, cuts in education and public services) and wide-scale psychological depression (indicated by the boom in anti-depressant sales). Meanwhile, we the people pay the income and property taxes while skyrocketing corporate profits and executive pay get big tax breaks or hide their profits in off-shore tax havens.



A single example may serve to illustrate this general trend. Why are N.Y. public schools are in trouble? When I went to public high school, corporations paid 80% of the taxes. Today their contribution is in the low single digits, and some corporations get away with the 1.5% minimum tax. Instead of money for books and teachers, we get sermons, endless testing and blaming of the victims — children from 'substandard' homes, 'incompetent' teachers. No Child Left Behind actually cuts funding for schools that 'fail' these tests, thereby taking money away from the students and teachers who need it the most. Many districts and principals willy-nilly buy into this ideological false front, even though the payoff (Federal Funding) is in many cases insignificant.

Returning to our paradigm, we must now ask what kind of ideology best rationalizes and sustains the front-story of these societal abusers and enablers. Unreason, religious and patriotic hysteria are the Bushies' weapons of choice. As for denial of the so-

cial and economic crises facing most Americans, 'We create our own reality' should be the Administration's logo. On the other hand, objectivity, critical thinking and rational analysis are obviously deadly enemies to the abuser's system of domination, and he will attempt to discredit them at all costs in order to maintain his power over the victims. In the family, the abuser will dismiss Freud and psychology as 'hoey,' and claim the therapist is 'out to get us.' In society, Marx and Darwin are dismissed as 'hoey,' and critics of the system are treated as akin to terrorists. Here we encounter a second level of denial. In order to remain lucid and effective, the investigator/therapist needs to ignore the patients' denial defenses and stand outside of the family's accepted rationalizations - which is paradoxically perhaps easier for us here in Europe than for Americans living within the 'abusive family' itself. But mere objectivity isn't enough. The political psychologist also needs to understand the symptoms *as part of a whole self-perpetuating system* in order to conceptualize the history, inner dynamics and internal contradictions of the pathology - as we shall attempt to do here.

Is the Earth Flat?

But first, let us take a closer look at some of the symptoms. To outside observers, a wave of unreason seems to be unfurling over American society, affecting religious, political, and even scientific life. The same week that featured the Schiavo scandal, American newspapers reported a variety of other disturbing symptoms of politico-religious delirium. For example, the *N.Y. Times* indicated that many IMAX theaters (3-dimensional cinemas, some of which can be found in science museums) are now refusing to show films about evolution, the Big Bang Theory - indeed about any of the earth sciences which go against the Biblical story of Creation — for fear of drawing protests from Christian fundamentalists.⁹⁹ Meanwhile, in a number of states, high school teachers are being coerced into teaching evolution as 'just a theory' or to teach it along with 'Creation Science' and 'Intelligent Design' (the belief that the complexity of nature proves that there is Divine Intelligence behind it). Even the very distin-

⁹⁹ *NY Times*, March 19, 2005.

guished *National Geographic Magazine* recently bowed to the trend by coming out with a special issue entitled 'Was Darwin Wrong?' (In fairness, the answer turned out to be a qualified 'no.')

The *Geographic's* questioning of accepted scientific data inspired a hilarious April Fool parody issue of *Scientific American* with articles such as 'Is the Earth Flat?' 'The Myth of the Atom,' and 'Let's Ignore CO2.'

Alas, the false science promoted by the U.S. Government and the Religious Right is not just a bad joke. It permits the White House to reject as 'unproven,' conclusions arrived at by respectable scientific watchdogs and by its own Environmental Protection Agency. Thus denial of the influence of industrial pollution on climate change paves the way for deregulation and legislation designed to favor the polluting auto and petroleum industries. And since the conclusions of science and rational thought contradict the need of American capitalism to remain competitive by externalizing ecological costs, a war on Science and Reason becomes *de rigueur*. Right-wing loyalists are appointed to run government agencies (protecting the environment, protecting workers' health, housing the poor, regulating financial markets) whose very purposes they oppose, while dissenting scientists and administrators are systematically fired or demoted. Thus, the government succeeds in promoting bogus science along with bogus politics, while the big corporate media tend to legitimize such symptoms of political manipulation and religious hysteria as respectable discourse. In the health field, the U.S. government openly practices religious censorship. Regulations forbid all personnel working for any Federally-funded organization or institution, including those on foreign soil, even to *talk* about abortion or contraception. The regime also promotes religion by financing parochial schools (disguised as 'charter schools') and supporting evangelizing charities with public funds (as a substitute for social welfare). All these



activities are in flagrant violation of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution which clearly states ‘Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion.’

Moreover, the violent fanaticism of self-proclaimed Christian terrorists is not a joke for its human victims: doctors murdered for practicing abortion, women’s health clinics bombed with impunity. Even the elderly state appeals’ judge in Florida who finally allowed Schiavo to die felt the sting of right-wing terror. Himself a devout Christian, he was harassed and threatened with death by Christian fundamentalists and had to be sequestered for his own protection. Yet no one was arrested. In the terror-obsessed United States where the F.B.I. and the Red Squads (subversive investigation units) of local police departments routinely infiltrate non-violent social movements and pacifist organizations, the police tend to look away when faced with manifestations of Christian terrorism. Remember that Christian terrorists, not Islamicists, set off the bomb at the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. This act of terrorism caused 168 deaths and more than 800 serious injuries — yet there were no conspiracy charges or attempts to investigate the convicted terrorists’ associations among survivalists, Christian militias, and neo-Nazis who thrive in nearly every state of the union. In contrast, the attack on the Twin Towers in New York which caused 3000 deaths was manipulated to justify a domestic witch-hunt and launch an open-ended world-wide crusade against a billion or so Moslems (most of them peaceful non-Arabs). The oppressive violence of the ‘abusive parent’ (the Christian Right) is denied, only to be projected on an outside enemy (Moslem hordes). Thus, the unity of the family unit is cemented in the vicious cycle of abuse, denial and projection. The unit (family/society) turns in on itself; the reasonable protests of rational family members (critics and dissenters) are considered as ‘treason’ while the advice of family friends (European allies) is ridiculed. It becomes difficult for family members (citizens, politicians, media members) to hold onto to their own sense of reality within such a closed system, especially when the abusive parent is righteously clothed in the double authority of government and religion (and is known to be violent and vengeful).¹⁰⁰ The spectacle of right-wing funda-

¹⁰⁰ It is interesting to note in this regard, that the actual mastermind of the 9/11

mentalism invading the media, stifling the political life and public dialogue of the nation is disturbing. The bullying tone is set by openly racist shock jocks, who thanks to deregulation and monopoly, now dominate the radio airwaves. On television, the slightly more respectable right-wing FOX network provides the secular cover for the Christian Right as do commentators like Bill O'Reilly, Rush Limbaugh and Ann Coulter.

Academia and the New McCarthyism

The pathology of denial has not only infected the media, it has also engulfed America's universities (which to their shame had cooperated with the red-baiting loyalty purges in the 50s). Yet remarkably in the 60s, the first wave of opposition to the Vietnam War came from U.S. universities. On hundreds of campuses, professors of Asian history, foreign policy, military history and other relevant subjects participated in nation-wide Teach-ins and shared their specialized knowledge with assembled students and the public. They explained in laymen's terms what the U.S. was doing in Vietnam and why.¹⁰¹ Some of the big Teach-ins were televised and rebroadcast all over the country. And that was in 1965, *before* the U.S. advisory mission in Vietnam escalated into a full-scale war. Alas, the right wing in the U.S. has spent the last forty years purging and punishing American scholars for their moment of courage and public-spiritedness in the Vietnam years.

In the wake of the so-called 'culture wars' (in fact one-way attacks on largely inexistent 'liberals' dominating the media and phantom 'Marxists' dominating the university), leftist academics have tended to retreat into the Byzantine obscurantism of postmodernism, with its incomprehensible meta-linguistic jargon and amoral relativism. Thus, professors no longer feel called upon to fight for reason, rationality, and scientific objectivity because, according to postmodern dogma, these very concepts must be 'contested' as 'totalizing' (read 'totalitarian') abstractions. Similarly, history and systematic political-economic analysis (for example, of capitalism)

attack, Bush's violent and vengeful Saudi twin Osama Bin Laden, remains, at the time of this writing, blissfully at large.

¹⁰¹ For example, as a young French instructor at Columbia University, I talked to student rallies about the French defeat in Indochina and my experiences with the student anti-draft movement in France during the Algerian War. ≈



are shunned as ‘grand narratives’ leading inevitably to totalitarian ends. So, no more vulgar class struggle, no more *passé* socialism. Instead give us ‘identity’ studies and chic ‘identity politics’ to hide our intellectual nullity, and build new departmental divisions to further isolate and divide us.

Moreover, since the much-vaunted ‘death of the subject,’ no one can be held responsible either for what they write or what they do. How convenient for Bush and Co., who are no longer responsible for the ‘collateral damage’ when they bomb civilians! How convenient for deconstructionists like Yale Prof. Paul de Man, who hid the fact he wrote pro-Nazi articles in occupied Belgium during WWII. How convenient for university administrators, whose funding depends on massive contributions and lucrative contracts from the government, the military and the big corporations! How convenient for professors, who know they will never get tenure if they criticize the corporations or attack the government. How convenient for the establishment that the *truth* itself should become a ‘contested concept’ in academia while the biggest liars in the world (Bush and his billionaire televangelist buddies) spell it with a capital T and brandish it like a club over the heads of doubters and critics.

But enough of discourse about discourse about discourse! Haven’t the big U.S. graduate schools historically submitted to the

corporations that created them in the 1880's, spewing forth racist historiography, elitist sociology, and the biology of eugenics from the corporate-funded ivory towers of Columbia, Harvard and John's Hopkins? As Victor Serge was fond of saying, 'The trouble with searching for the truth is that you find it.' By which he meant that the truth (for example about oil spills) is often dangerous, threatening, and subversive to the powers that be (for example, the energy companies that finance most graduate Geology departments). Hail then to the dissidents in the academy, who, like the whistle-blowers in the government, have the courage to speak out and suffer the consequences.

Censorship and Propaganda in the U. S.

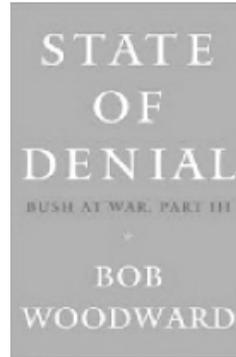
As we have seen, the painful daily realities lived by millions of poor and middle-class Americans do not correspond to the bogus 'reality' proposed on a daily basis by the Bush administration and openly or tacitly endorsed by the mass media. Among the exceptions to generalized complicity in this cultural denial is the celebrated columnist Maureen Dowd, who exposed in detail how the White House manipulates the media.¹⁰² First of all, she pointed out how the Bush Administration does not tolerate criticism. For example, it forced Dan Rather, dean of national television news anchormen, to take an 'early retirement,' after he quoted a document from an unconfirmed source concerning the military service of George W. Bush during the Vietnam War. And yet, the information was correct: no one denies that Bush went AWOL for a long time from the Texas Air National Guard. Bush's absence was all the more disgraceful considering that he secured his coveted place in the TANG through favoritism, so as to avoid being sent to Vietnam (this unit could not be deployed overseas).¹⁰³ As for Dowd herself, the glamorous veteran White House reporter during four administrations, was banned from presidential press conferences for asking too many pointed questions.

On the other hand, Bush press conferences did include a phony 'journalist' hired by the White House to ask softball ques-

¹⁰² *New York Times*, March 18, 2005.

¹⁰³ James Goodale, 'Report of the Independent review Concerning President Bush's Texas Air National Guard Service,' *New York Review of Books*, April 7, 2005.

tions in front of the cameras.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, the Bush administration has ended up admitting that it systematically procures favorable articles from hired journalists, and, that the U.S. Treasury had paid out large sums of money to a score of advertising agencies to create fake ‘news reports’ which were routinely broadcast as real ones by regional television networks. Little did it matter: the Justice Department ruled that these fake news stories are perfectly legal ‘as long as they are based on facts and are not partisan’(!). Dowd calls this a “Soviet-style propaganda campaign.” It also reminds me of Orwell’s *1984* with its ‘Ministry of Truth.’



‘We Create Our Own Reality’¹⁰⁵

In any case, the regime has created a system of lies and hallucinations in which any relation to verifiable reality is quickly lost. An unnamed Bush official was quoted by a reporter as denigrating ‘the reality-based community.’ He explained: ‘We are an Empire now. We create our own reality.’ American television projects an imaginary Bushland inhabited by merry billionaires. In the place of socially realistic 1970s shows like ‘Good Times,’ ‘M*A*S*H,’ and ‘All in the Family,’ we have ‘Lives of the Rich and Famous,’ ‘Dallas,’ and ‘The Evening News.’ There, peace and democracy are being established in the Mid-East thanks to Bush’s victory over Evil Saddam.

In that wonderful Bushland, the economy is picking up as a result of the tax exemptions which enable the rich to create jobs.

¹⁰⁴ A photo of this fake journalist was eventually found on a web-site offering his services as a male prostitute serving gentlemen as well as ladies!

¹⁰⁵ See ‘Without a Doubt,’ *NY Times*, Oct. 17, 2004, by Ron Suskind. The Administration’s anonymous spokesman went on to deride the impotence of the ‘reality-based community’ meaning people who ‘believe that solutions emerge from your politically discernable reality [...] That’s not the way the world really works anymore... We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you’re studying that reality —judiciously, as you will — we’ll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and this is how things will sort out. We’re history’s actors, and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.’

So what if the facts indicate otherwise? Just ignore the facts, and Bingo! — they are deleted from the record. When confronted with the absence of Saddam's Weapons of Mass Destruction and links to September 11 attacks, a Bush advisor announced: 'We create our own reality.' This is what psychologists call 'magical thinking.' Alas, he knew what he was talking about: according to polls, nearly half of all American voters still believed in these two myths at the time of the 2004 election. Wasn't it Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's propaganda minister, who proclaimed: 'If you repeat a lie often enough, people will believe it?'

Indeed, the Big Lie can be effective, but only when the speaker has the power to subjugate the mass media, silence or marginalize critics, cast doubt on empirical reason, and impose an ideology of illusion. Still, let us keep in mind that reality has a way of sooner or later blowing back on the self-deluded who blind themselves by denying it. After all, the 'Thousand Year *Reich*' (Empire) of Hitler's demented dreams lasted only thirteen years.

Elephants in the Living Room

How do people 'create their own reality?' The shameful behaviors of the alcoholic, the incestuous father, the physical abuser are like elephants sitting in the middle of the family living room. They are apparently invisible because the abuser has the power to enlist the complicity of the entire family in his denial of his secret guilt. The biggest of the elephants brought into the White House by Bush, Cheney, Rice, Rumsfeld, and Wolfowitz is called 'Iraq.'

People pretended not to see it but they couldn't help smelling it as Washington's living room mysteriously filled up with elephant droppings. The Iraqi and U.S. casualty figures increased daily. The U. S. Armed Forces bogged down with no end in sight. The American troops demoralized, poorly equipped and stretched to the limit. Intelligence false or falsified. The torture scandal, the runaway costs, the astronomical debts, the obscenely high profits of cronies like Halliburton, etc. The list could go on and on. The mass media and the Democrats held their noses in silence. A few audacious souls asked, 'What's that smell?' But, who within the Beltway, dared talk directly about getting rid of the elephant and stopping the ill-conceived, unwinnable, brutalizing war? It was safer to talk about private morality and God. In any case, the ex-

istence of the elephants is ‘unproven’ and zoology is ‘just a theory,’ and, for clinchers, there are no elephants in the Bible! Abusers tend to project or transfer their inner violence onto symbolic enemies in order to justify their tyranny. In the case of a social psychosis, an abusive government declares an endless war against abstract, invisible, and elusive enemies: ‘Communism,’ ‘Drugs,’ ‘Terrorism,’ ‘Evil.’ Frustrated, the failed strategists of the War on Iraq declared permanent war on the rest of the world. In order to intimidate their own citizens, their allies, and their adversaries, they officially authorized themselves to bring about ‘regime change’ in any nation which they might judge to be ‘friendly to terrorism’ or who might be part of an imaginary ‘Axis of Evil. It is sheer madness. According to Pew Research polls, at the time, the world was more afraid of Bush than of Osama bin Laden, but no leader, not even France’s Chirac, dared protest.

Citizens and Allies Intimidated

Washington's unilateral warmongering under Bush was not aimed at frightening only the nations labeled ‘rogue’ by the rogues in the White House; it was also aimed at our allies. Washington was bent on bullying and intimidating rival imperial powers such as France, Russia, and China, who dared question the American war in Iraq at the United Nations in 2002. Bush showed his contempt for U.S. allies by naming John Bolton, a sworn enemy of the United Nations, as his U. N. ambassador, and in appointing the right-wing ideologue, Paul Wolfowitz, the architect of the War in Iraq, to head the World Bank.¹⁰⁶ Formerly in charge of the reconstruction of Iraq (where he fixed nothing and privatized almost everything), Wolfowitz would now be managing the development of the Third World. A scandal? No allied government dared challenge these imperial nominations, which were nevertheless a direct slap in the face from Bush. Like the Democrats in Congress, America’s allies were frightened into submission. Wolfowitz was a monster, yet German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and Hillary Clinton both reacted to the scan-

¹⁰⁶ Formerly Deputy Secretary of Defense, this Bush protégé not long ago expressed utter contempt for the ‘Old Europe.’ It is ‘Wolfie’ who declared in 2002 that the Iraqis would welcome the Americans ‘with flowers’ and that the costs of reconstruction would be ‘covered by revenues from Iraqi oil.’

dalous nomination by singing his praises. Domestically, =this bully of a President set in motion a police state in which civil liberties were wrested away. The right to assemble and protest existing only in designated, wire-enclosed 'Free Speech Areas' where no one can see or hear the protesters. The abusive police beating and arrest of non-violent demonstrators routine. With the Patriot Act, even individual citizens were no longer protected from government abuse. The Executive Branch unilaterally able to designate any citizen or non-citizen ('alien') as a suspect in order to spy on, imprison, secretly detain, even torture such individuals - without answering to any court or public tribunal, indeed without revealing the suspects' names. In order to prevent any recourse to justice, Bush named as Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, the infamous author of the executive memorandum authorizing torture at Guantanamo and at Abu Ghraib. 'The White House now has its own Gulag' wrote Maureen Dowd.¹⁰⁷ In fact, the United States, whose prisons are overflowing with more than 2 million detainees, surpasses both Russia and China as a prison society.

The Ideological Bunker



Politically, the occupants of the White House under Bush were more and more isolated in the ideological bunker of their 'neo-conservatism.' With no tolerance for contradiction or complexity — even on the part of their own intelligence agencies, they demanded (and rewarded) blind loyalty above all other qualities. Thus, after a presidential commission of inquest on intelligence stated that the reasons given for the war in Iraq were 'completely erroneous,'¹⁰⁸ the architects of the war, Rice and Wolfowitz, were given promotions; moderates were dismissed (Colin Powell), and the critics hounded and persecuted.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ *New York Times*, March 18, 2005.

¹⁰⁸ 'Dead Wrong' See the *International Herald Tribune* of April 1, 2005.

¹⁰⁹ Apparently, the White House even went as far as to reveal the name of Valerie Plame, a secret agent of the CIA in order to get even with her husband, Joseph Wilson, an ex-ambassador, who had unmasked the lie about Iraqi purchases of nuclear materials in Africa.

The new Masters of the Universe were, like Bush himself, uncomfortable with complexity, with little curiosity about those around them. Many of them provincial, more or less lacking in culture and foreign language skills, who barely spoke proper English and who had little or no foreign experience outside of the business world or American university contacts. The more cosmopolitan Colin Powell, whom they ridiculed, was their diplomatic cover. until they no longer needed him. They chose a simpler solution than diplomacy: naked force.

Outside of the United States, true allies were not the rival capitalist democracies, but reactionary dictatorships protecting their investments and to whom they sold weaponry at a very high profit. Tyranny is reassuring to right-wingers in power. Democracy, with its complexity is threatening. Bush, having looked into the ice-blue eyes of Russia's Czar Vladimir Putin, dubbed him 'my friend Vladimir.' Let us recall that Vice President Cheney was CEO of war-profitteering corporation Halliburton, and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld sold weapons to Saddam, with whom he was notoriously photographed 'shaking hands' at the time of the Iran-Iraq war; that Osama bin Laden's Islamic crusade was originally financed by the U.S.; that Washington supports foreign tyrants who terrorize the multitudes of poor people in their native lands. These are the fierce guard-dogs



who protect U.S. interests, but who also frighten their masters. They have a tendency to turn on them and bite, as both Saddam and bin Laden certainly did. Indeed, the only 'link' between those two mass murderers is that they both received subsidies from the CIA. The Masters of Washington instinctively preferred to align themselves with the Islamist Pakistani military dictatorship (God-

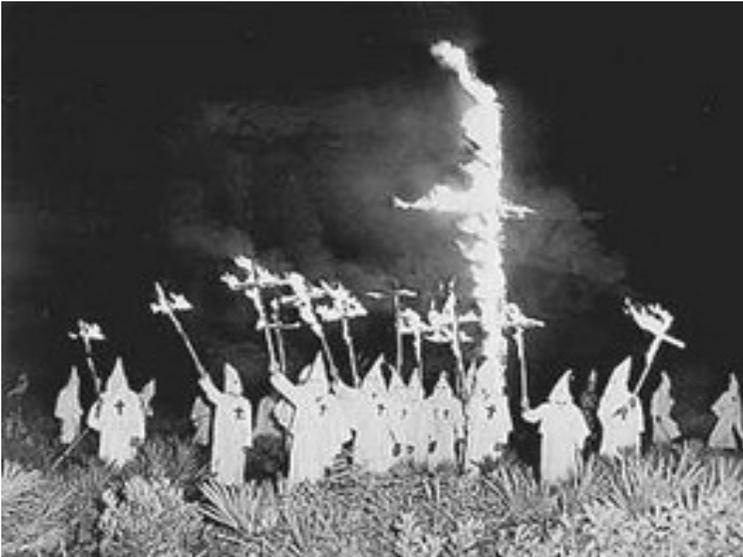
Donald Rumsfeld visited Iraq in 1983 on behalf of the Bechtel corporation, seeking to build an oil pipeline from Iraq to the Gulf of Aqaba via Jordan. Here the former (and soon-to-be, again) U.S. Secretary of Defense shakes the hand of Saddam Hussein, who was being funded by the U.S. at the time to wage war with Iran and to seal the trade agreements between the U.S. and Iraq.

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father of the Taliban and provider of nuclear secrets to North Korea) than to the capitalist democracy India (seen since Nehru's neutralist days as soft, unstable, and pro-communist).¹¹⁰

The Religious Right

Returning now to the example of the campaign to 'Save' Terry Schiavo, we are able to contextualize it as the latest skir-



ish in an ongoing battle against rational thought. Fundamentalist preachers and politicians attempted to exploit the human drama in Florida by instigating a wave of religious hysteria in the name of the right to 'life' — however artificial and vegetative. Heading up the campaign was George W. Bush himself (who claims to have been 'personally saved' by Jesus Christ), followed by his brother Jeb Bush, the Governor of Florida, who had been meddling in the Schiavo case for years. These two Christian knights were backed up by the Republican leaders of Congress and the millionaire televangelists, with the complicity of the mass

¹¹⁰ In the same way, they support right-wing paramilitary narco-terrorists in Colombia and turn their backs on the labor government of Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva in Brazil, whose policy is nonetheless perfectly compatible with U.S. neo-liberalism.

media and of congressional Democrats who voted for special legislation to 'save' the brain-dead woman.¹¹¹

Nonetheless, this noisy campaign to bamboozle the American people eventually flopped! The little old Florida county judge made his decision on the evidence, and the public refused to be fooled, hoodwinked or deceived. As Abraham Lincoln put it, 'You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all the people some of the time, but you can't fool all of the people all of the time.' According to the March 23 CBS poll, 82% of Americans were on principle opposed to these politicians' and preachers' extra-legal interventions, and 74% saw them as nothing more than opportunistic political ploys. Thus the campaign of religious hysteria unleashed by the government was blocked by the rationality of the American people. Nonetheless, 80% to 90% of Americans see themselves as religious and are affiliated with a church, synagogue, or mosque. How does one explain this paradox?

To be sure, the shameless abusers in power in America have harnessed religion as their face-saving ideology, and it would be difficult to exaggerate the influence on American society of right-wing religious sects and the conservative Catholic hierarchy. With millionaire backers and millions of followers, they constitute wealthy and powerful lobbies which are increasingly able to censor personal morals and impose their reactionary ideology by intervening aggressively in the political, sexual, and even scientific life of the nation. This religious smokescreen allows the government of the super-wealthy to evade social issues (*i.e.* class issues) by replacing them with 'moral' ones. Indeed, European readers have a hard time grasping that the term 'social issues' in American media parlance no longer designates traditional social questions such as poverty, unemployment, poor housing and delinquency but rather personal moral issues such as abortion and gay marriage.

The Religious Right in the US is extremely media savvy. Christian broadcasters pioneered the use of radio, T.V. and the In-

¹¹¹ Not to mention help from another living-dead celebrity, Karol Wojtyla, the grand ayatollah of an international sect which proclaims itself 'Holy, Apostolic, Roman, and Catholic?' His Holiness also intervened to 'save' Schiavo before himself being mercifully permitted to die. Nonetheless, Wojtyla's not-unexpected demise unleashed a wave of equally putrescent religiosity in Europe, where his funeral was staged as a media orgy of unwholesome false piety.

ternet to spread their ideas and consolidate their political base. Back in the 1930s, Father James Coughlin, a populist Roman Catholic, was the principal spokesman for fascism in the U.S. His weekly half-hour broadcasts had a big audience, but he remained marginal — especially after he was silenced by the hierarchy shortly before the US entered WWII. Today hate-mongering televangelists like Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell (who memorably described 9/11 as God's punishment on the U.S. for tolerating gays) have their own daily TV shows and routinely appear as guests on other networks and as advisors to Presidents and politicians. The fundamentalists have also created alternative cultures, with their own radio networks playing Christian Rock. In the literary field, a series of apocalyptic novels called *Left Behind* has been topping the best-seller lists in the US — a major publishing phenomenon generating films and spin-offs. The *Left Behind* novels recount the adventures of a group of evangelical Christians trapped on Earth — having missed the first cut for Heaven on Judgment Day. They may still be saved, but first they must face the rise of the Antichrist, plus plagues, wars, earthquakes and the final battle of Armageddon (*Left Behind* Vol. 11). This will occur when the Jews re-conquer the biblical Holy Land. These novels have a born-again Christian audience of forty millions linked by talk radio and fan clubs, where current events are interpreted in terms of the Apocalypse scenario allegedly derived from the Bible. The series' author, Tim LaHaye, is a right-wing militant who, with televangelist Jerry Falwell, co-founded a powerful lobby, the Moral Majority.



Taken up by fundamentalist sects and certain Republicans close to Bush, LaHaye's hallucinatory scenario serves as rationalization for the government's policies. The enemy is at the gates. The 'clash of civilizations' between American democracy and politicized Islam may pass for conventional wisdom in Washington, but it looks more like a clash of fundamentalisms to us over here in Europe. Indeed, the politicized Christianity of the Bushies and the Zionist Judaism of Sharon are a match for the politicized Islam of the Ayatollahs... Which makes for more 'strange bedfellows.' With regard to Mid-East policy, the traditionally anti-Semitic Christian Right now supports the Jewish State. Formerly, the Christian Knights of the Ku Klux Klan lynched Blacks and Jews without distinction and with equal fervor. Today, they are allied to the Zionist lobby and the oil lobby in Congress, while Senator Lieberman openly associates with fundamentalist Christian sects. According to their common religio-political scenario, Israel will vanquish the Arab-Islamic Anti-Christ while Bush and his oil-rich clique grab the Evil One's oil reserves. Concerning the environment, the neo-liberal Christian Republicans apply the same kind of teleo-'logic:' It is pointless to preserve our heritage of nature's wealth and beauty, since the End of the World is nigh. Thus, our pious politicians hand over the national forests for clear-cutting to enrich their friends in the lumber industry, remove restrictions on pollution to enrich auto and coal industry billionaires, and seek to open up the vast untouched tundra of Alaska to the greed of the oil industry.

Southern Trees Bear Strange Fruit

There is no dearth of right-wing sects in the United States. We have a vast array of fundamentalist evangelical churches, reactionary Catholic bishops, Orthodox Jews, Southern Baptists, Mormons, Christian Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, apocalyptic survivalists, christo-nazi militias, you name it. These faithful comprise the shock troops of the billionaire regime in power in Washington. Most of these sects are steeped in a culture which originated in the Deep South and which today encompasses many working-class Whites, whose economic and social standing depends in part upon their superiority in relation to Blacks. Back in slavery times, plantation owners depended on this class of un-

educated, superstitious, and violent Whites to manage and suppress their slaves. This same class of bullies is glorified in Westerns chivalrously protecting the sacredness of White womanhood by lynching Blacks and practicing genocide on the 'Indians.' Today, our regime of predatory billionaires uses them to intimidate secular civil society and to silence its critics. And just as the majority of officers in the pre-Civil War U.S. Army came from the South (and joined the Confederate Army), so do today's professional officer corps. Ironically, right-wing poor Whites are often just as destitute as their Black neighbors, competing with them on the labor market at the bottom of the social ladder.

But racism allows them to sublimate their humiliation by identifying themselves with the masters — slave-owning plantation owners or billionaire capitalists — by projecting their shame on Blacks, whom they hold in contempt and terrorize more or less with impunity. And now we have Arabs ('towel-heads') to feel superior to. In Germany, the unemployed *lumpen* of the Nazi Party imagined themselves to be Supermen (*Übermenschen*) descended from a master race (*Herrenvolk*), and Hitler gave them the opportunity to take out their humiliation on Jews and other 'inferior' races. In Texas, where Governor Bush set a modern record for executions (88% of which were Blacks), Blacks and gays are still lynched. Christian fundamentalism is the ideological glue which holds this alliance between poor Whites and cynical or superstitious right-wing billionaires together.

An Intimidating Mass Party?

Viewed through the psychological paradigm of the dysfunctional family, these fundamentalists correspond to the children of a violent father who repress their own humiliation, fear and rage, only to project them on alien others. Wilhelm Reich, in his Marxist phase, had already analyzed this character type in his observations on mass psychology of fascism in Germany. Such children tend to embrace their own repression by internalizing the 'reality' of the abusive father, who is seen as representing rightful authority. It has been observed that battered sons tend to become aggressive and project their own fear and violence on those around them. All to keep their shameful secret within the family. Indeed, these children often see themselves as victims who are 'protect-

ing' themselves. Their character structure becomes rigid and their behavior becomes aggressive.¹¹² They make good policemen, good soldiers, good torturers and good terrorists. Such are the shock troops of the 'Republican Revolution.' They add a key fascist-type element to the increasingly repressive imperial regime of George W. Bush. Historically, it has been observed that Mussolini, Hitler, Stalin, Saddam Hussein, Khomeini and the rest depended on five indispensable elements in order to establish and maintain their totalitarian regimes:

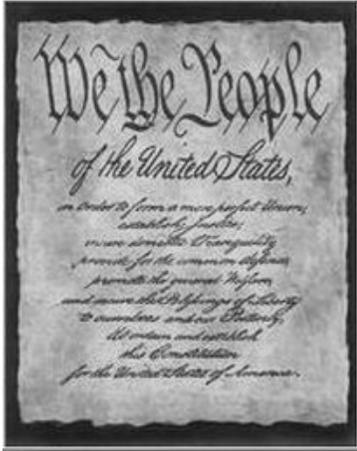
- An irrational ideology including xenophobic hysteria
- State power
- Control of the mass media
- A social-political crisis
- An intimidating Mass Party

The regime of George Bush was close to having all five of these elements at its disposal, and this is a very serious matter. For the first time in my life, I saw the spectre of an *imaginable* 'American fascism' — too often carelessly bandied about by hysterical Leftists in the past. Historically, native fascism, although threatening, lacked a mass following in the 1930s and was checked by a highly organized Left of militant trade-unions and political activists. In the 40s and 50s, the bi-partisan 'McCarthyite' witch-hunts — like their post-WWI predecessors — coincided with eras of relative peace, prosperity and high employment, offering no major crises for fascism to exploit. Today, with U.S. imperialism's hegemony nearing crisis, the Religious Right in power has behind it a whole network of fundamentalist shock-troops, many of them violent, allied with the gun-freaks of the NRA. Not, perhaps, a disciplined mass party, but quite an intimidating terror force which had long been tolerated and allowed to operate with near impunity. It is impossible to predict at what point U.S. society may step over the borderline from neurosis into psychosis. And although the U.S. still retains many checks and balances, the theoretical *possibility* — however remote — is indeed frightening.

¹¹² See *Violence*, by Thomas Gilligan, M.D. *op. cit.*

The Paradoxes of American Religion

Fortunately there are still some sane and healthy social forces in the United States, believers who are resisting the ideological offensive of the Christian Right. This is both because the country



is deeply divided, and because the religiosity of American society is itself paradoxical. Paradox number one: politics in the U.S. is traditionally secular. Let us recall that the Founding Fathers of the American Republic (Washington, Jefferson, Adams, Franklin, Paine) were 18th Century deists, if not outright atheists. The word 'God' does not appear in the U.S. Constitution, which makes provision for a separation of Church and State even stricter than the '*Laïcité*' practiced in France. Great readers of Mont-

esquieu, the Fathers' true religion was the strict separation of executive, legislative, and judiciary powers. Religion itself they considered useful to calm the poor and uneducated, as long as it was kept out of politics.

Thus, even today, the Constitutional independence of a Florida Appellate judge (something unheard of in centralized France) under pressure from the President and the Congress remains more sacred than the Bible. In fact, Bush, the imperial President, his brother, the Governor, and dozens of fundamentalist Congressmen, made fools of themselves by trying to defy the decision of the Florida Superior Court. Simultaneously, a recent ruling by the Supreme Court forbade the placing of a stone with the Ten Commandments in front of a courthouse by a fundamentalist judge in the State of Georgia.

Paradox number two: ecstatic, evangelical Christianity is not necessarily reactionary. Around 1830, Alexis de Tocqueville spoke of the great religiosity of American civil society (which he saw as part and parcel of its narrow-minded, hypocritical, and mercenary spirit). In the Southern states, Tocqueville heard the 'biblical proofs' of the inferiority of Blacks from the mouths of

his sanctimonious slave-owning hosts. But he did not see, that, a generation later, the Christian radicalism of Black Abolitionists like the former slave Sojourner Truth and the White Abolitionist John Brown would precipitate a Civil War. I

It is important not to confuse the religious fanaticism of the right-wing fundamentalist sects which form the electoral base of the Republican Party with the liberal parishioners and the liberal theology of the traditional Protestant churches - nor with the Black church and a growing number of socially-conscious White and Hispanic Evangelicals.

The Liberal Churches

The faithful among the Episcopalians, Congregationalists, African Methodists, Unitarian-Universalists, Quakers, Reformed Jews, and Liberation-theology Catholics, are generally anti-racist and increasingly accept women or even openly gay people as pastors. At the time of Martin Luther King and of the Vietnam War, many of these churches became involved in movements for peace, social justice, and racial equality. Throughout the next decades marked by anti-nuclear, human rights, and Central America solidarity movements, church people were very much present and visible in demonstrations and in non-violent direct action. They frequently lent their recreational rooms and parish halls to movement organizations for free, and they often served as meeting-places for anti-war and anti-racist organizations - including even the Marxist *groupuscules* I frequented. These people of faith and conscience still cling to their principles in a country mired in self-centered consumerism and the every-man-for-himself religion of individual salvation.

Other religions, while not strictly 'liberal,' have little in common politically with the Religious Right. For example, while morally conservative, the Jehovah's Witnesses' politically neutral stance means that they do not support right-wing agendas. Furthermore, their refusal to salute the flag or engage in warfare has legally, through the American court system, won any American citizen the right to do the same for reasons of conscience. Similarly, in wartime, the humanitarian-oriented Seventh-Day Adventists refuse to engage in active combat, preferring medical roles. Historically, both denominations have chosen to suffer for their beliefs:

in WWII, they were sent to Nazi concentration camps — especially Jehovah's Witnesses, who were assigned the purple triangle.

Liberal churches (like their right-wing counterparts) are also human communities which allow American families to shield themselves from the anonymity of a fragmented society. They serve as havens of solidarity and mutual aid against the harshness of American life under neo-liberal capitalism; they compensate

for the near total absence of what the French call '*le social*' and '*la vie associative*,' i.e. of a basic social safety net or even of regular social contact between people. Leftists and Europeans have trouble accepting the fact that the large majority of Americans practice their religion to some degree and should not be scorned for this. A great number of the 500,000 Americans who demonstrated against the Republican Convention in New



York and who voted in record numbers for the Democrats in 2004 came from the ranks of the liberal churches. As we have seen, 82% of those Americans expressed anger at their government's meddling to 'save' a brain-dead woman. As Karl Marx so eloquently put it, they represent 'the soul of a soulless world.'¹¹³

Democratic Enablers

It was the Republican Right, beginning in 1968 with Nixon's racist 'southern strategy,' who injected religion into U.S. politics by making a 'social issue' out of the 'rights of the unborn.' Alas, today's Democratic Party is playing out its role as 'enabler' by embracing and pandering to religious fundamentalism. Let us recall that in 2004 the Republican Party won its very slim (and con-

¹¹³ This is the near-forgotten phrase that completes Marx's famous remark about 'the opium of the people' in the *Manifesto*. In Marx's day, the rich could buy opium in pharmacies, like today's anti-depressants. The poor had only their faith.

testable) majority by playing the religion card. The Right ran a 'social issues' campaign designed to mobilize poor White fundamentalist voters against a domestic Axis of Evil composed of homosexual marriage, abortion, and moral laxity. Their tactic was to pin the label of godlessness on the traditionally liberal, secular, tolerant, and humanistic Democratic Party and to portray the Democrats as impotent in the face of Mexican and Muslim hordes preparing to invade the Homeland. In the wake of their marginal defeat, the mainstream Democrats have hypocritically gone over to the camp of the Religious Right instead of regrouping their mass base by defending the social-liberal values of civil society and citizenship.

Only a handful of Congressional Democrats voted against the special legislation to maintain the living death of Terry Schiavo. That same week, Hillary Clinton, a probable presidential candidate in 2008, revealed that she has 'always' engaged in daily prayer and declared that the Democrats should 'talk more about their faith.'¹¹⁴ Note that both Hilary Clinton, a self-proclaimed feminist, and her wayward husband are members of the Southern Baptist Convention, which, in its annual Council in 2000, re-affirmed the doctrine that according to the Bible: 'A woman should obey her husband.' This convenient hypocrisy also allows the billionaire-backed Democratic enablers to avoid talking about down-to-earth problems: like the American quagmire in Iraq, the Enron and Halliburton scandals, the torture scandal, the health care crisis, industrial pollution, the tumbling dollar, run-away factories, unemployment, economic insecurity and homeless families. Neither will they discuss tax exemptions for the ultra-rich, not to mention the astronomical national debt which is used to justify dismantling Social Security, education, and other social services like aid to indigent women and children. These are the painful realities lived by the abused children of our collective abusive parent: realities that must be denied if the abusers are to continue holding power and making money. They are the political, social and economic realities that both major billionaire parties need to avoid discussing, realities that must be subjected to the censoring mechanisms of *denial* of which pie-in-the-sky-when-you-die religion is one component. But not the only one.

¹¹⁴ *International Herald Tribune*, March 18, 2005

Decadence and Retrogression

After the November 2004 election, the reactionary Bush coalition apparently no longer felt it necessary to conceal its decadent racist roots or temper its hallucinatory and regressive worldview. How to explain this backward leap into decadence and regression in American society, once considered the model of democracy and progress that many Europeans sought to emulate? In the liberal 18th century, American capitalism stood for rationality, tolerance, and science against superstition and despotism. Today, in the neo-liberal 21st century, American capitalism is fighting *against* rationalism, tolerance, and science while promoting superstition and despotism. If the imperial rulers in Washington are behaving more like Nero or Caligula than like Wilson or Roosevelt, it is because the already decadent US Empire — though triumphant in 1918 and 1945 — is losing its grip, hollowed out by internal and external debt and sapped by increasing inequality.

As we have seen, the billionaire Right uses the masses of fundamentalist poor Whites — including violent and racist elements — both as an electoral base and as shock troops. But this profitable alliance between CEOs and fundamentalist preachers is not just a marriage of convenience. There is a profound affinity, a spiritual one, so to speak, in their perception of the spirit of the times and their view of the world. Indeed, the delirious scenario of a universal Apocalypse imagined by 2nd century Christians corresponds fairly accurately to the catastrophes with which people are faced at the beginning of the 21st: wars and widespread epidemics, climate shifts, the breakdown of the social fabric, famines, droughts, the destruction of cities, pervasive fear and dread, dissensions, violence. Now if God isn't the cause of these catastrophes, who is? People might be tempted to blame the government and the wealthy. Alas, the millions of fundamentalists who suffer from chronic unemployment and the failure of small businesses in the United States, suffer no such temptation. They have been taught to deal with the social crisis by retreating into the fantasy that they belong to a special tribe of Chosen Ones who will be saved. Provincial, ignorant, and xenophobic, terrified by the vision of a hostile world which they see in the sensationalistic mass media, they are haunted by the racist nightmare of an uprising of angry Blacks, swarming Mexicans — and now hordes of

Arab invaders envious of the ‘American way of life.’

Fortunately, Bushland is not the only America. There is another America, democratic, idealistic, and tolerant, for whom religion and personal morality are private matters and the rights of the individual are sacred. There are the four Americans in five who defended Terry Schiavo's right to die with dignity and understood the religious and governmental propaganda media blitz as opportunistic political propaganda.¹¹⁵ Today, these peaceful, tolerant Americans are on the defensive. They feel betrayed by the Democratic Party, born again as the Party of Prayer. Largely unrepresented in the media, dumbfounded by the government-and media-driven wave of religious psychosis, they are reeling under the blows and seeking new bearings. Meanwhile, the elephant of the Iraq war continues to infest the living-room. At the moment, the lead in denouncing this stinking, rotten war is being taken by the courageous dissident soldiers and their families. No one dares question their patriotism. Behind them, the U.S. anti-war movement is hopefully regrouping.¹¹⁶ In the 1960s, it succeeded in changing public opinion, provoking a crisis in the government, and forcing the withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam. Bush's imperial policy became quagmired in Iraq. The last word has not yet been spoken.¹¹⁷

What are they afraid of?

In the meantime, the regime in Washington is hardening up. Permanent war, censorship, campaigns of hysteria, special legislation, despotic allies, overflowing prisons, torture. One may well ask: Why there is so much repression in an opulent consumer society which seems to be stable and which rules the world as an uncontested military and economic superpower? The question is well put. Wasn't Freud's original discovery of the unconscious derived from his observations of the mechanisms of repression? In psychoanalysis as in politics, it is safe to assume that where there is

¹¹⁵ *The New York Times*, March 24, 2005.

¹¹⁶ Karen Houppert, ‘The New Force of Protest’ in *The Nation*, March 28, 2005.

¹¹⁷ *Update*, Nov. 2005. Since this was last published, we have seen gold-star mother Cindy Sheehan flush our playboy President Bush out of his Texas ranch and pursue him to Washington accompanied by other military families and a huge (300,000?) anti-war demonstration — totally ignored by the media.

smoke there is fire; where there is repression, there is an equally strong force which is repressed. Freud saw our repressed desires and passions 'returning' in dreams, accidents and dangerous fits of irrationality. Of what societal 'return of the repressed' are the occupants of the White House and their corporate cronies so afraid?

Let us keep in mind that Bush, Cheney, Wolfowitz, and Co. all experienced the 1960s as a traumatic event. First, they faced the risk of military service in Vietnam (which they all succeeded in avoiding) and then the deep shock of the American superpower's defeat by under-armed pajama-clad Vietnamese revolutionaries. At the same time, these ambitious young conservatives were thunderstruck at the unimaginable spectacle of American society torn apart by resistance to the war, by the Black revolt, by riots in the great cities, by college campuses occupied by rebellious students, by women asserting themselves, by the sexual and cultural revolutions. They heard the word 'revolution' repeated so much that they feared for their privileges and even for their own precious persons.¹¹⁸

Schizophrenic Masters of the Universe

Today, these 1960s Young Conservatives find themselves swept into power by their generation of conservative billionaires. On the one hand, they can only imagine themselves as the 'Masters of the Universe' free to do whatever they choose. And indeed, for the time being, they have been able to construct their own reality and force us to live in it. They have gotten away with enriching themselves, their cronies and the billionaires who finance their political campaigns by exempting them from taxes, giving them extravagant contracts and exorbitant subsidies. More, they have succeeded in making war *profitable* — as well as necessary to their mutual goal of controlling the resources of the planet — all the while passing on the overhead costs in blood and treasure to the working payroll-tax-payer.

The key economic notion of their neo-liberalism is a form of magical thinking in which the United States (and the consumer) can continue to borrow and spend indefinitely without ever hav-

¹¹⁸ By 1968, the idea of 'revolution' was so popular that advertisers recycled it. For example, the slogan 'Dodge Revolution' — which Black workers at the Dodge plants in Detroit famously parodied with their 'Dodge Revolutionary Movement.'

ing to pay back. Never mind that American predatory capitalism is no longer productive, that almost all ‘American’ cars and all of the televisions purchased by American consumers are imported, that the United States exports almost nothing anymore except for weapons, garbage, and the dumping of subsidized agricultural surpluses. In the magical thinking of speculators of 2005 (as with those of 1929), this economic boom should continue forever.¹¹⁹

But the new masters of the world are schizophrenic, because behind their arrogance, there is fear. They are afraid of the multitudes of people who teem about the Earth — all of the poor people, the aliens, the unfamiliar and incomprehensible races and cultures that they dominate and exploit. They are afraid of their envy and desires, of their latent anger, of their capacity to rebel once again as during the traumatic 1960s. For if the Left has forgotten the power of that revolutionary wave which shook many regimes in 1968, the privileged Right has not forgotten their fright — or the suddenly-revealed fragility of political power.¹²⁰ That is their nightmare. The more fearful they were, the more they strive to repress it and to escape into magical thinking.

However deluded by their own propaganda and wish-fulfillment, the predatory billionaires in power in Washington understand all too well that they are only a handful compared to the billions of human beings whom they are pillaging. That widening chasm separating them from humanity must surely make them dizzy, as it yawns ever deeper — recalling the terrifying volcanic eruptions of the 1960s. Indeed, with the Zapatista revolt in Chiapas, and with the sieges led by anti-capitalist demonstrators against the World Trade Organization in Seattle, Quebec City, Cancun, and Genoa, the whole world knows their dirty secrets. And now they hear from the four corners of the globe a new generation calling out: ‘The Earth is not for sale!’ and proclaiming ‘Another world is possible!’ A formidable return of the repressed.

¹¹⁹ Nonetheless, as a precaution against a major depression, the U.S. Congress is preparing legislation to prevent consumers from declaring personal bankruptcy but which lessens the liability of corporations in case of failure. If the bubble bursts, the CEOs will not lose their shirts, while their employees will have to work like slaves to pay off their credit cards and mortgages.

¹²⁰ Let us remember that President DeGaulle of France fled to Germany, during the May 1968 student-worker rebellion and that, a few months later, U.S. President Johnson ‘resigned’ by turning down the nomination to a near-guaranteed re-election.

Jimmy Carter's Imperialist Peace Prize [2002]¹²¹

Ex-President Jimmy Carter deserves the Nobel Peace Prize for 2002 for at least one reason: his name isn't George W. Bush. Also, because he finally expressed his tactical hesitations about the latter's mad march toward war in Iraq. But let's look behind the mask of this champion of humanitarianism who has been criss-crossing the globe for the twenty years that he's been out of work. If we examine the essence, his record as President in office, what do we find? An efficient and unscrupulous defender of the interests of the American Empire.



Carter's Background

As a career officer in the U.S. Navy, Carter served the Empire as the Commander of nuclear submarines armed with atomic missiles — the weapon of terror *par excellence*. They give the U.S. the capability of launching a surprise 'preventive' nuclear attack from the enemy's coastline. A few minutes later and their cities and military sites are incinerated. Nuclear subs, which can survive under the oceans during a victorious enemy attack, also provide Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) as a deterrent. After the Navy, Carter went into politics and got himself elected Governor of the State of Georgia, where the wages were among the lowest in the South, thanks to racism and union-busting.

¹²¹ Translated from the French, Jimmy Carter: "Prix Nobel de la paix imperialiste américaine," published in 2002 in *Herault du Jour*, Montpellier.

Carter Organizes the *Contras*

In 1979, the Nicaraguans succeeded in overthrowing the bloody dictatorship of the Somoza family, in power since 1934. The Marines under President Roosevelt had imposed the rule of Anastasio Somoza, the Chief of the infamous National Guards and murderer of the agrarian rebel, Sandino, after whom the rebels of 1979 named their revolution. At last, democracy triumphed after forty years of ferocious repression. The rebels were young, democratic, liberation Catholics, home-grown *Sandinistas*. None of them were even Communists. What did Carter do? He demanded that the bloody National Guard retain their power to maintain imperialist “order.” Then, the CIA, under Carter’s orders, regrouped exiled National Guards into a terrorist army and sent them back to Nicaragua to destroy the new government, which contemplated sharing out the lands of Somicista *émigrés*. They call this terrorist gang the *Contras*.

But Jimmy Carter was not a Neanderthal. He learned all about how the world runs while patrolling it as an officer of the Imperial American Navy, famous for its ‘gunboat diplomacy’ and its Marines — always at the ready when it comes to overthrowing foreign governments disloyal to U.S. banks and corporations. The peanut farmer became an internationalist. He participated in seminars at the Trilateral Commission, a semi-secret elite society presided by Nelson Rockefeller, the billionaire Governor of New York. Rockefeller had made several tries at running for President but always coming up short, he was appointed by President Gerald Ford to be Vice-President (the only time in U.S. History that neither the President nor the Vice-President had been elected to office). Rockefeller made Carter his *protégé*. This humble son of Dixie, with his peanut farm, could actually get elected to the White House, whereas the great representative of finance capital never could himself, for all his billions. Once elected, Carter proclaimed ‘human rights’ as the motto of his Presidency. But he remained faithful to his Wall Street patrons and defended their global interests around the world.

I saw them at work in Occotál and León [Nicaragua, in 1984]. They were systematically torturing and murdering nurses, agronomists, volunteer alphabetization teachers and cooperative leader. One day, a copy of an actual CIA manual teaching this method of

“targeted assassinations” was found on the body of a fallen *Contra*. (It was also known that the CIA had brought in former Argentinean torturers as their instructors). The CIA manual was explicitly designed to target humanitarian workers so as to kill the idealism of the Nicaraguan people, nullify their progress in health, literacy, agriculture, and undermine their democratic revolution. That was humanitarianism *à la Carter*.

Carter Supports the Salvadoran Death Squads

In El Salvador, Carter supported the government based on right-wing death-squads, *escuadros de la muerte*. He proclaims this government ‘democratic’ after a show-election held at bayonet-point. In 1980, this government massacred 10,000 peasants, trade unionists and resisters thanks to millions in military aid, munitions and advisors sent by Carter. Carter was unshaken by the murder of Oscar Romero, the Archbishop of San Salvador, in his Cathedral or the machine-gunning in the Cathedral Square of hundreds of his followers at his funeral. Only when four U.S. nuns were raped and murdered by Salvadoran soldiers was military aid suspended and replaced by ‘humanitarian’ aid to the government of assassins. More humanitarianism *à la Carter*.

Carter’s Humanitarianism in Asia

In South Korea in the Spring of 1980, workers and students organized huge demonstrations against the military dictatorship of Chun Doo Hwan. Carter’s Ambassador advised the South Korean generals to crack down on them. A thousand demonstrators were massacred on May 17 at Kwangju. Similarly, let us recall the *Khmer rouge* mass murderers in Cambodia with their pyramids of skulls. After they were defeated by the North Vietnamese, Carter intervened to offer them ‘humanitarian’ support (poor things!) to get them back on their feet and ready to fight. Carter also sent military aid to Indonesia, whose bloody military dictatorship had just brutally annexed East Timor, the newly independent former Dutch colony. They slaughtered thousands while Carter’s Ambassador organized a cover-up.

Carter in Afghanistan and Africa

And guess which U.S. President began the secret CIA operations in Afghanistan? Guess who first supported the fundamentalist *mujahedeen* against the pro-Soviet government and built the networks that eventually included Osama bin Laden? I admit that the Communist Afghani government, which educated women to be doctors, teachers, and technicians, didn't support 'human rights' *à la Carter*. So Carter was forced to impose a regime of raping, plundering, opium-trading, fundamentalist warlords over the Afghani women. And it was Carter again who, before Reagan and Bush, boycotted the UN Special Conferences organized in 1978 and 1980 to redress North-South inequalities and confront racism, thus sabotaging the hopes of a whole period of decolonialization. So, it was in the name of the humanitarian neo-liberalism promoted by Carter that they began to dismantle social services and public infrastructure in Africa, ushering in the period of famines and epidemics he now runs around trying to 'cure' through charitable works.

Carter and the Shah

In 1979, a popular revolution overthrew the dictatorship of the Shah of Iran and his terrible secret police, *Savak*. Remember that during its first year, this revolution remained in the hands of democratic moderates. It was a revolution of unionized oil workers, Air Force non-coms and technicians, Marxist students and young feminists as well as that of *bazaar* merchants and Ayatollahs organized behind Khomeini. Democracy was possible, a new edition of Prime Minister Mossadegh's democracy, overthrown by the CIA in 1953 to place the Shah and his torture regime back in power.

What did Carter do? First, he offered his Presidential protection to the Shah — the Rockefellers' close friend — in the name of 'humanitarianism.' Then, he rebuffed the overtures of the government of moderates, thus opening the doors to the fundamentalist dictatorship of Khomeini. But Carter also knew how to divide and rule. He sent arms to Saddam Hussein, dictator of Iraq and former CIA 'property,' who felt his own power threatened by the contagion of the Iranian revolution. Thanks to U.S. support, Saddam was able to continue the war against Iran for eight years,

with a total of about three million slaughtered.

The End of Carter's Presidency

But Carter's Iranian adventure destroyed his Presidency when Iranian *mujahedeen* made hostages of the personnel of the U.S. Embassy. For it was presidential candidate Ronald Reagan, who, more wily than Carter, made a secret deal with the Ayatollah to prolong the crisis until the 1980 election, which Reagan won easily. This tricky maneuver has gone down in history as Reagan's October Surprise. So, if Carter seemed laudable in expressing his reservations about Bush Jr.'s plan to make war on his poor ex-agent Saddam, he was doing so for purely tactical reasons. U.S. troops ran the risk of getting bogged down in Iraq, while terrorism spread out of it. Moreover, a war could destabilize the shaky world economy to the detriment of Wall Street interests. So by criticizing the policy of the Texan adventurer Sheriff George W. Bush, Commander Carter, Rockefeller's *gendarme*, remains faithful at his post.

Glory to Wall Street's humanitarian mercenary! Like his predecessor, the U.S. war criminal Kissinger, Carter well deserved the Nobel Prize for Imperial American Peace!

A Bit of Political History

American society has always been torn between its progressive, libertarian, democratic traditions on the one hand, and its decadent, violent, reactionary slave culture on the other — an idea we develop below in "Religion and Repression in the U.S." In terms of electoral politics, the majorities of the progressive Democratic Party of Wilson and Roosevelt were based upon a tacit alliance between immigrant workers and the educated middle class in the Northern cities, and the "Dixiecrats" of the apartheid Southern states where only Whites could vote and the Democrats ruled as the only political party on the local level. But in 1968 this coalition was shaken apart by Black rebellion and Democratic President Lyndon Johnson's support of civil rights and racial equality. In reaction, the Dixiecrats deserted to the conservative Republican Party, thus tipping the Southern vote to the reactionary presidency of Richard Nixon (Nixon's famous 'Southern

strategy'). This New Right now dominates the American political scene. Nixon, then Reagan, waged a cultural war against the gains of the 1960s (the right to abortion, sexual freedom, anti-racism), a crusade in which Bush II is the new Christian knight-in-shining-armor. But the two Democratic presidents, Carter and Clinton, (both former governors of Southern states) remained within this neo-liberal and warmongering framework, despite a lot of fancy words about "human rights."

As we have seen, Carter of Georgia turned a blind eye to the right-wing death-squad murder of the Archbishop of El Salvador, and it was Clinton of Arkansas who first bombed Afghanistan and the Sudan and set forth the new doctrine of American military unilateralism which Bush of Texas picked up to justify his war on Iraq. My French readers may not be aware that Carter's Georgia is in the running with Trent Lott's Mississippi, George W. Bush's Texas, and Bill Clinton's Arkansas for the Poverty Prize, the Ignorance Prize and the White Supremacist Prize. The reactionary powers of 'Dixie' — the geographically small region made up of former secessionist slave states — more or less dominates U.S. politics. Senators from Dixie still dominate the Federal Congress through control of the committee system, and more than half of U.S. Presidents, among them Johnson, Carter, Clinton, and Bush hail from Dixie. So do the majority of ranking officers in the U.S. military. Two other modern Presidents, Nixon and Reagan, came from Southern California (settled by white Southerners) and won office by appealing to the formerly Democratic South. Dixie still harbors powerful racist and Christian Right organizations, not to mention more or less fascist militias.

Contextualizing the ‘Threat’ of Radical Islamism

Note: In this fifteen-legged essay, I have done my non-specialist's best to make comprehensive sense of a complex ‘hot-button’ issue, taking care to give empirical evidence and historical examples based on variety of accessible sources. My goal is to situate the dangerous escalation of the conflict between Western democratic imperialism and radical Islam — the so-called War on Terror — in the various contexts of ideology, history, geopolitics and popular struggles for democracy in the Moslem world. The fifteen short ‘legs’ add up to a coherent argument, but each deals with a specific context and stands on its own.

Outline: We begin at home, deconstructing *Islamism in the Western Imagination* and situating its perceived ‘threat’ in the ideology of imperialism and the history of America's ‘*Urgent Threats*’ of *Yesteryear*. We next analyze the ideological struggle as *A Clash of Fundamentalisms*, plumb the desperation behind *Obama's Dangerous Escalations*, and give various explanations for the apparent irrationality of *The U.S.'s March of Folly in Middle-East*. We then turn to the Islamic world and look empirically at the history, geography and demographics of *Actually-existing Islamic Movements and States* among which *Moslem Disunity* is the salient feature. We then show the necessity of *Inventing Islamism* and recount *How the Islamic Virus Broke Out of the Imperialist Laboratory* and turned into an urgent threat challenging the West.

We next assess the threat of *Islamic Forces on European Soil*, deconstruct the *Islamic Trojan Horse Myth*, and locate the source of terrorism among *Radical Islamic States and Political Movements* in the Arab/Middle East. Looking historically at *The Vietnam Syndrome*, we theorize today's dangerous impasse in

terms of the contradiction of *Empire versus Democracy*, pose the question of clerico-fascism in Iran, Israel and the U.S., and ask, following the ancient Athenian historian Thucydides, if democracy and imperialism can co-exist. We conclude with *The Middle-East Problem: How to Become Part of the Solution*. Reject violence and join people-to-people solidarity networks with the women, trade-unionists and democrats fighting against the reactionary forces of both Islamism and capitalist imperialism.

‘Islamism’ in the Western Imagination

Under the headline ‘Appeasers,’ the Sunday book section in the N.Y. Times reviewed a book called *Surrender: Appeasing Islam, Sacrificing Freedom* by Bruce Bower.¹²² The Times’ critic, Stephen Pollard, began breathlessly: ‘There is no more important issue facing the West than Islamism, Islamofascism or — to use another label — radical Islam. And there is no more necessary precondition to countering that threat than understanding it, where it springs from, how it is expressed, and the ways in which it is spreading. But, before we do any of that, we have to agree that the threat exists.’

But does ‘the threat’ indeed exist? And is it really ‘more important’ than catastrophic climate change, proliferating WMDs, or the world economic crisis? If we sincerely wish to analyze the social forces which express themselves under the various banners of what Westerners have lumped together under the heading of ‘Radical Islamism,’ perhaps we should begin by deconstructing the concept and situating it in the context of the Orientalist ideology of Western colonialism/imperialism. And what better place to begin our study than America’s moderate, middlebrow *Sunday Times Book Review*, a generally good barometer of middle-of-the-road opinion in the U.S. and a publication which has reviewed one or more of the proliferating new books on the Islamic threat almost every week over the past decade?

Returning to the *Times*’ ‘Appeasers’ piece, the ‘insidious problem’ for Pollard is that “many liberals and others on the European left are making common cause with radical Islam and then brazenly and bizarrely denying both the existence of that

¹²² Stephen Pollard, “The Appeasers” *N.Y. Times Book Review*, July 26, 2009, p. 12.

alliance and in fact the existence of any Islamic threat whatsoever.” Bower’s book *Surrender: Appeasing Islam, Sacrificing Freedom* supports Pollard’s thesis by rounding up the usual suspects: the insidiously charming Islamic theologian Tariq Ramadan, the left-wing former Mayor of London Ken Livingston, and the unnamed ‘Western leaders’ who allegedly failed to defend the publisher of the anti-Moslem Danish cartoons. The *Times*’ Pollard concludes somewhat hysterically: ‘Bower is unquestionably correct, and that fact is quite simply terrifying.’

Terrifying? To be sure, the silver-tongued scholar Ramadan, does send different messages to the Faithful and to the kaffirs (Arabic for ‘goyim’), and Livingston was an unprincipled, opportunistic Left politician looking for votes among England’s fast-growing Moslem population (along with the British Socialist Workers’ Party and its erstwhile ally Respect). But this is old news. Neither has much influence any more, and although ‘insidious,’ they were hardly ‘terrifying.’ On the other hand, equating Western leaders’ alleged ‘appeasement’ of political Islam with the appeasement of Hitler in the 1930s is sheer hysterical (and historical) lunacy, as those of us who actually live in Europe can testify. Far from ‘appeasing’ Islam, the Swiss, after a virulently anti-Moslem right-wing campaign, voted by referendum to ban the construction of minarets. Meanwhile, the right-wing Sarkozy government orchestrated a summit-level discussion of ‘French national identity’ while simultaneously demonizing and expelling non-white immigrants including long-time residents and human rights activists. Nor is there a dearth of French anti-Moslem books denouncing the ‘appeasement’ of Islamism with titles like *Conquering the West: the Secret Project of the Islamists* and *France Infected with Islamism: Terrorist Threats within the Hexagon*.¹²³ In any case, writers representing the ‘Appeasers’ school of anti-Islamism (not to mention the *Times*’ fact-checkers) can hardly be unaware that for at least a decade the U.S. and Britain (not to mention Israel) have been systematically boycotting,

¹²³ Sylvain Besson, *La Conquête de l'occident: Le projet secret des islamistes* (Paris, 2005), cited in Patrick Haenni and Samar Amghar, "Un spectre hante l'Europe: Le mythe renaissant de l'islam conquérant," ("A specter is haunting Europe: the rebirth of the Myth of Islam the Conquerer") *Monde diplomatique*, Jan. 2010. See also Mohamed Sifaoui, *La France malade de l'islamisme: Menaces terroristes sur l'Hexagone* (Paris, 2002).

bombing, invading Islamic countries and assassinating Islamic leaders. They call that ‘Appeasement?’ The ongoing wars against Afghanistan and Iraq have already lasted much longer than WWII, with concomitant waste of lives and treasure, and no end in sight. Can Messrs. Pollard, Bower and the Book Review editors who commissioned, headlined, and ran this hysterical propaganda piece really believe that the feeble, phoney left-liberal voices of Ramadan, Livingston and the like threaten to prevail over negative stereotypes with which CNN, Fox News, the *N.Y. Times* and Western leaders have been bombarding us for years as justification for hugely expensive oil-wars in the Middle-East? What we read in their texts is not empirical argument but ideology which, like religion itself, is supremely indifferent to fact and logic. It is easy for us Westerners to laugh at the Ayatollahs’ depiction of dear old Uncle Sam as the ‘Great Satan,’ but harder to see the ideological demonization of Moslems and Arabs in our own ‘liberal’ media.

‘Urgent Threats’ of Yesteryear

To understand the lunacy of the problematic Islamic ‘threat’ currently being hyped in mainstream U.S. political discourse, we need to place the concept in the historical context of Western, particularly U.S. imperialism’s, collective self-image. White American identity has, from the beginning, defined itself in opposition — a dangerous, threatening, darker ‘other’ who had to be conquered, subdued, and/or exterminated: in the first instance the ‘savages’ native to the Americas. Thus European invaders projected their own inner savagery on the ‘Indians’ in order to brutally displace them in the name of Civilization (as Richard Slotkin demonstrated in his seminal *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier* and subsequent works). After the ‘Indians’ were deprived of their lands and nearly wiped out, the laboring classes replaced them as American capitalism’s terror-inspiring ‘other.’ This ‘threat’ was incarnated in two fear-inspiring images: the potent Negro slave ready to rape his mistress and slit his master’s throat in the South, and in the North, the specter of bloody conspiracies among the immigrant workers, whether Irish (‘Molly Maguires’), Italian (‘anarchist bomb throwers’), Jewish (‘subversive communists conspirators’)

or just foreign-born ('disloyal'). These demonizing images of the 'other' were useful for ruling class divide-and-rule domination, pitting native workers against immigrants, and black bondsmen against free white labor — to the extent that even today labor in Dixie remains largely non-unionized under anti-labor 'right to work' laws.

The Red Scare of 1919 mobilized these stereotypes to justify government roundups (the Palmer Raids) more violent than the Cold War witch hunts or the post-9/11 anti-terrorist campaign. At the end of WWI, returning black and immigrant vets were full of democratic aspirations. The high hopes inspired by Wilson's 'self-determination of peoples,' and ignited by the 1917 Russian Revolution were met with union-busting, mass arrests and massacres of strikers, deportations of the foreign-born, lynchings and race-riots against 'Negroes.' A nation-wide campaign of Nazi-type raids on Socialists, Communists and Wobblies was organized, and the FBI, vigilantes and local police sacked offices, smashed presses, and beat and arrested leaders. It wasn't until the Depression of the Thirties that the American Left came back to life. Likewise, in the Forties, after WWII had once again raised democratic aspirations, the FBI, HUAC and the Truman Administration came up with the mass anti-Communist hysteria of the McCarthyite 'witch-hunts' — investigations aimed at hounding alleged Communists and subversives out of their government jobs, purging radicals from the unions, the schools, the entertainment industry, and the universities, thus silencing any political debate about foreign policy — henceforth considered 'treasonable.' Americans were forced to incriminate themselves and rat on their associates through compulsory Loyalty Oaths taken under pain of Perjury. To be sure, there were actually-existing Communists in the U.S., and yes, some of them did agree to collect information for the Russians — albeit at a time when the Soviets were U.S. allies against Hitler. But the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) had at most 180,000 members at its height, and, by the late '50s, it had dwindled to the point where it was said that the dues payments of FBI infiltrators kept the Party treasury afloat.

Back when I was coming of age in the Fifties, the word 'Communist' was the functional equivalent of 'terrorist' today in the world outside our Left-wing family circle. The sensational Rosenberg atom-spy trial was the Fifties' '9/11 wake up call,'

alerting Americans to the ‘urgent threat’ of us Commies.¹²⁴ After the 1989 collapse of Russian bureaucratic state-capitalism parading as ‘Communism’ and with ‘Red’ China born again as a U.S. capitalist trading partner, a new demon was needed to deflect from unrest over increasing economic and social inequality in the U.S. and around the world. The War on Drugs worked for a while. It proved useful for sending U.S. military advisors and equipment abroad to prop up pro-U.S. governments in Latin America while profitably filling and expanding the U.S. private prison system with unwilling customers from among unemployed Black and Hispanic youth. But after Osama bin Laden and his cohorts pulled off the attacks of September 11, 2001, the War on Terror took precedence and ‘Radical Islam’ was suddenly discovered as the major threat to Western Civilization. This distant threat has proven a sufficient ideological pretext for curtailing democratic freedoms and creating a security state at home while using torture, terror bombing and outright invasion in pursuit of insanely unrealistic hegemonic foreign policy goals in the oil-rich Middle East.

A Clash of Fundamentalisms

Historically, the Islamic ‘threat’ fits into an established tradition of hysterical propaganda campaigns — whether against ‘Indians,’ ‘Negroes’ or ‘Reds’ — which distort and exaggerate real and potential challenges to U.S. capitalism /imperialism so as to justify violence, state terror, and wars of plunder. If the truth is ‘the first casualty’ in war, then democracy is the second.

Although framed by the U.S. in terms of defending (or spreading) ‘democracy,’ today’s East-West conflict turns out to be not so much a Clash of Civilizations as an ideological Clash of

¹²⁴ I well remember the electrocution in June 1953 of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, parents of two boys more or less my age, which took place in Ossining, N.Y., near my boyhood home. It took several jolts to kill the mother, Ethel, who looked like my aunt, the lights browned out in some places, and the kids in school were telling “frying” jokes. At thirteen, I was old enough to know that the Communist couple had not been given a fair trial, that the intelligence work Julius was accused of carrying out for Russia took place during WWII when the Soviets were our allies, and that there was no such thing as “the secret” of the A-bomb that could justify a death sentence.

Fundamentalisms.¹²⁵ While hyping the threat of 'Islamic Fundamentalism,' U.S. media and politicians conveniently fail to point out that their own outlook is based on the same kind of reactionary hard-shell fundamentalism as 'Political Islamism.' Let's call it 'Political Christianity.' The Christian right in the U.S. aspires to the same kind of theocratic domination over government and peoples' private lives as the Ayatollahs. Its members speak with the same hysterical absolutist certainty, believe the ends justify the means, and are willing to resort to violent means — like murdering abortion-providers and bombing women's health centers. Both fundamentalisms offer identity and community to the disaffected masses while silencing opposition and bullying the hesitant through fear.

The Zionists and the Jewish Religious Right are equally ruthless, and recently the U.S. Christian right has overcome its traditional anti-Semitism to form a reactionary pro-Israel, pro-U.S. alliance with right-wing, pro-Zionist Jewish organizations and leaders like the notoriously Jewish Senator Lieberman — much to the dismay of the vast majority of liberal, secular U.S. Jews. In this upside-down ideological world, the U.S. domestic War on Terror seems to be aimed exclusively at hunting largely imaginary conspiracies among American Moslems and peace activists — to the exclusion of actually-existing white racist militias and violent right-wing Christian networks which operate with impunity. Thus, when the domestic terrorist Tim McVeigh, an avowed member of a network of right-wing Christian militias, bombed the Oklahoma City Federal building killing 168 people and seriously injuring 800 more, there was no broad conspiracy investigation or round up of suspects. Today, Christian anti-Choice organizations openly incite violence by posting "Wanted" posters of 'Murderers' (abortion providers) on the Internet, including the names and addresses of their families. The same groups regularly terrorize women's health clinics harassing personnel and prospective clients, all with impunity. And no one spoke of 'terrorist

¹²⁵ See Tariq Ali, *The Clash of Fundamentalisms (Crusades, Jihads and Modernity)*, Verso 2002. In my opinion, given the retrogression of both the West and Islam to rape, torture, extermination of civilians and contempt for the rule of law or public opinion, "The Clash of Barbarisms" would be an even more appropriate description. As for "Western Civilization," I agree with Gandhi: "It would be a good idea."

conspiracies' when the saintly Dr. Tiller was gunned down in his church on a Sunday by a member of one of these fanatical anti-abortion organizations.

Under George Bush, the 'threat of Islamism' myth was evoked to justify the U.S.'s routine, brazen use of 'secret' torture on captured Moslems. Of course, this torture was 'secret' only to the U.S. media and public, not to the victims, their families and the rest of the world. Arabic broadcasters like *Al Jazeera* gave U.S. torture-camps a big play all over the Moslem world. Machiavelli writes that cruelty is only useful as a deterrent to enemies if it is well-publicized. If letting potential 'enemy combatants' know the fate awaiting them, if captured by the Americans, was the goal of the U.S. torture program, the 'intelligence' community achieved it at the price of alienating a billion Moslems and eradicating any residual pro-American feelings dating from 9/11/01. The irony is that such 'enhanced interrogation' methods have proven notoriously useless for actual intelligence gathering, since people will say anything under torture.

Yet the torturers and their superiors in the Bush Administration who sullied America's reputation and who violated U.S. and international law remain unpunished. The new President was made to understand that the U.S. may need these guys in the future and so his Administration decided not to 'look backward' only forward! Forward to what? More useless 'intelligence?' Further degradation of the image of progressive, liberal, Western democratic values exemplified by kidnappings, torture chambers and brutal concentration camps like Abu Ghraib? As I shall argue in the next piece, such extreme methods are evidence of desperation. With the oil-wars escalating and with U.S. and British voters less and less enthusiastic about paying for them, there was a need to ratchet up the pitch of anti-Moslem hysteria so as to 'stay the course' in Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and now Pakistan and Yemen. Given this ideological drive, it goes without saying that knowledge of the history, politics, sociology, and even the languages of these threatening 'others' would only get in the way. In fact, the CIA and State Department actually dismissed their staff of Arabic-language translators years ago, when 'human intelligence' was replaced by spy satellites which capture megabytes of important information in Arabic which the Americans can't read. Who said: 'Those whom the gods would destroy, they first make blind'? Are

not ideological constructions like 'terrorism' the blinders rulers put over their own eyes and the eyes of their subjects when they embark on a fatal course of hubris?

Obama's Dangerous Escalations

Obama's decision to radically escalate the wars he was ostensibly elected to terminate is a measure of U.S. imperialism's desperation. It's not just that our erstwhile peace candidate and Nobel peace laureate is withdrawing exhausted U.S. troops from the frying pan of Iraq only to transfer them into the fire of Afghanistan, although that itself was an act of desperation. Many of these 'volunteer' soldiers and reservists, shattered after several devastating tours of duty in Iraq, are being forced to remain in the service years beyond their contracts. Blackwater and other mercenaries now outnumber U.S. troops in Afghanistan with more escalation in sight.

A new and highly dangerous stage was reached in January 2009 when Mr. Obama officially extended the 'anti-terror' oil-war into unstable, corrupt, nuclear-armed Pakistan. And, if that weren't enough, as our 2009 Xmas present from the CIA, we received a new war in Yemen. Thus, the new President rounded out his first year in office, with drone attacks on Pakistani civilians. Obama's radical escalation into Pakistan's nuclear danger-zone is arguably even more irrational than Bush II's Iraq occupation or Johnson's Vietnam escalations. Yet this new folly was accepted as a matter of course, without any serious discussion, by the U.S. mainstream media and politicians of both parties — the same way they accepted Bush's Saddam=Osama and WMDs lies, and Lyndon Johnson's 'Bay of Tonkin Incidents.'

Today, after these gross deceptions, dangerously aggressive irrational policies can no longer be sold on rational political grounds to the wary, anti-war silent majorities in the U.S and Britain. The enemy must be demonized and the threat must be magnified in an atmosphere of a hysterical, irrational Islamophobic and anti-Arab propaganda. Under Bush II, we had an explicit Clash of Fundamentalisms, Judeo-Christian versus Islamic. Yet, paradoxically, it was born-again Bush who finally signed off on U.S. withdrawal from Iraq just before slinking out of office, leaving his successor a free hand — one hoped to make peace, but in the

event to escalate! Was a deal with the Pentagon made quietly behind the scenes during Obama's 'seamless transition?' In any case, we quickly learned the truth when Obama launched a Predator attack on Pakistan during his first week in office, 'bleeding' himself as Commander-in Chief and setting a hawkish precedent for his Administration. Thanks to this 'seamless transition,' Obama gave new political legitimacy to the hawks in the CIA and the Pentagon — the very people who got Iraq wrong in the first place.

And now, in the wake of the botched Xmas Day bomb attack, another 'secret' U.S. war has come to the surface in Yemen, a strategic country divided by decades of civil war, with rival factions armed by Saudi Arabia, Russia and the United States. On January 7, 2010, Yemen's Deputy Prime Minister Rashad al-Alami reported declared, 'If there is direct intervention by the United States, it will strengthen al-Qaeda. We cannot accept any foreign troops on Yemeni territory.' Time for 'regime change' in Yemen? Yet how many Vietnamese puppet presidents did the U.S. remove or assassinate before finally withdrawing, humiliated by defeat, abandoning its Vietnamese allies to their fates? The Obama Administration's *fuite en avant* Afghan offensive — escalating a losing Mideast campaign into dangerous new territory — makes about as much sense as sticking one's member into a beehive.

Yet Mr. Obama is no gross fool, unlike his predecessor. The President is socially aware enough to know that every time he orders another CIA-Blackwater Predator drone to drop out of the sky over Pakistan and blow up a village or family of traditionally war-like Pashtuns, ten or a hundred new dedicated 'enemy combatants' rise from the ashes swearing (by Allah, who else?) eternal vengeance on the West. The President has enough imagination to visualize the consequences, yet like King Cadmus in the Greek myth, Obama is 'sowing dragons' teeth' and 'reaping armed warriors' — myriads of whom spring up from the soil for each cluster-bomb sown. Militant Islamic groups like the Taliban stand ready and eager to inspire and direct such potential martyrs. Angry poor men, particularly warriors from 'honor cultures,' are always eager to listen to ministers of religions that sanctify Holy War. In any case, the fierce tribes who inhabit Afghanistan and West Pakistan have never been conquered, having defeated invasions by Darius the Persian, Alexander the Great, the British and

the Soviet Russian empires. Are they likely to be conquered by NATO under Obomber the First?

The U.S. March of Folly in the Middle-East

Does desperation alone account for reckless escalation of U.S. military aggression in the Middle East for which the 'threat' of an aggressive Islamism provides the rationalization? To be sure, the worsening world economic crisis directly conditions the international context, aggravating U.S. capital's frantic rush to control the world's remaining oil reserves. America's willingness to use excessive force and go it alone also serves to intimidate would-be imperialist rivals like China, Russia and France, so as to retain its lion's share. But it makes little geo-political sense for U.S. imperialism to have become so obsessively focussed on its Middle-Eastern crusade that it apparently lost sight of the main prize in its own back yard, Latin America. Thus Yanqui imperialism's oldest and most important sphere of influence has been quietly slipping out of Washington's grasp. North American capital now faces regional rivals like Brazil and heavy-duty competition from China. An expanding coalition of more or less democratic regimes backed by popular movements has shown itself determined to break free from U.S. economic and political hegemony. Indeed, the U.S. has only two reliable allies left in Latin America, Colombia and Mexico, and both are hopelessly corrupt semi-dictatorships bemired in bloody drug wars. This major setback for U.S. global interests is further proof of the irrationality of the ideologically-driven U.S. campaign against 'Islamism.' Another explanation for the U.S. government continuing blindly to pursue failed policies was put forward most recently by the Nobel prize-winning liberal economist Paul Krugman who explains that beginning in the 1970s, the enormous cost of political campaigns, the growing power of corporate lobbies, and the direct and overwhelming domination of big money over every aspect of government has made reform impossible. Today, the demands of individual special interests predominate over the collective national interest, even over those of U.S. capitalism taken as a whole. The government is thus reduced to the role of hired 'enforcer' for the coal, petroleum, arms, pharmaceutical, insurance, and banking industries in their frantic rush to accumulate short-

term profits. Although Krugman — who is a Keynesian, not a Marxist — doesn't go quite that far, he does conclude that this system of legal, quite open corruption, has led to a paralysis of the U.S. political system. The system is no longer able to change course or even to make token reforms to satisfy the aspirations of Obama's multi-class, multi-ethnic, heavily feminine, youthful and anti-war electorate. Within this corrupt system, the petroleum-military-industrial complex is by far the most powerful lobby and the one most deeply invested in continuation of that multi-billion-dollar boondoggle known as the crusade against radical Islamism — at whatever cost to the taxpayer and to U.S. long term political interests. Apparently Obama believes 'no man can serve two masters' and he has chosen to serve the money that paid for his campaign over serving the voters that elected him. A year after the popular groundswell that overcame American racism and swept the first African-heritage president in office, Barak Obama remains a vassal of the Pentagon and the lobbies, dependent on their favor. Trapped in the system, he has proven himself unwilling or unable to satisfy the vast popular expectations for peace (as well as for jobs and affordable health insurance) that got him elected. As his disillusioned, disappointed supporters decline into apathy, popular discontent gets channelled into support for the Right, only a year ago discredited by eight years of Bush. The domination of the Religious Right over American political system is yet another factor limiting U.S. imperialism's ability to correct its course. During the Bush years, it spoke directly through the drawl of the born-again Texan in charge. Since losing the White House, a headless Republican Party has now apparently been taken over by the hydra-headed Christian Right. Its deafening noise machine barks a crypto-racist message of hate through the halls of Congress and the media, harping on Obama's 'foreign birth certificate,' his 'forced-euthanasia communist healthcare plan,' his Arab middle name, his 'appeasement' of the Islamists. What should objectively be termed 'Political Christianity' (to balance 'Political Islamism') is arguably in an even stronger position under a Democratic President dedicated to 'bi-partisanism' who will predictably hold out his hand to the rabid, no-compromise Republicans and get his arm bit off. These economic and political pressures combine with ideological rigidity to make rational reform possible. Given this delusional and

self-defeating outlook, I can only conclude that the U.S. Establishment (dare I say 'Corporate Ruling Class?') and its noble-brow'd factotum Barack Hussein Obama are literally on the Road to Folly — a mental state defined as pursuing an irrational course without regard to the predictable consequences, refusing to listen to critics, and making the same mistakes again and again without drawing the lesson of past failures. The erudite military historian, Barbara Tuchman, studied five historical examples of such disastrous 'Pursuits of Policy Contrary to Self-Interest.' Her brilliant 1984 *March of Folly, From Troy to Vietnam* concludes with mad King George III's loss of his American colonies and (then) contemporary America caught in the Vietnam quagmire. To crown eight years of failure in Iraq and Afghanistan by destabilizing Pakistan and invading Yemen seems the height of folly, yet it is the (ideo)logical consequence of today's Clash of Fundamentalisms. 'Those whom the gods wish to destroy, they first make mad.' As we have seen, U.S. imperialism, deluded by its own ideology, has joined the March of Folly in Afghanistan/West Pakistan — following in the illustrious footsteps of other would-be conquerors including the Persian Emperor Darius I, Alexander the Great, the British Empire under Queen Victoria, and Brezhnev's Soviet Russian empire. All these great powers lost whole armies in the region before being driven out by the fiercely independent natives, as we have seen in previous articles. The U.S. Government, dominated by powerful lobbies whose special interests trump the national interest, appears unable to change its irrational course. American imperialism justifies its dangerous and self-defeating policies through ideological constructs rooted in America's long history of conquest, projecting white American aggression outward onto a series of threatening 'others' from the 'Indians' to the 'Commies' and most recently the 'urgent threat' of 'Islamism, Islamo-fascism or [...] radical Islam' (to quote the *Times* article with which we began our analysis). Having thus deconstructed and contextualized the contested concept of the Islamic 'threat,' we now have a more objective perspective from which to examine Islamism empirically, on the ground, as it were.

Actually-existing Islamic Movements and States

Here we must account for two distinct, but related geograph-

ical and political phenomena: 1) militant Islamic movements, parties and states in the Moslem Middle East/Arab world (ME/A, for short) and 2) Islamic fundamentalism among immigrant or immigrant-descended youth in Western countries — to whom Islamic radicalism appeals as expression of their alienation, humiliation, and need for cultural identity. Naturally, these two strands are intertwined. Radical Islamic states and movements in the ME/A seek to influence and recruit among the Moslem diaspora in the West; they weave international propaganda networks aimed at gaining cultural and political hegemony over communities of often indifferent or irreligious Moslem immigrants, where family, cultural and emotional ties with the homeland nonetheless remain strong. Such networks may also be used to recruit militants for combat and suicide attacks among the disaffected masses of unemployed youth in the ME/A world and the frustrated, humiliated, educated elites in both Europe and the Moslem countries.

Taken as a whole, these state and non-state actors form what has been described as a ‘nebulous,’ and the most striking thing about this nebulous is its lack of internal unity and coherence. To begin, the Islamic world with its 1.6 billion inhabitants (1/5 of the world population) is itself as various as the so-called ‘Christian-heritage’ world with its right-wing Evangelicals and its politicized Vatican at one extreme, and its vast un-churched European majority at the other. Similarly, Islam, as it is lived and practiced by millions of South and East Asians, has a much less significant political role than in the Middle East/Arab (ME/A) lands, where it has become the ideological expression of exacerbated nationalism and a vehicle to political power. And even within this geographical area, it is division — or rather violent schism — among Moslems that predominates over unity and coherence.

The 1200-year rivalry between Shiite and Sunnite factions of Islam — each with its alliances of states and insurgent groups — reminds me of the European inter-Christian religious civil wars between Catholics and Protestants, which continued through the 17th Century here in France and were bloodier and more destructive than the Christian versus Moslem Crusades of the Middle Ages. And apropos of the Crusades, the fact that the Christians were organized under the Popes in a united Catholic Europe, accounted for much of their success against the more

civilized Moslems who were divided, then, as now.¹²⁶ Indeed, since the 1980s, the Sunni-Shiite rivalry for dominance of the ummah (the global community of Islam) has intensified with new revolutionary Shiite Islamic Republic of Iran challenging the dominance of Sunni fundamentalism. The Sunni counter-attack is centered around the Moslem holy cities of Mecca and Median in the Islamic Monarchy of Saudi Arabia, where the Wahhabi clergy actually consider Shiites to be kaffirs ('infidels') and prefer the Americans.¹²⁷ Meanwhile, hundreds of millions of Moslems in South and East Asia practice traditional local forms of Islam with little regard to the bloody quarrels among Arabs and Iranians in faraway West Asia and North Africa.

More Moslem Disunity

Returning to the 'threat' of Radical Islam today, it is obvious that for a movement to be a serious threat to the imperialist West, it must be coherent and united, which is simply not the case here. A united militant Islamic ME/A world would indeed be a serious threat to the West; however, nothing like that is in the offing, with the result that 'Political Islam,' divided, remains weak and ineffectual. So much for the Clash of Civilizations' theories, based on ideology rather than concrete history. To be sure, Islamicist terror is a very serious daily threat to its principle victims, Moslem civilians in the ME/A lands, as well as to its more occasional victims, civilians in Western cities. But the actually existing Islamisms within the divided Moslem world represent no serious threat to U.S./Western hegemony, only obstacles to its control of the extraction and transit of petroleum. The most dramatic evidence of continuing Moslem impotence is the freedom and impunity with which Israel was able to invade, first, southern Lebanon in 2006,

¹²⁶ Cf. Amin Malouf, *The Crusades through Moslem Eyes*. In fact, there was internal division on both sides. The Crusaders' most significant victory was to lay waste to the Christian kingdom of Armenia and destroy Constantinople, the thousand-year-old capital of Eastern Orthodox Christianity (and the commercial rival of Catholic Venice). For a pagan like me, the only positive part of the Crusades was that some filthy Europeans adopted the Eastern practice of bathing — which the Church later banned when the bath-houses turned into brothels.

¹²⁷ See David Pinault, 'Sunni-Shia Sectarianism and Competition for the Leadership of Global Islam,' *Tikkun*, Jan-Feb 2010.

and then, Gaza in 2008-09, deploying massive bombardments of civilian areas and scandalous attacks on schools, ambulances, and hospitals. Ostensibly, Moslem pro-Western authoritarian states like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Morocco et al., responded to these brutal aggressions 'by tacitly supporting Israel's offensive in the hope of weakening a resistance movement which they see as a proxy for Iran and Syria.'¹²⁸ Moslem Egypt has even closed its border with Gaza to humanitarian aid. Only when faced with huge spontaneous pro-Palestinian street demonstrations at home did these U.S.-propped 'Moslem' despotisms eventually consent to send some aid for the rebuilding of Gaza. Similarly, the U.S. occupiers in Iraq have successfully played the imperial divide-and-rule game by paying off Sunni militias to 'keep order' and serve as a counterforce to the restive Shiite majority. Likewise in Afghanistan, the victorious 2001 U.S. invasion was made possible by the divide-and-rule tactic of arming the Northern Alliance of Islamic warlords from the ethnic Tadjik, Usbeck, Hasara nations against the Taliban government whose ethnic base is the Pashtun nation, large but still a minority. I am not asserting here, that all, or even a majority of Pashtuns, supported or now support the Taliban. But when U.S. drones bomb Pashtun civilian villages or compounds on 'intelligence' provided by locals (who might be personal enemies) asserting that 'Taliban' (including relatives and fellow tribesmen) might be present there, the Pashtuns can only see this as a war against them as a nation. Moreover, the Pashtuns' territory bleeds far into Pakistan, and the U.S.-supported Pakistani government quietly supports the Pashtun/Taliban cause in Afghanistan (though not within its own borders) so as to undermine a rival Afghan state allied with Pakistan's arch-rival and nuclear nemesis India.¹²⁹ This is a situation of immense complexity in which regional inter-state conflict and ethnic/national rivalry on the ground apparently trump religion. Thus, put to the empirical test, the concept of the 'Islamic threat' as a Unified Actor simply falls apart — or rather dissolves into a nebulous.

The word 'nebulous' is apt, because it suggests a swarm of bees — in this case angry Islamic bees, including heavily armed Shiite wasps and Sunni hornets. Now the trick around bees is to

¹²⁸ Rashid Khalidi writing in the *London Review of Books*, 29 January 2009, p. 5.

¹²⁹ See Steve Coll, "Don't Look Back," *The New Yorker*, March 1, 2010.

move slowly and leave them alone. They become a 'threat' only when you stir them up, which is exactly what Obama is doing in Afghanistan and now Pakistan and Yemen. It has become obvious to the world that every time the U.S. bombs Moslem civilians (or allows Israel to bomb Palestinian civilians), the imperialists create new Islamic militants who rise up and join the growing swarms of 'political Islam.' Indeed, news anchor Tom Brokaw recently described what the U.S. was engaged in as the 'war against Islamic rage.' Would it not then be fair to conclude that in some non-metaphorical, non-ideological sense Western imperialism actually creates 'the threat of political Islam?'

Inventing Islamism

To sum up so far, we have seen that linguistically the concept of 'Islamism' is a product of the Orientalizing Western imagination and that it fits into a longstanding paradigm of demonizing the inferior, yet threatening 'other' (Indians, Negroes, anarchist immigrant laborers). We have also observed that empirically speaking the concept 'political Islam' does not qualify as a unified actor, and that its strength grows in reaction to each new Western outrage (invasions, bombings, kidnappings, assassinations, torture) against Moslem states and populations that resist U.S. hegemony over their oil and strategic position in the Great Game. We have also observed how this contested concept has been mobilized for propaganda purposes in order to justify unpopular, hugely expensive oil wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and now Pakistan. Functionally speaking, the War on (Islamic) Terror, like the War on Drugs, provides a blank check for domestic repression and foreign aggression. Indeed, if we can be permitted to paraphrase Voltaire's remark about God, if Islamism didn't exist, we would have to invent it.

In what more concrete ways can it be said that the West 'invents' what it calls Islamism? As we have seen, contemporary imperialism inadvertently spreads Islamic militantism by stirring up the ME/A hornets' nest through torture-camps and attacks on civilians. But Western agents have long supported Islamic movements in the region as a way to divert nationalism and democracy. Historically, the British Intelligence Service nurtured the Islamicist movement at its very origin. Said Aburish and Caroline

Fourest, among others, have documented how the Moslem Brotherhood, founded in Egypt in 1928, was encouraged by the British as a diversion against Egyptian secular movements for labor rights, democracy and national independence. Likewise, the strict Wahhabi Islam of Saudi Arabia, encouraged by the British and then the Americans, has long been the main political prop of the despotic pro-Western Saudi monarchy — itself an invention of British colonialism.¹³⁰ This convenient relationship provides immense royalties to the U.S./British oil companies operating in Saudi Arabia as well as lucrative sales of F-16's to protect the Saudi royals from their benighted subjects — an imperialist sweetheart deal if there ever was one. No one seems to notice that Saudi Arabia, like Hamas which it has historically financed, officially remains an Islamic state which still refuses to recognize the state of Israel. And although the Western media occasionally react to such barbaric incidents as the beheading of a young princess for the crime of kissing a boy, somehow the Saudi Wahabi fundamentalist semi-theocracy is never counted under the heading 'threat of political Islam.'

Proponents of this concept also conveniently forget that Osama bin Laden and most of his September 11 hijackers were Saudi subjects and that their avowed purpose was to expel from Saudi Arabia the U.S. bases, established during Bush I's Gulf War against Iraq, which were seen as polluting Islam's Holy places. Another 'open secret' is the longstanding relationship between the Bush and bin Laden clans which culminated in the expatriation to Saudi Arabia of dozens of bin Laden family members residing in the U.S. in the days following the 9/11 attacks — despite the grounding of all civilian aviation and without any FBI or other interrogation as to their possible knowledge of the attacks. Blood may be thicker than water, but oil is thicker than both.

Where does Israel fit into this ideological picture? I have al-

¹³⁰ Cf. Said K. Aburish, *A Brutal Friendship: The West and the Arab Elite*, 1997 and Caroline Fourest, *Frère Tariq*, Paris, 2005. Not by coincidence did the first Arabic translation of 'The Protocols of the Elders of Zion,' still in circulation today, appear in the 1920s. This anti-Semitic forgery was created by the Imperial Russian secret services around 1905 in order to designate a scapegoat and divert the growing Russian revolutionary movement into reactionary channels (pogroms, Black Hundreds). Today, as in the Twenties, it serves to divert the anger of the Moslem masses away from their despotic governments toward Zionism and the Jew-dominated West.

ways seen Zionism as a Hebrew remake of the American frontier movie transposed to Palestine, with the Arabs in the role of the Indians: a matzoh-ball Western called 'How the East Was Won.' Like the courageous Euro-American colonists occupying an 'empty' American continent, the Zionists fulfilled their own Manifest Destiny in an 'empty' Palestine by shooting and expropriating the natives. The Zionist settlers saw themselves as 'a people without land in a land without people,' creating a City on the Hill in the wilderness, making the desert bloom. The necessary ethnic cleansing was carried out by the same John Wayne methods: First, encourage peaceful settlers to take over the natives' land; then, when the natives fight back and some settlers get killed, holler 'atrocities' and send in the Cavalry to exterminate the savages or drive them into camps and barren reservations to rot in idleness. When necessary, negotiate treaties you have no intention of keeping. Above all, demonize the natives so as to prevent poor or disaffected settlers from fraternizing or running off with them. Soon the only 'good' Indian or Arab becomes the 'dead' Indian or Arab and democracy will bloom.

To me, the tragedy of both the Jewish and Arab peoples is to be led by violent, corrupt, reactionary, religiously-inspired, ultra-nationalist leaders who more and more resemble their opposite numbers. Their reciprocal power depends on mutually maintaining a state of crisis so as to silence internal opposition. I think the term 'clerico-fascism,' originally applied to Franco's Falange and applied below to the Islamic Republic of Iran, is one useful way of understanding some of these reactionary religio-nationalist movements and regimes. 'Clerico-fascism' is a more general (and less biased) term than Washington's ideological stereotype of 'Islamofascism' since it includes the symmetrical threats to peace and democracy posed by Zionist Judeo-fascism and the Christo-fascism of the Religious Right in the U.S., not to mention the Hindu fascists in India. I can only conclude that the most urgent 'Islamic threat' on the horizon is probably the threat that America's irrational Crusade against Islamofascism will either explode into nuclear war or seal the doom of democracy in the U.S. — where the Judeo-Christian version of clerico-fascism is looming large.

How the Islamic Virus Broke Out of the Imperialist Laboratory

As we have seen, over the years, the British-backed Moslem Brotherhood's activities spread far beyond Egypt. Not by coincidence did the first Arabic translation of 'The Protocols of the Elders of Zion,' still in circulation today, appear in Egypt in the 1920s. This anti-Semitic forgery was created by the Imperial Russian secret services around 1905 in order to designate a scapegoat and divert the growing Russian revolutionary movement into reactionary channels (pogroms, Black Hundreds). Today, as in the 1920's, it serves to divert the anger of the Moslem masses away from their despotic governments toward Zionism and the Jew-dominated West.



However, in the 1970s, this did not stop the Israelis from encouraging and financing the Brotherhood's evangelical and social activities in newly occupied Gaza and the West Bank through its 'Moslem Center' front in a 'tactical alliance' against the Palestinian resistance led by the secular PLO. These activities were directed by the Brotherhood's Palestine Apparatus as a base on which to prepare the creation in the 1980s of the Islamic political party Hamas and for its future armed struggle against both the PLO and Israel.¹³¹ Divide-and-rule continued to bear fruit for the Israelis in the Twenty-First Century, when actual armed hostilities broke out between Fatah-and-Hamas-oriented militias in the West Bank, demoralizing the Palestinians and paving the way for fresh Israeli incursions. Similarly, the 'Islamicist' tactic of attacking civilians by placing car bombs in front of mosques was first introduced by the CIA in Lebanon in the 1970s, according to award-winning journalist Allan Nairn.¹³² In the 1980's we find the CIA playing

¹³¹ Cf. Adam Shatz, "Michal's Luck," *London Review of Books*, May 14, 2009, p5.

¹³² Allan Nairn, "Obama Has Kept the Machine Set on Kill," in "Obama's First

the Islamic card against the Communists in the Great Game between Russia and the West over control of Afghanistan. If Osama bin Laden didn't personally work for the CIA in the 80s (as did Saddam Hussein), his fighters received U.S. arms and money through the Pakistani secret services (ISI) to combat the Russians and the Afghani Communists (who incidentally had brought secular education, female equality, and relative lack of corruption to Afghanistan during their years in government).

Throughout ME/A history, the imperialist West has consistently preferred to support pliant reactionary despots over democrats and nationalists for the simple reason that it is cheaper and more profitable to pay off a small ruling group and keep the lion's share of the profits than to submit to popular demands for



better wages, local development and a fairer distribution of the oil revenues. By and large, these divide-and-rule tactics have worked. And although the Clash of Civilizations' paradigm presents the Islamic world as an aggressive, expansionist, ideological and military threat to pacific Western democratic liberalism, the historical record shows that the Western governments have consistently crushed every attempt at democracy or secular nationalism in the ME/A lands. One needs only to recall the 1953 CIA-organized overthrow of the elected government of Iran and its mildly nationalistic prime minister, Mohammad Mossadegh, who had dared to impose partial nationalization of Iran's oil-fields (while offering to pay 25% royalties to the British). Or the 1956 French-British-Israeli invasion of Egypt, when the secular pan-Arabist government of Nasser threatened the Suez Canal. The reason secular strongman and former CIA 'asset' Saddam Hussein suddenly got transformed from cherished ally in the war against the Ayatollahs into an Islamic 'Hitler' had nothing to do with religion. As the surviving regional power after

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the defeat of Iran in their bloody 1980-1988 war, the Iraqi dictator got too big for his britches and tried to take a bigger cut of the profits. This would have set a very bad precedent, and it took the West two wars and an invasion to cut him down to size — naturally in the name of ‘democracy’ and the ‘liberation’ of the Iraqi people. And although the Bush II Administration attempted to link Saddam Hussein with the religious fanaticism of Osama bin Laden as a pretext for invasion, Baathist Iraq was arguably the most secular, progressive, technically advanced state in the region. One recalls that under Saddam, women occupied roughly half the jobs in the Iraqi civil services as well as in education and medicine. Well-trained Iraqi engineers and administrators were able to successfully repair the infrastructure after the devastations of the first Gulf War, despite the continuing U.S. embargo — something Halliburton has been unable to do after spending billions. Not surprisingly, in 2003, the U.S.-British occupiers immediately pushed aside the actual democratic forces within Iraq — women, organized labor, and the educated middle class of doctors, lawyers, engineers — and based themselves exclusively on the reactionary religious and tribal elements whose reign of Islamic terror went viral and continues to this day. Another case of divide-and-rule imperialism playing with fire, ‘creating’ Islamism — and then getting caught in the ‘blowback.’

Islamic Forces on European Soil

Much of the Western hysteria over Islamism focuses on the perceived threat posed by the fifteen million Moslems presently residing in Western Europe. This hoarde is seen as poised to burst out of the Wooden Gift-Horse of work-horse immigration in order to murder and plunder the unsuspecting ‘Trojans’ within the European citadel.

We find this Trojan Horse paradigm, minus the racist hysteria that often surrounds it, on the front page of our old friend the *N.Y. Times Weekly Book Review* which sympathetically reviewed Christopher Caudwell’s *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe: Immigration, Islam and the West* under the headline “Strangers in the Land.”¹³³ The *Times*’ reviewer, Fouad Ajami of the conservat-

¹³³ *Times Weekly Book Review*, Aug. 2, 2009.

ive Hoover Institution, presents these potentially dangerous Moslem 'Strangers in the Land' as if they had been smuggled into the European heartland by liberal 'elite opinion.' He writes: "The native populations in Western Europe hadn't voted to have the Turks and the Moroccans in Amsterdam, the Kurds in Sweden, the Arabs in London and the Pakistanis and Indians in Bradford and West Yorkshire." The 'Strangers in the Land' are described by Ajami, himself an assimilated 1970 immigrant from Lebanon, as "bold immigrants [...] keen on imposing their will on societies given to moral relativism and tolerance" and as "guests" who have "overstayed their welcome."

This kind of talk puts the shoe on the wrong foot. First off, the native populations of Pakistan, India, Iran, Iraq, Algeria, Morocco, et al., didn't exactly vote to have their countries taken over by the British (or French) Empires. Nor did they vote to have their local cultures and economies destroyed and their natural resources syphoned off to Europe, leaving their homelands mired in mass poverty and unemployment. As a result of these Western incursions, members of despoiled native populations were obliged to 'vote with their feet' and seek work (and safety from post-colonial despots) in the colonial and post-colonial imperialist capitals. The 'elites' that smuggled these immigrant Trojan Horsemen into the European citadel were not trusting, bleeding-heart liberals obsessed with the plight of colonialism's economic and political refugees, but hard-headed businessmen who needed abundant sources of cheap foreign labor to drive down the favorable wages and conditions won by well-organized, militant post-WWII native European workers. Guest-workers, refugees and illegal immigrants lacking political rights and subject to expulsion represent a perfect source of cheap labor for European (and U.S.) capital. 'Unwelcome guests' indeed! Unwelcome only to competing native workers whose economic pain fueled the racist anti-immigrant right.

Cheap Moslem immigrant labor was the dirty secret that fueled the Thirty Glorious Years of European capital growth. Here in France, for example, anti-Arab racism undercut class unity with the complicity of the Left (SP, CP and CGT) to the point where the formerly Communist 'Red Belt' of Paris suburbs ended up voting for LePen's racist National Front. Speaking of LePen, European white racism is another subject which Western

proponents of the Trojan Horse paradigm conveniently neglect while accusing its victims of refusal to ‘integrate’ themselves. Nearly a half-century since Algerian independence, France remains a *de facto* segregated Republic as far as the roughly 10% of Arabs are concerned. Naturally, they live largely among themselves and seek support in their own communities. After living for twenty-odd years in Montpellier, a southern French city with a big North African population, I can’t recall ever seeing an Arab face behind any of the ubiquitous grilled windows at the railroad station, the post office or any public administration. In contrast, colored citizens of France’s West Indian departments are thoroughly integrated into the civil service, and educated black Africans are more or less tolerated according to economic status.

Day after day, immigrants from Moslem countries and their European-born children and grandchildren face the pain and humiliation of racism, social exclusion, and discrimination — when they are not actually being persecuted or forcibly deported because of problems with documents. They should feel grateful? Put yourself in their place: European imperialism made your ancestral homeland unlivable, so your family painfully pulled up roots, and to seek work and/or freedom from persecution in Europe, where they treat you like a pariah. Wouldn’t you feel ‘disaffected?’ Yet despite discrimination, the vast majority of the fifteen million non-white Moslems in Europe lead normal immigrant lives, struggling to stay afloat or get ahead, concerned with children and relatives back in the mother country, indifferent to politics except when it is forced down their throats.

Moreover, the demographic Great Fear of an exploding Moslem immigrant population overwhelming Europe’s low-birth-rate native populations, turns out to have been without basis in fact. According to the respected sociologist, Emmanuel Todd, and his associates, overall fecundity in Moslem lands has been declining rapidly from an average of 6.8 children per woman in 1975 to 3.7 in 2005. In Algeria, the birthrate is down to 2.6 and in Iran and Tunisia to 2 . . . the same as in swinging France!¹³⁴ Moreover, despite the increased visibility of Islam in France (provoked by official ban on head-scarves and its inevitable defiance by

¹³⁴ Youssef Courbage and Emmanuel Todd, *Le rendez-vous des civilisations* (Paris, 2007).

Moslem girls and women), the practice of Islam in France has stagnated for the past twenty years and may actually have declined.¹³⁵ Even more surprising, mixed marriages by Franco-Algerian women grew from 6.2% in 1975 to a whopping 27.5% in 1990.¹³⁶

The Trojan Horse Myth Redux

Despite the statistical evidence of declining birth rates among Moslem populations in Europe, the 'Trojan Horse' myth of an Islamic population bomb persists. And despite statistical evidence of integration and even intermarriage of Moslem immigrant families, they are still seen as alien and dangerous. As we have seen, the ultra-moderate *N.Y. Times Weekly Book Review* sees them as "Strangers in the Land," and its reviewer, Fouad Ajami, himself a Lebanese immigrant, reproaches them as ungrateful militants, "second generation immigrants who owed no allegiance to the societies of Europe." Indignantly, the critic decries "the hostility of the new Islamism to the idea of assimilation, to the principle of nationality itself." Here, Adjami apparently confuses 'integration' with 'assimilation' — as does nominally anti-racist French society. He also forgets that nationality may be a portable identity for uprooted Pakistanis in Yorkshire or Algerian kids born in the dismal projects outside of Paris. In any case, unemployment among Arab youth in France is probably at least three times the already discouraging 11% figure for Franco-French.

It would be hard to imagine a more fertile ground for the growth of Islamic or any other sort of militantism among disaffected nominally Moslem youth than the ghettos on the fringe of Paris and other large French cities. Yet significantly, when police brutality touched off the powder-keg and ghetto youth rioted for several days in 2005, religion had nothing to do with it, and radical Islamic militants were nowhere to be seen. Indeed it was Sarkozy, then Minister of the Interior (Police), who, in desperation, introduced Islam into the discussion. Having first denounced the slum-dwellers as 'scum' and threatened to "scour them with a high-pressure hose," Sarko summoned the Council of the Islamic

¹³⁵ "Décryptage: l'islam en France et en chiffres 1989-2009", <http://religion.info>

¹³⁶ Emmanuel Todd, *Le destin des immigrés* (Paris, 1997) quoted in the Jan. 2010 *Monde diplomatique*, p. 7.

Clergy of France, appointed them to speak for their community and promised them funds to build Republican mosques and mad-rassas to train ‘French’ Imams so that the nominally ‘secular’ *République laïque* (which also finances the Catholic Church and its parochial schools) could have some ‘responsible’ Arabs to deal with.

No doubt there are plenty of fundamentalist Islamic preachers in store-front mosques around Europe (and the U.S.) trying to recruit militants and impose Shariah on their immigrant communities. They are not, however, trying to impose Moslem customs on the surrounding ‘societies given to moral relativism and tolerance’ (Ajami’s words). Where are angry, disaffected youth in search of identity and dignity in Europe’s streets or universities to turn else besides Islam in the absence of secular political civil rights and labor movements to fight discrimination, help register Arab citizens for the suffrage, or to defend their cause? Yet sadly in the French Republic, where racism is officially invisible (and thus not on the political agenda), only recently have Left parties — Socialist, Communist or Trotskyist — bothered to solicit their votes. In 2007, only the National Front, led by Jean-Marie Le-Pen’s daughter Marine, attempted to go for the Arab vote. They ran Arab candidates, and the NF presidential campaign poster depicted two attractive young women — one white, the other visibly North African!

Of course, the clinching evidence for the Islamic Trojan Horse thesis are the terror bombings carried out with the help of Islamic kamikazes recruited from among European Moslems. The memories of the three thousand U.S. civilians killed in the 9/11/01 attacks on the Twin Towers and the victims of the London Underground bombings loom large. Indeed, Ajami begins his article citing 200 killed and thousands wounded in Madrid in 2004 thus framing it as a ‘Moor’s revenge’ — alluding expulsion of the last Moorish ruler of Granada in 1492. One problem with this truly shocking evidence for the Trojan Horse theory is that most of these horrific attacks were instigated not in Europe, but in the ME/A lands, and that they were conceived as retaliation for perceived Western aggression there. Such attacks are inevitable in this asymmetrical war where one side has Predators, F-16s and cluster-bombs while the other side uses box-cutters and home-made improvised explosive devices. But the Islamic terrorist

foot-soldiers who carry out such attacks, whether immigrant, European-born or foreign, are merely agents of the West's true antagonists, the radical Islamicist states and political movements in the ME/A lands. So the best that can be said for the Islamic Trojan Horse thesis is: 1) that among the fifteen million nominally Moslem immigrants living more or less peacefully in various parts of Europe, a few thousand disaffected youth have been won over by various competing Islamist networks; and that, 2) among these new militants, a few dozen have shown themselves willing to act as terrorists and martyrs for the cause. Islamic terrorists represent a very real threat to the potential victims of suicide attacks on peaceful Western commuters, but they are not likely to take over the European heartland in any foreseeable future. Scary as suicide attacks may be, the origin of this threat lies not in Europe but in the Moslem ME/A world, to which we turn.

Radical Islamic States and Political Movements in the Mid-East/Arab World

Historically, today's ME/A area corresponds geographically with the Moslem Empire of the Ottoman Turks, which lasted from 1453 to 1918 and once extended from the heart of Central Asia to Morocco on the Atlantic and to the gates of Vienna in Europe. Although by and large tolerant of other religions, the Ottoman Empire was nominally unified by a common faith, an official form of Islam. In the 19th Century, a weakened Ottoman Empire, the so-called 'sick man of Europe,' fell prey to the appetites of the Western Great Powers — especially their appetite for oil, which was beginning to replace coal as Europe's principle energy source. When oil was discovered in Iran and Iraq, Germany — then the rising industrial power — drew the Ottomans into their sphere of influence. One of Britain's principle war aims in 1914-1918 was to take over the Kaiser's Ottoman oil monopoly — to the extent of diverting whole armies from the Western Front to fight the Turks (think Churchill and Gallipoli). What was left of the Ottoman sphere of influence was carved up by the victors at the Paris Peace Conference, with Britain getting the lion's share in the form of humanitarian Protectorates on which to impose unpopular neo-colonial puppet governments. When Britain placed a Sunni dynasty on the throne of Shiite Iraq and the local tribes re-

volted, Churchill ordered the British Royal Flying Corps under then-Col. 'Bomber' Harris (the future architect of the WWII Dresden raids) to bomb and machine-gun their camps and villages from the air. Churchill's rickety biplanes were less sleek than Obama's drones but quite effective against horsemen armed with sabers and muskets or women and children in tents.¹³⁷ Thus the arbitrary borders drawn on maps at Versailles in 1919 became the fault-lines of today's civil wars. Nearly a century later, the U.S. (with Britain as a junior partner) is still putting down the same insurgencies for the same oil.

One reason radical Islamic movements have grown so powerful is that they fill the political vacuum created by the crushing of democratic social movements defending the rights of workers, women, students and national minorities. Looking at the ME/A world today, we find nothing but dreary despotisms of one kind or another — the secular, democratic, socialist option having been ruled out by Western intervention and Western support for local Islamic reactionaries. 'It's not that the Taliban is very strong,' an Afghan politician was recently quoted as saying, 'but that the government is very weak.'¹³⁸ This observation could be expanded to comprise many of the corrupt, despotic, ineffectual Western-backed regimes in the ME/A world. When occasional show elections are organized, Islamic parties rush in to fill the political vacuum. For example, it is generally accepted that the reason Hamas pulled off a surprise victory in the Palestinian elections of 2006 was that Arafat's ruling Fatah, having agreed at Oslo to become Israel's gendarme in return for a shred of legitimacy, had become dictatorial, corrupt, and ineffectual in dealing with the Israelis. The voters were so disgusted, they went for the image of a pure, uncorrupted, socially-concerned Islamic party willing to stand up to the occupiers.

The same analysis seems to apply to the Algerian elections of

¹³⁷ Eventually the pilots, who had volunteered to fight Germans airmen, not Arab tribesmen on the ground, became sickened by the sight of the slaughter, revolted, and demanded to be discharged back to Britain. Nonetheless, Churchill's 1919-1921 British Iraqi campaign deserves historical recognition as the first use of deliberate terror bombing of civilians, an innovation unjustly attributed to the 1936 bombing of Guernica by Herman Goering's *Luftwaffe*.

¹³⁸ Patrick Cockburn, 'Return to Afghanistan,' *London Review of Books*, 11 June, 2009, p. 14.

1990 when the Islamist FIS outpolled the historical party of Algerian independence, the ruling National Liberation Front (FLN). In both cases, the results of Western-style electoral democracy were annulled with the support of the Western democracies themselves. As soon as the Palestinian election results were known, Israel and the U.S. refused to recognize the Hamas victory, while in Algeria, the French backed a military coup by the Army/FLN. Both situations led to prolonged and bloody civil wars between the Islamists and the illegitimate Western-backed secular dictatorships during which civilians bore most of the brunt of violence.

The history of modern Iran reveals a more complex, but essentially similar pattern, where the Islamist party eventually did take and hold power. In 1953, after the CIA overthrew Mossedegheh and destroyed Iranian democracy, the U.S. restored the monarchy and installed Reza Shah Pahlavi on the Peacock Throne. (One recalls that the Shah's father had been removed by his British patrons in 1941 for collaboration with the Nazis). The new Shah, although a sadistic dictator and megalomaniac, was a pro-U.S. secular modernizer and promoted education. After a quarter of a century of torture-based economic development, the royal peacock was swept away on a tide of demonstrations by revolutionary students, women and men, non-commissioned officers, oil-workers and technicians who had grown up under his progressive, yet oppressive regime. For a while, Marxists, feminists, and revolutionary workers' councils flourished along with middle-class professionals and democratic exiles, provoking fears of new Mossedeghs and expropriated oil-fields. So how did the stern, fanatical, bearded reactionary Ayatollahs take over? To begin with, Rockefeller protégé President Jimmy Carter deliberately alienated the Iranian people by offering U.S. asylum to the dying, deposed Shah rather than reaching out to these newly liberated democratic and nationalist forces.¹³⁹ Moreover, the democratic forces, having grown up under the eye of the Shah's dreaded secret police, Savak, had no pre-existing structured organizations — aside from the opportunistic Tudah Communist Party which called for a popular front with Khomeini's 'progressive' Islamists! The Ayatollahs, on the other hand, were superbly organized.

¹³⁹ Richard Greeman, "Obama: the New Carter of the *Pax Americana*?", *Divergences*, December 2009. <http://divergences.be/spip.php?article1657>

They already had their religious networks in the villages and among the bazaaris. Following a general plan outlined years earlier by the Moslem Brotherhood, the Islamists rapidly infiltrated all the workers' and neighborhood Committees as well as the revolutionary militias. At first, they talked tolerance and preached a populist social gospel, but later they attacked and marginalized their secular adversaries. Meanwhile, the Ayatollahs made a deal with Savak, which had remained dormant behind the scenes following the collapse of the monarchy. When the moment arrived, the Ayatollahs tightened the noose, and suddenly the leftists and democrats found themselves once again in Iran's torture-prisons.

So far, Iran seemed to follow the established pattern of authoritarian right as spoiler, foiling the social and political aspirations of the democratic Left during crises of the established order to the ultimate benefit of Western oil interests. But once the Ayatollahs took power, there was no stopping them. Their Islamic Republic incarnated the national aspirations of a historically rich, powerful nation which had long been manipulated, repressed and humiliated by Western imperialism. Once again, Iran would rise to its ancient status as major West Asian power, like the Persian Empire which had dominated the region for centuries B.C.E. Although repressive, the Islamic Republic was, at first, popular. From a Western point of view, however, it became clear that if the Iranian revolutionaries were allowed to succeed in defying the United States, their example of radical independence would spread. The seething masses among the other corrupt, unpopular, pro-Western Moslem despotisms in the region would rise and the U.S.-armed dictatorships would fall like so many dominos, depriving the West of 'its' oil.

Once again, however, divide-and-rule tactics came to the rescue of the imperialists when neighboring Iraq (instigated, financed, and armed by the U.S.) initiated a bloody eight-year war against Iran during which huge battles on the scale of World Wars I and II were fought. While millions were killed, mutilated, or lost their homes, the U.S. rulers profited both politically and financially through arms and equipment sales. (Remember the famous photograph of Saddam Hussein shaking hands over a deal with former (and future) Defense chief Donald Rumsfeld?) Both countries were bled white, but in the end, Saddam ended up with a surfeit of modern U.S. arms which tempted him to take a bite

out of plump, oil-rich Kuwait next door. Indeed, with Persia out of the way, why shouldn't Mesopotamia be the regional bully?

Believing he had the green light from the State Department in 1991, Saddam made his incursion into Kuwait.¹⁴⁰ Suddenly, the CIA's fair-haired boy became the new 'Hitler,' and the U.S. organized a military coalition to put the mustachioed upstart in his place. However, unlike his idiot son, Bush I was smart enough to leave Saddam's Sunni-based Baathist regime in power as a foil against Shiite Iran. Indeed, Bush I even allowed Saddam to use his elite Republican Guard to crush the restive Shiites and Kurds, who had risen up in response to the Coalition's promises of liberation. Thus, for ninety years, from 1919 to 1999, Anglo-American interests successfully dominated the oil-rich ME/A world, suppressing, subverting or containing democratic and nationalists revolutions while relying on reactionary despots to rule — so long as they remained pliable clients.

The Vietnam Syndrome

As we have seen, Anglo-American domination of the oil-rich Middle-East based on Moslem disunity exacerbated by insidious divide-and-rule tactics, and punctuated by occasional invasions or coups d'état, brought relative stability to the region for the better part of the 20th Century. It took the born-again genius of Bush II and the Republican Right to invade an already helpless Iraq in 2001, wreck the infrastructure, turn power over to the pro-Iranian Shiites, tip the regional balance of power in favor of Iran, and successfully destabilize the whole Middle East. After eight years stuck in the Bush Administration's deepening military quagmires, the U.S. elected a centrist Democratic policy wonk on an implied promise of peace. Once elected, however, Bush's Democratic successor enlisted in the U.S. Middle-East March of Folly. As we have seen, President Obama has escalated the hopeless war in Afghanistan, further destabilized regimes teetering on the brink of civil war in both Yemen and nuclear-armed Pakistan, and employed terror tactics guaranteed to antagonize the populations of the entire Moslem ME/A world — all the while talking about

¹⁴⁰ Whether through ineptitude or by design, on the eve of Saddam's incursion into Kuwait, the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq was reported to have reassured him that it was "not U.S. policy" to intervene in inter-Arab conflicts.

‘winning their hearts and minds.’

Moreover, unlike the case of Dubya, we cannot attribute Barack's self-willed ignorance of consequences and irrational Pursuit of Policies Contrary to Self-Interest to an obvious personality disorder. The danger today is not only that the Obama Administration might ignite a nuclear war in West Asia but also that its escalation of Bush's War on Terror might prove fatal to U.S. democracy as well.

To illustrate the danger, allow me to compare today's Middle-East crisis with the crises of the 1960s when Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) was the U.S. military's official nuclear doctrine (talk about folly!) and when Kennedy and Khrushchev were playing nuclear games of ‘chicken’ over Berlin and Cuba. I was an anti-war organizer active during the scary Berlin crisis as well as during the terrifying nuclear showdown over Russian missiles in Cuba. Later, I was one of the earliest (1963) critics of U.S. intervention in Vietnam — thanks to my familiarity with France's earlier defeats in Indochina and Algeria. I was appalled by the risks Johnson and Nixon were taking, but I didn't really feel scared at the time. Yet today, forty years later, I am appalled to confess I consider Bush-Obama's March of Folly in the Middle-East more dangerous still. Why? Back in the Sixties, Presidents Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon had a tacit agreement with Khrushchev and his successors to contain these regional conflicts, to fight each other mainly through proxies, and, above all, not to go nuclear despite simian displays and threats. MAD retained the balance of terror, and both sides had a lot to lose. Today, President Obama has no way of foreseeing who will have his hand on the Pakistani nuclear trigger a year from now. Unstable Pakistan has a history of political assassinations and military coups. The Pakistani government harbors Islamic fundamentalists in its intelligence/security apparatus and unleashes them against regional rivals like India and India's ally Afghanistan. A recent Taliban offensive within Pakistan came close to threatening the capitol before the military intervened, at U.S. insistence, perpetrating a bloodbath and a humanitarian nightmare. Meanwhile, the father of the Pakistani atom bomb, although convicted of selling nukes to the North Koreans, remains at large and influential.

Paradoxically, the U.S. and the U.N. Security Council express hysterical concern over nuclear reactors in Iran that might pro-

duce enough weapons-grade Uranium to build a bomb, but no one seems excessively concerned about the nuclear canons loose on the pitching Mid-East deck in the form of combat-ready Israeli, Indian and Pakistani A-bombs. Further, back in the Sixties and thanks to the pioneering Civil Rights and Black Power movements, there was political space for protest in the streets, and the media were compelled to pay attention to the anti-Vietnam-war movement. Our teach-ins, mass demonstrations, acts of civil disobedience and military insubordination thus played a historical-recognized role in ending the Vietnam war. Perversely, this victory for democracy and sanity over murderous Folly has been stigmatized as 'the Vietnam Syndrome' — as if our protests were the disease, not the cure. This bogus label allows today's pundits to dismiss out of hand the obvious comparison between the military Follies of Iraq/Afghanistan and those of Vietnam. And so I wonder if such a successful anti-war movement is still possible in the U.S. today. Alas, the Pentagon and its allies learned the perverse lesson of the 'Vietnam Syndrome' all too well: In order to pursue imperialist aggression abroad, personal liberties and the right to free speech, free assembly and political organization must be curtailed at home.

The U.S. national security state has long been preparing for a preventive or pre-emptive counter-revolution. Police and other security forces have been super-armed with tasers, water-cannons, percussion grenades, tear-gas, and lethal riot-weapons. Protected behind armored vests, plastic shields and Darth Vader helmets, trained in violent riot-control methods, the forces of repression stand ready and eager to crush any suspicious gathering of hippies, weirdos, feminazis, gays, tree-huggers, peaceniks and other government-designated 'terrorist suspects.' Today's protestors are often confined to 'Free Speech Areas' enclosed by chain-link fences and established far from the targeted event and attendant media. There we are free to march in circles carrying signs and chanting slogans to each other. This reminds me of the old philosopher's paradox about the sound of a tree falling in an empty forest: 'If free speech is emitted in the forest and nobody hears it, is it free speech?'

Worse still, today's peace activists and indy journalists are routinely subject to groundless arrest, warrantless searches, seizure of their computers, cameras, and poster-making equip-

ment before they can even get their protests off the ground. In Pittsburgh in 2009, the government brought in National Guardsmen from out of state and the local police rounded up the would-be environmentalist demonstrators before the economic summit even began! Apparently, the Establishment — never hospitable to whistle-blowers — is bent on removing the democratic safety-valve that during the Sixties whistled long and loud enough to prevent the U.S. from going all the way down the Road to Folly in Vietnam. Alas! Where are the riots of yester-year? But I guess if the Iranians are brave enough to demonstrate against Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's police and Islamic thugs, we'll work something out.

Empire versus Democracy

It doesn't take a rocket-scientist to see that today's American-led March of Folly in the Middle East — attempting to impose imperialist hegemony through military power alone — will inevitably lead to catastrophic U.S. defeats if not to generalized catastrophe. But what other alternatives do the rulers of what some call the 'Empire' really have? Democracy? If we return to the comparison between the Middle East and Latin America, we see that the main threat to U.S. imperial interests south of the border is not reactionary nationalism but a sudden outbreak of democracy after decades of U.S.-backed dictatorships. This return to relative democracy was based on the growth of powerful social movements among the poor as well as burgeoning national economies. Today, Latin American regional trade groups openly challenge U.S. hemispheric hegemony and invite Chinese and other foreign capitalists into Uncle Sam's 'back yard,' ending the two centuries-old Yankee sphere of influence.

This strategic loss may be a partial consequence of the U.S. fixation on the Middle East over the past decades: when the cat's away the mice will play. In any case, the Genii of democracy is out of the Latin American bottle now, and the over-extended U.S. military no longer has the power to stuff it back in. Unfortunately, the lesson for the Middle-East that Washington apparently has drawn from this historic hemispheric defeat is this: 'No more Mr. Nice-Guy.' At the slightest sign of independence or weakness on the part of a client government, go for 'regime change' and install

a more compliant or more repressive one. Talk about 'nation-building,' 'winning hearts and minds,' and 'development,' but put the money behind military equipment, mercenaries, bribes to enemy combatants and alliances with war-lords and drug-lords — as we did in Vietnam, which we could have won if we kept our nerve! Of course this blind militarism won't work in the Middle East anymore than it did in Vietnam, but it is the logical consequence of the basic contradiction of capitalist imperialism since the First World War and the revolutionary wave that followed it in 1917-21 — the contradiction between imperialism and democracy.

Although parliamentary democracy was the ideal political form for the establishment of bourgeois-capitalist rule in the 19th Century, allowing as it does for the interplay of various propertied interests, during the 20th Century's revolutionary crises, it became necessary to replace it with dictatorship through 'preventive counter-revolution.' This is precisely the historical role played by the various forms of what are properly called 'fascist' movements, beginning with Mussolini's March on Rome after striking Italian workers occupied their factories in 1919-1920. It includes the Catholic clerico-fascism of the Iberian dictators Franco and Salazar and of course Nazi-fascism under Hitler, who sent German trade-unionists, socialists and communists to the concentration camps years before he sent the Jews. All these fascist movements were broadly supported by the propertied ruling classes in the capitalist democracies. The U.S., France and Britain didn't just appease Hitler after he took power. From the Twenties on, as the Depression and the social crisis deepened in Europe, the democracies both openly and surreptitiously supported European fascist movements as a foil against Socialism, Communism, and plain old democracy. In 1936, they backed Franco's Falangist rebels against the legitimate government of Republican Spain.¹⁴¹ But playing with fascism is like playing with fire because fascism is both a fanatical racial/religious ideology and an expression of exacerbated nationalism. To survive, German and Italian fascism required an expansionist, aggressive type of regime, projecting

¹⁴¹ Most famously by enforcing a hypocritical, one-side 'arms embargo' on the Left-leaning Republic, while allowing Hitler and Mussolini to 'smuggle' into Spain whole armored regiments and Luftwaffe squadrons to aid Franco's Church-backed military rebellion of fascist officers.

each nation's inner crisis outward. The Western capitalist democracies thought they were clever, fighting fire with fire. They had second thoughts when the upstart Hitler conquered continental Europe and threatened island Britain. The irony of the anti-Iraqi 1991 Coalition painting a puny peanut like Saddam Hussein as a 'second Hitler' is that both Hitlers were nurtured by the Western democracies before they got too big for their britches. Having played the Sorcerer's Apprentice for too long, U.S. imperialism is now dependent on little Hitlers around the globe, any of whom might at any moment go 'rogue' or switch sides in what is now a multi-lateral world.

Of course, no conceivable coalition of rival regional imperialisms (i.e., China, Russia, the European Union or even all combined) have the military or financial might to challenge the U.S. super-power militarily. Yet America with its hollowed-out economy may once again prove to be the 'helpless giant' it was in Vietnam. Despite Wall Street's artificial recovery, the Great Recession of 2008 has left Main Street in a deepening depression. In the wake of mass disillusion over Obama's unredeemed promises of 'change' and a renewal of virulence on the racist, religious Right, the U.S. stands polarized as never before. What is most to be feared is that America itself may undergo a preventive counter-revolution under the pressure of democratic imperialism's contradictions and succumb to our own brand of Judeo-Christian clerico-fascism.

Thucydides the Athenian in his 5th Century B.C. History of the War Between Athens and Sparta proposed as the cause of the demise of Athenian democracy the contradiction between democracy and imperialist expansionism. Thucydides claimed that his History was 'written in bronze' because 'given human nature' in similar circumstances in the future, one could expect the same results. He was right, but perhaps there is still time to stop the wars and save democracy. A huge project! Where to begin? What can be done in the face of Folly?

The Middle-East Problem: How to Become Part of the Solution

There can be no peaceful, democratic solutions to the escalating Middle East crisis under capitalist imperialism with its un-

quenchable thirst for oil — only continuously escalating wars and more barbaric depredations — with the possibility of nuclear war or a preventive U.S. counter-revolution on the horizon. The much-ballyhooed ‘threat’ of Radical Islamism is only a symptom, not the cause of the disease. With Obama expanding the wars into Yemen and unstable nuclear Pakistan and with the religious far Right rampant again, the U.S. seems to be declining into a vicious cycle of imperialist wars overseas justifying curtailment of democracy at home. Will our democracy's imperialist over-reach leading to dictatorship as it did, according to the ancient historian Thucydides, in 5th century Athens? As we have learned from our disappointment with Obama's Democrats (as well as Blair's New Labour and France's Socialists), changing the personalities and parties in power has become a useless diversion. But this does not mean that we should stand aside paralyzed or support, out of desperation, the Islamic ‘resistance’ to Western imperialism as some wayward Leftists have done, forgetting that the ‘Enemy of our Enemy’ is not necessarily our Friend. Nor is it useful to declare ‘a plague on both your houses’ while waiting for capitalism's collapse and the hypothetical world revolution — I prefer the term ‘Planetary Emergence’ — which we, many of us, devoutly desire. It is becoming clear to many that we eventually need to change the system, but this revolutionary Emergence can happen only through powerful planet-wide social movements of the oppressed: women, workers, peasant farmers, idealistic youth, indigenous peoples and discriminated minorities. Only such movements, combined with global general strikes of salaried and waged workers within the global capitalist corporations, have the potential to actually change the system before time runs out for the planet — whether through nuclear war or catastrophic climate change. If this be ‘treason’ (or rather ‘revolution’), let's make the most of it!¹⁴² Meanwhile how better to begin building such planetary movements than by joining in solidarity with the democratic forces among our designated ‘enemies’ in the so-called Moslem world? In any case, it is our simple moral duty as fellow humans and (dare I say?) ‘fellow working people’ (employees, home-makers, professionals, students, builders, as opposed to

¹⁴²Is ‘Another World Really ‘Possible?’ Please see my ‘Ecotopia: A bet You Can't Refuse,’ <http://www.stateofnature.org/ecotopiaABet.html>

bankers) to hold out our hands in solidarity with our counter-parts in countries suffering under the double oppression of Islamic Fundamentalists and heavily-armed NATO occupiers. We can begin 'thinking globally and acting locally' by forging people-to-people links of solidarity with the democratic forces — mostly invisible in the media — struggling to emerge in the nominally Moslem ME/A world. Our place is along side of the civilians like ourselves: teachers, students, health-care professionals, office and factory workers, trade-unionists, civil servants, and homemakers, women and men, gay and straight, struggling for their rights against the double terrorism of G.I.'s breaking down their doors and Islamicists blowing up their markets. Here's how to join them in struggle:

The 2001 U.S. invasion of **Afghanistan** was supposed to bring 'democracy,' particularly women's rights, to what was depicted as a totally backward land. The tragic irony is that the Western occupation, by replacing the Taliban with Hamid Karzai's corrupt Islamic regime of violent, reactionary warlords under a Shariah Constitution, made the situation of Afghani women even worse. Far from being totally backward, **Afghanistan** abolished purdah (the banning of women from public life) as early as 1959, when women began attending co-educational universities and joining the workforce. Women made more progress after the popular 1978 Peoples Democratic Party coup abolished feudal privilege and confiscated royal land and even after the Russian invasion of 1989. All these democratic advances were abolished after 1992 when U.S.-backed Islamist warlords and militias overthrew the Communist puppet government. So oppressive was warlord misrule — now once again restored by the Western coalition — that in 1996 much of the population felt relieved when the Taliban took Kabul. But not for long. By 2001, Afghani women and democrats were ready to welcome the U.S. invaders as liberators. Popular participation in the 2002 loya jurga (the traditional gathering delegated to create a new government) was enthusiastic. According to participants, 'Women played a leading role at these meetings . . . The one issue that untied the delegates above all others was the urgency of reducing the power of warlords and establishing a truly representative government.'¹⁴³ Of course, the

¹⁴³ See Terry Moon, "Afghan lives and freedom sucked into U.S. quagmire,"

U.S. occupiers ignored the *loya jurga* and set up a powerless reactionary puppet, while the country slid into violent chaos. Today, according to Zoya, spokeswoman for RAWA, the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan, which has been organizing and struggling among Afghani women since 1977, 'Afghanistan is now a free country: free for the rapists of women and children, free for the warlords, for drug lords, terrorists and occupation forces. It is not free for the people of Afghanistan.'

To find out more about RAWA and support the Afghani women's struggle go to www.rawa.org/

Meanwhile, since Obama's 'surge' in Afghanistan, **Iraq** has slid largely under the media's radar, but huge U.S. bases remain and the bloody occupation/civil war continues. Meanwhile, women and trade unionists are fighting desperately for their rights — and sometimes their survival — caught in the cross-fire between Islamist militias, on the one hand, and, on the other, the U.S. Occupation and its Iraqi client government, which is still enforcing Saddam Hussein era anti-labor laws. Despite persecution, Iraqi workers and unemployed have organized, held national conferences, and successfully sought international support from trade-unionists in Japan, Europe and the U.S.

To find out more, get involved and contribute money, contact U.S. Labor Against the War at <http://www.uslaboragainstwar.org/>

As for the fate of Iraqi women, one recalls that before the U.S.-led invasion, **Iraq** was a modern society with women occupying more than half the civil service jobs and working as doctors, lawyers and professors (even under Saddam's horrid Baathist dictatorship). Since the beginning of the U.S.-led occupation, Iraqi women have been courageously organizing OFWI, the Organization for Women's Freedom in Iraq, in defiance of rapes and attacks on militant or unveiled women committed by both occupiers and local reactionaries. OFWI has been building battered-

women's shelters, fighting honor killings, rapes and sex-trafficking that flourish under U.S.-imposed regime. These women — not the bearded killers — represent the true 'Iraqi resistance' which decent people ought to support.

To find out more about Iraqi women's struggles and join them in solidarity, go to www.equalityiniraq.com

In **Pakistan**, the civilian long-suffering population is currently under simultaneous attack from the Taliban, U.S. drones, and the armed forces of the brutal, corrupt Pakistani regime. Recent government sweeps in Swat and South Waziristan have killed hundred and created an estimated five million (!) refugees. Yet less than two years ago, protests by courageous Pakistani judges and lawyers followed by mass demonstrations drove out the U.S.-backed military government of Gen. Musharraf and restored formal democracy — such as it is in that vast impoverished country where the political parties are dominated by a small number of rich families. Even today, the struggle continues, with peasant women confronting police attacks and peasants in Hari who occupied the Karachi Press Club to protest land seizures.¹⁴⁴ Last June in **Iran**, after far-right President Ahmadinejad apparently stole his re-election, masses of courageous women and men took to the streets day after day in defense of democracy and defiance of the Ayatollahs and of brutal attacks by police and Islamic militias. Although the Western media were flooded with spectacular images and blah-blah about 'democracy,' the reactions of heads of state, from Obama to Chavez, was curiously cold and reserved. These spontaneous, self-organized demonstrators — women and men of all ages and social classes are still continuing their protests in less spectacular forms. They have creatively appropriated modern technologies like cellphones and Twitter to mobile street tactics, revealing the high degree of political maturity of the Iranian people, who, as we have seen, have a long revolutionary past. In any case, what the media didn't publicize was last Spring's wave of Iranian workers' strikes (naturally illegal) in transport, auto, construction, even in oil, which set the stage for the big democracy demonstrations. The slogan of the workers,

¹⁴⁴ "Editorial: Pakistan needs a revolution," *New & Letters*, December 2009, www.newsandletters.org

parodying Marx, was 'we have nothing to lose but our unpaid wages.' Many workers participated as individuals in the 2009 year's democracy demonstrations, which were reinforced by daily work stoppages in sympathy with the big crowds. The Iranian working class, with its long memory of betrayal by middle-class movements, had no illusions about the 'moderate' candidates from whom Ahmadinejad stole the election or the 'Green' leaders, mostly former officials of the Islamic Republic whose hands are bloody with earlier massacres.¹⁴⁵ The world economic crisis has hurt Iran badly, and struggles are bound to become sharper. Iran is a modern, developed country with a large educated population, mostly young but wise in experience. Future developments there promise to be interesting.

To find out more about the Iranian labor movement and show your solidarity with *Hands Off the People of Iran*, visit <http://hopoi.org/>

By joining in solidarity with these non-violent civilian women and men, we Westerners can at least help them to make concrete gains, like building a union hall or a battered women's center. We thus become 'part of the solution' — rather than 'part of the problem.' Together with our civilian counterparts in the ME/A lands, we can begin to build bridges of international solidarity and weave networks uniting the freedom struggles of the oppressed 'colonial' world with the anti-capitalist resistance in the dominant imperialist world. By these simple, useful, concrete actions, we can begin to incarnate, today, the image of a future planetary social movement which alone can conceivably bring humane solutions to the crises created by capitalism.

March 2010

¹⁴⁵ Yassamine Mather, "Iranian Workers say: 'We have nothing to lose but our unpaid wages,'" *New Politics* #48, Winter 2010.

Alice in Imperialist Wonderland*

Lewis Carroll, the creator of *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*, satirized the colonial rivalry between England and France *circa* 1870 in his delightful ‘nonsense’ poem

‘The Walrus and the Carpenter.’ Every child recalls how the two friends lure out a band of young oysters to join them for a stroll on the beach and then — as shown in these delightful Tenniel illustrations — sit down and devour them all. The Walrus, who symbolizes hypocritical, perfidious Britain, weeps for the unfortunate oysters, who represent the newly subjugated peoples of the colonies:



*With sobs and tears he sorted out
Those of the larger size,
Holding his pocket-handkerchief
Before his streaming eyes.*

Alice, indignant, declares she likes British Walrus better than the French Carpenter because at least the Walrus felt sorry. But when she learns that the Walrus, hiding his huge mouth behind the hypocritical handkerchief of British sentimental moralism,

* A shorter version of this text appears in the Summer 2007 issue of *New Politics* under the title ‘Alice in Imperialland.’

had secretly eaten the most oysters, Alice decides she likes the Carpenter better. Alas, the latter ate 'as many as he could.'

This ingenious parable illustrates the hypocrisy and cynicism which continue to mask inter-imperialist rivalries — for example, between the U.S. and France — in our own day. The Carpenter continues to defend tooth and claw his spheres of influence among French ex-colonies and ex-protectorates in Africa and the Middle East, while the U.S., having replaced Britain in the role of the moralistic Walrus, hypocritically supports the 'rebels' against pro-French corrupt dictatorships in the name of 'democracy.' The result has been a generation of bloody and never-ending civil wars which have devoured hundreds of thousands of Oysters — I mean of dark-skinned men, women and children. Yet such proxy wars — from Algeria to Central Africa — are generally portrayed in the media as inexplicable mayhem rooted in 'age-old ethnic or religious rivalries.'

Anti-imperialist Alices



Unfortunately, many intellectuals on the Left are quite as naïve as Alice when it comes to understanding the nature of these inter-imperialist conflicts which continue to bloody the planet. For some, the one and only imperialist is the American Walrus, the one who eats the most Oysters (while throwing a few to his faithful imperialist lapdog, Britain). Thus for many anti-imperialists and Third World supporters on the Left, the word 'imperialism' has become synonymous with 'U.S. superpower.' Anti-imperialist internationalism is thus reduced to simple anti-Americanism.

This confusion is very convenient for French neo-colonialism which literally gets away with murder, for example in the Ivory Coast today. Like Alice, many intellectuals in both France and the U.S. are naïvely unaware that the little imperialist Carpenter is still devouring 'as many (African and Asian) oysters as he can.' They forget that 'little' French imperialism — personified today by the slightly ridiculous pointy-nosed Carpenter Chirac — counts among his ancestors Louis XIV, the two Napoleons, Clemenceau 'the Tiger,' and Charles de Gaulle. They forget that

France's current prosperity is in large measure based on its privileged relationships with the French-supported kleptocratic dictatorships which have replaced the former French colonial administrations (thus keeping the profits while reducing administrative costs). However, the imperialist rivalry between the Franco-American allies becomes obvious once we look behind the handkerchief of humanitarian propaganda which masks the genocidal civil wars ravaging central Africa today — as they ravaged Rwanda a decade ago.

Genocide in Rwanda

Indeed, the scandal of Western responsibility in the Rwandan genocides is once again back in the headlines — at least in France. On the one hand, Paul Kagame, the pro-American President of Rwanda, has correctly accused the French government of having supported and armed the genocidal 'Hutu' militias both before and during the massacres of Summer 1994. This complicity had already been exposed in *Le Monde diplomatique* as early as March 1995.¹⁴⁶ On the other hand, a French prosecutor has counter-attacked by accusing Kagame of having plotted the murder of the former President, the pro-French Hutu Habyarimana, in April 1994 — thus provoking the massacres. The prosecutor's case is quite convincing.

The point is that during this sordid imperialist proxy-war between the colossal American Walrus and the small French Carpenter, 500,000 African oysters were being cruelly murdered while the Western media prattled on about 'ancestral ethnic hatreds.'

In fact, the words Tutsi and Hutu refer to two castes of a single ethnic group who for the past hundred years have been turned against each other first by the Belgian colonial regime (who created these legal identities) and then the French. Divide and rule, the oldest trick in the imperialist book. Nowadays, we have the American Walrus cynically backing the ex-'rebel' Pres-

¹⁴⁶ According to *Le Monde diplomatique*, France massively equipped the Rwandan Military Forces (FAR), France introduced them into the camps where torture and massacres of civilians was taking place. From April to June 1994, during which period the massacres continued and 500,000 Tutsi's were murdered with *machetes*, part of the French Army had but a single obsession: continue to re-supply the FAR.

ident Kagame in order to squeeze the French out of their spheres of influence in Central Africa. Nonetheless, today's naïve intellectuals, Alice-like, always seem to feel the need to back one imperialist side over the other. Thus the French section of the NGO Doctors Without Borders 'were eager to intervene [in Rwanda] on the side of the French Army, which the other sections [of DWB] categorically refused.'¹⁴⁷



More recently, we saw another instance of this naivety in the buildup to the Iraqi War during 2002-2003. Then, the French Carpenters Chirac and de Villepin appeared as veritable anti-imperialists for attempting to block the bloated Walruses Bush and Blair who were preparing, for humanitarian reasons, to devour Iraq's oyster reserves - I mean 'oil reserves.' Yet the anti-imperialist Alices had no clue that Carpenter Chirac was only doing his imperialist duty bravely defending the interests of the French oil cartel Elf/Total, long implanted in Saddam Hussein's Iraq, against the pretensions of the nasty Walruses (Bush/Exxon and Blair/BP) who were trying to gobble them up.

Liberal and Social-Democratic Alices

Fortunately, liberal and social-democratic Alices like Christopher Hitchens were around to reassure us that the tender-hearted Anglo-Saxon Walruses were only intervening in Iraq to save us from non-existent WMD's. Or was it to save us from Islamic terrorism (after having subsidized it in Afghanistan)... Or

¹⁴⁷ See 'Retour sur le génocide de 1994 au Rwanda,' in *Révolution internationale* No 375 Jan. 2007. www.internationalism.org

to free the Muslim womenfolk (by imposing Sharia)... Or to bring democracy (in the form of Islamic militias)? Cynical or naively patriotic, these pro-intervention Alices failed to see that the hypocritical super-armed Walrus likes to hide his ravenous appetite for oysters behind ideological handkerchiefs like ‘humanitarian intervention,’ ‘defending democracy,’ and never-ending crusades such as the ‘war against drugs’ and the ‘war against terrorism.’ So they support imperialistic interventions ‘from the Left,’ all the while criticizing the excessively brutal, greedy and sloppy table manners of the Walrus devouring his prey.

Both groups of intellectual Alices - the ‘anti-imperialists’ and the ‘humanitarian interventionists’ - commit the same logical fallacy as Carroll’s original. Former children will recall that Alice, who as an English school-child believed in Fair Play, waxed indignant at the sniveling hypocrisy of her compatriot, the Walrus, hiding his greed behind tears. So Carroll’s Alice instinctively transferred her sympathies to the Carpenter - equally rapacious, but smaller. We find the same naïve reaction among sincere (or cynical) Leftists who, revolted by the hypocritical barbarism of the Western imperialists in the Middle East, turn around and support the frank barbarism of reactionary Islamist militias. I call this common error in reasoning the EEF fallacy: ‘the Enemies of our Enemies are our Friends.’

According to this EEF logic, progressives must now consecrate violent, reactionary Islamists under the noble title of ‘the Iraqi Resistance.’ Never mind that these bloodthirsty sheiks, mullahs and sectarian militias massacre civilians in internecine warfare, blow up elementary schools, rape and murder unveiled women and break up trade-unions. In the writings of my old friends Alex Calinicos and Chris Harmon and their co-thinkers in France and the U.S. these Islamists, dialectically cleansed of such venial sins, emerge as saints. What is the proof that fanatical religious militias are truly ‘progressive?’ When not murdering each other and preying on civilians, the Islamists *also* fight against U.S. and British troops! Lewis Carroll, who in his day job was a Professor of mathematics and logic at Oxford University and delighted in pushing such illogic to its logical conclusions in his *Alice* books, would have died laughing. But what is truly sad is to see former Marxist internationalists — who during the Cold War had the clear-sighted courage to reject *both* Western capitalist imperialism

(‘Democracy’) and Eastern state-capitalist imperialism (‘Communism’) — fall opportunistically into this EEF trap in Iraq.¹⁴⁸

But how are we to avoid the trap of taking sides between the imperialist Walrus and his equally rapacious little buddy, the Carpenter? How to escape the false logic, according to which one is inevitably obliged to choose, between Uncle Sam and smaller rivals like France, Russia, China, Iran, India and Brazil? Or between the Great American Satan and reactionary nationalist-religious forces striving for dictatorial state power in places like Iraq, Lebanon and Israel/Palestine? ‘That,’ said Hamlet, ‘is the question!’

Dustups in a Gentlemen’s Club

Engrossed in this dilemma, I decided to address myself to the professional Marxist scholars who publish the journals *ReThinking Marxism* (U.S.), *Historical Materialism*, and *The Socialist Register* (G.B.). Two international conferences organized by the editors last Winter — one at University of Massachusetts (Amherst) and the other at the University of London — provided the occasion. During my sojourn in these postmodern academic paradises, I was heartened to learn that in today’s globalized world inter-imperialist rivalries no longer existed (or had been reduced to mere vestiges of former times, like your Correspondent). This excellent news was systematically presented by the keynote speakers — highly respected specialists — at the London plenary session on International Relations. For them, world capitalism is ‘a club’ (exact quote) whose only problem is to choose new members with prudence. (Is China ‘clubbable’ yet?) For a moment, I thought myself transported back to the 19th Century Oxbridge world of Carroll and Wilde.

Courteously, these Marxist clubmen explained to me that today, with a globalized economy, something called ‘international capital’ (the club) had emerged. This mysteriously ubiquitous capital apparently has no denomination, no nationality, no home port, and its club has been ruling for the past century over a relat-

¹⁴⁸ This fallacy has led these would-be revolutionary internationalists to some wonderfully absurd deviations like ‘Islamic feminism,’ presented by the Socialist Workers’ Party and Tariq Ramadan at the World Social Forum in London in 2004. See Caroline Fourest, *La tentation obscurantiste*, (Paris, Gras-set 2005), pp. 131 ff.

ively stable, peaceful world. Naïvely, I asked them ‘but what about the two World Wars?’¹⁴⁹ These were merely ‘dustups’ (exact quotation).¹⁵⁰ This last explanation provoked groans from certain members of the otherwise respectful and attentive audience. However, calm returned when another lecturer provided conclusive evidence that the capitalists of every land indeed belong to the same international club. Using slides, he demonstrated that corporate advertisements and government campaign posters promoting higher efficiency through competition were virtually identical whether produced in Britain, Europe, Taiwan or Indonesia. From this it follows that international competition, far from dividing, actually unites all the members of the club by providing each and all with incentives to increase their productivity.¹⁵¹ Conclusion: inter-imperialist rivalry cannot exist. The Walrus and the Carpenter — like the Limeys and the Gerries, the Yanks and the Japs, the Frogs and the Boches — are members in good standing of the same club, where competition is confined to the tennis court and war to the chessboard.

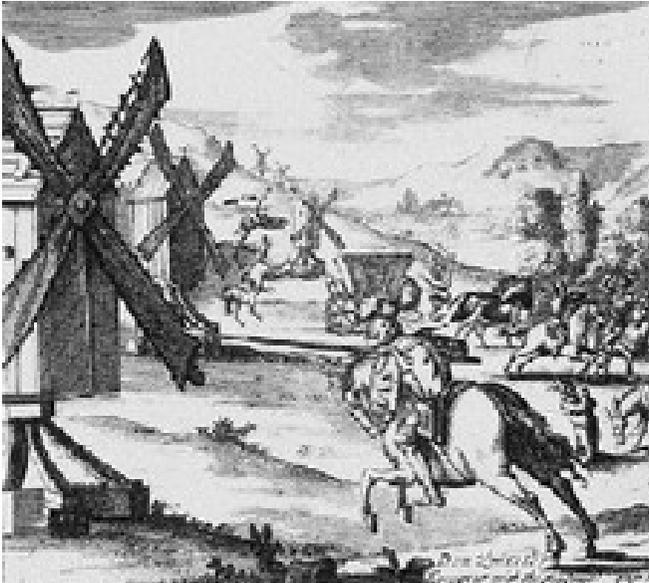
By now, it had begun to dawn on me that these British Dons, like Don Quixote before them, had lost their reason from reading too many books — for example by reading postmodern Romances by legendary authors with foreign-sounding names like ‘Negri-and-Hardt.’ Reading these Romances, they imbibe tales about Multitudes of revolutionary knights-errant tilting at a huge windmill marked ‘The Empire of International Capital.’ Meanwhile in the real world, giants of various sizes and nationalities (Russian, American, Iranian, French, Chinese) are busy dividing up the world and fighting over the spoils. Always practical and curious like Alice, I decided to test these charmingly deranged Dons by asking them to explain to me — without reference to the interests of national capital — how it was that my comfortable teachers’ pension, paid in deflated U.S. dollars, was no longer ad-

¹⁴⁹ Wars which, according to the *passé* Marxism of Luxemburg, Lenin, Kautsky, Hilferding and Trotsky, resulted from so-called ‘inter-imperialist rivalries’.

¹⁵⁰ Quoted from Prof. Peter Gowan: ‘One Logic or Two in Capitalist International Relations and the Possibilities of Transcending the Inter-state System.’ Paper presented at the *Historical Materialism* international conference, University of London, Dec. 2006.

¹⁵¹ As demonstrated by Paul Cammack in his paper ‘Governance of Global Capitalism,’ at the London conference. Q.E.D. again!

equate enough for me to stay in a London Hotel (\$200) or buy them a round of British beer (at twelve bucks a glass). Like true gentlemen and true socialists, these generous colleagues immediately invited me to be their guests — but no one came up with the obvious explanation for this devaluation, to wit: Uncle Sam, that scheming old Yankee Walrus, was in debt up to his ears having borrowed billions from the Chinese. He solved the problem by cranking up presses and printing cheap dollars. That way he can pay back the poor benighted heathen in devaluated paper (all the while yelling ‘unfair!’ at the devious Chinese for keeping the *yuan* at an ‘artificially low’ exchange rate).



What is ‘International Capital?’

By this time, I began wondering about this *international capital* about which I had yet to hear a precise, operational definition. Is it merely a statistical abstraction (the sum total of all the capital invested in all the world’s banks and stock exchanges)? Doesn’t it go home some place at night? Or is all this wealth running around the world like a dog without a master? Call me ‘insufficiently theorized,’ but I always imagined that capital (or

rather peoples' individual capitals) had to be parked somewhere, denominated in one or another fluctuating *national* currency ('a mark, a yen a buck or a pound'). I also thought that capital had to be invested in corporations (however extensive their transnational or foreign holdings) chartered by one or another *national* state and traded on one or another *national* stock market.

Moreover, my occasional reading of the *Wall Street Journal* and *Forbes: Capitalist Tool* gives me the impression that these corporations based in one state are always competing with corporations from another, seeking new markets and investment opportunities in order to repatriate their profits to their stockholders back home. Furthermore, these corporations are generally able to count on the support of their national governments, which they influence through media control and political campaign contributions. In return, they receive not only tax breaks and bailouts but also diplomatic and military support in their international operations. Always 'in the national interest' to be sure. From a practical businessman's point of view, the abstract *international capital* of the academic theorist appears like a creature out of Carroll's Looking-glass World.

Take one example: the U.S. multinational corporation *United Brands* (formerly the *United Fruit Company* of Chiquita Banana fame) owns half of Guatemala, including the railroads and other essential infrastructures. This corporation's purpose is to enrich its U.S. investors, and it depends on the U.S. government to keep Guatemalan labor costs low — for example, by using the C.I.A. to overthrow Arbenz's reformist government in 1954 and by supporting and arming a horrendous series of death-squad dictatorships ever since. And speaking of bananas, the business pages of my *International Herald Tribune* are full of stories about the diplomatic trade-war between France and America over whether the U.S. has the right to dump cheaply-produced Guatemalan bananas on the European market — a market heretofore dominated by French banana companies implanted in Africa. Like the 2003-04 diplomatic conflict between Bush/Exxon and Chirac/Elf-Total over Iraq, today's banana wars are a clear case of imperialist rivalry between national capitals invested in globalized multinational corporations. How to explain this apparent paradox?

The Unified Actor Fallacy

It goes without saying that all bourgeois capitalists (and the governments they control) agree that they should pay their workers the minimum possible salary, extract from them the maximum amount of labor and send for the police when they go on strike. Small wonder that their 'competitiveness means productivity' propaganda should be nearly identical from Indianapolis to Indonesia.¹⁵² Their bourgeois class interests are complimentary. But that doesn't stop the different national bourgeoisies from competing to attract new capital and to dominate markets or from eating each other up in hostile takeovers, trade disputes or even armed invasions - the ultimate in contradictions.

Even little Alice finally got behind the apparent paradox that the Walrus and the Carpenter were 'friends' (or accomplices) when it came to luring the naïve young oysters onto the beach, but 'enemies' (or rivals) when it came to dividing the spoils. An old-fashioned Marxist (if there were any left) would have patiently explained to her that this friendship is a dialectical relationship, at once complimentary and contradictory.

So how come our London International Relations specialists, all good neo-Marxists, failed to identify such blatant examples of inter-imperialist conflict as World Wars I and II? I can only imagine that our good Dons' Negri-sotted brains became fixated on the chimerical vision of a unitary '*international capital*' as a sort of Unmoved Mover or Invisible Hand. In consequence, the deluded Dons were forced to conclude (erroneously, of course) that their own febrile abstraction was the necessary and effective cause of every political-economic effect in the real world, from the World Wars to the price of beans in Bengal. Some people call this kind of logical error the Unified Actor Fallacy (UAF). It consists of treating a plural subject ('immigrants,' 'sports fans,' 'the Jews') as if it were singular. Once we accept the assumption of *international capital* as a single, all-powerful Unified Actor running the world, it follows, like night follows day, that such an ideal world must be harmonious and WWII a mere 'dustup.'

¹⁵² And were Stalin's Stakhanovite productivity campaigns in favor of 'socialist emulation' any different?

‘International Capital’: an Anti-Semitic Myth?

Here, please allow me a personal aside. Personally, it is hard for me to conceive of ‘International Capital’ other than as a kind of imaginary conspiracy, like the ‘Jewish capital’ that the anti-Semites I grew up among were always raging about. And sure enough, whom do we find today trumpeting their opposition to globalizing ‘international finance capital’ but our old friends the anti-Semites? For example, that hoary fabrication of the Czarist secret police, the alleged ‘Protocols of the Elders of Zion’ is now back in circulation not only in Czar Putin’s Russia, but translated into Arabic by the Moslem Brotherhood. ‘The Jews own the world, they are the Enemy; the international Jewish conspiracy battens on impure, unproductive, international finance capital, trampling on the rights of honest native, racially pure, productive national capital. Worse still, Jews ritually drink the blood of Christian children every Passover.’ A crude fabrication, but it worked well enough for the Czars, not to mention Hitler in his day.

The time-tested anti-Semitic ‘conspiracy’ myth is of great utility to today’s super-rich fundamentalist Sunni oil-sheiks and billionaire Shi’ite mullahs, not to mention secular dictators. While these national potentates batten on an oily diet of Oysters Rockefeller, the impoverished populations they exploit and oppress are mobilized against the Enemy Other — international bankers, Israel, the rich Jews in N.Y. and Washington.

Closer to home, we find Hitler-admirer Pat Buchanan jumping on the anti-globalization bandwagon, warring against international finance capital, opposing NAFTA and joining the anti-WTO protests in Seattle in the name of ‘America First.’¹⁵³ In France, the neo-fascist Le Pen made common front with the far-left to block the European Constitution as did the near-Nazi Haider in Austria. In the Russian Federation, President Putin has adopted the nationalist politics of the openly anti-Semitic ‘Brown/Red’ neo-Stalinists like Zhirinovskiy while merrily squeezing all the oil, blood and money out of the billionaire Jewish oysters — I mean Jewish oligarchs. Anti-Semitism is the glue that bonds the International of right-wing populists, nativists, ra-

¹⁵³ See ‘Anti-Globalization: Buchanan, Fulani & Neo-fascist Drift in the U.S.’ by Tom Burghardt in *My Enemy’s Enemy* Kersplebedeb Publishing, Montreal and online at www.kersplebedeb.com/mystuff/books/myenemy.html

cists, nationalists, xenophobes, proto-fascists and Nazis of all countries in their opposition to globalization. Whatever their nationality, today's anti-Semitic demagogues speak a common language where code-words like '*international finance capital*,' '*American*' (i.e. N.Y. Jewish) or '*multi-national capital*' are used to define the Enemy Other, as by nature foreign, alien, conspiratorial — ultimately Jewish. The politics based on attacking '*international finance capital*' rather than capital *per se* is a politics that makes for some very unsavory bedfellows.

Bloody Handshakes

Having exploded both the EEF and the UAF fallacies, we are now able to return dialectically to the paradoxical 'friendship' between France and the United States. As we know, the French Carpenter and the American Walrus have been great Allies since the 1770's when Louis XVI supported George Washington's War of Independence in order to undermine his rival, King George of England. In the 20th Century, the American Republic supported the French Republic during two World Wars ('Lafayette, we are here!') Yet this unity between the world's two oldest republics also contains its own dialectical contradiction, as I discovered during the 50th Anniversary celebrations of the U.S landings in Normandy when the French papers were full of interesting historical information. It transpired that in June 1944, General Eisenhower landed in Normandy planning not to liberate France but to *occupy* it (like Iraq today). In his baggage train, 'Ike' brought cases of printed bank notes intended to replace the *franc*. Far from planning to free Paris from German occupation, much less supporting de Gaulle, the Anglo-Saxon commanders' plan was to abandon the Parisians to their fate and head straight toward Berlin (as we learned from the popular book and film *Is Paris Burning?*). Roosevelt's unspoken goal — pursued by all of his successors — was to take control of France's rich colonies in Africa and Indo-China. On the other hand, the underlying objective of de Gaulle's Free France, based in France's overseas territories, was always to preserve these colonies for the benefit of the French bourgeoisie, which had lost its legitimacy by collaborating with the losing side (Germany and Japan).

However, it must be born in mind that this Franco-American rivalry was ever and always subordinated to their Alliance against the Axis and against the Communists. Thus, for example, in 1954 Eisenhower and Dulles were seriously considering dropping an atomic bomb to save the French colonial troops pinned down by the Vietnamese Communists at Dien Bien Phu. Which didn't stop the friendly American Walrus from replacing France as imperialist overlord in Vietnam and suffering his own prolonged 'Dien Bien Phu' in 1965-1975. Nor did it stop the American imperialists from encouraging anti-French rebels in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia in the name of 'anti-colonialism.' In 1993-94, as we have seen, the two imperialisms fought a kind of proxy war in Rwanda using the 'Hutus' and Tutsis' as pawns just as in 2003-04 they had a big falling out over Iraq and oil.



“Shouldn't we find out more about their policies before following them?”

But that story had a happy ending in 2004 when the Presidents of the two Republics collaborated in overthrowing the elected government of the world's third oldest (and only Black) Republic: Haiti. After kidnapping its legitimate President Aristide, occupying the island (for humanitarian reasons), supporting the terrorist *Tontons Macoutes* and promoting the cronies of the former dictator, 'Baby Doc' Duvalier, Bush and Chirac finally shook hands. And here we are in 2007, with the French and American military advisors (not to mention the Chinese) once again murkily involved in murderous maneuvers in Chad, Central Africa, Darfur and Somalia with more massacres in sight. Conclusion: Oysters of the world arise! Oysters have no Fatherland! Don't heed the siren songs of imperialist Walruses and Carpenters! We must unite globally before they gobble us all up! We have a world to win (if global warming doesn't get us first)!

Part III

The Sixties

‘What Did YOU Do in the 1968 War, Dad?’

Telephone Interview between Richard Greeman and Jenny Greeman [April, 2008]

Jenny (in N.Y.): So, Dad, the 40th Reunion of the Columbia Strike is coming up, and I’m going to the festivities with Mom. To set the scene for this interview, I want to state that Columbia is right up the hill from where I live here in Manhattan Valley.

Richard (in France): Back in 1968, when it was a slum called Manhattanville, I used to borrow your mother’s Polaroid camera to take housing court photos of holes in the plaster and rat-bitten kids for members of tenants’ associations which we helped organize through CORE [Congress of Racial Equality] and the West Side Block Association. Polaroids were acceptable evidence in land-lord/tenant cases because they couldn’t be faked.



Jenny: My husband and I now complain about all the students running around the neighborhood as if we were townies! Anyway, we've got some great pictures here from April 1968, even the cover of *The NY Times*. That strike was a big deal!

Richard: I think the issues at Columbia crystallized the major problems that were national — even international — questions of racism, the imperialist war in Vietnam, and what became known as the youth revolt or student rebellion. But, of course, the Columbia revolt was far overshadowed by the student-worker near-revolution in France, which broke out a week later. At the

time, the Columbia Strike Committee asked me to telegraph, in French, their greetings of solidarity to the students occupying the Sorbonne. The text was later reprinted in French in a book about the *Situationnistes*. If you remember, I quote that group in ‘The Permanence of the Paris Commune.’

Jenny: Getting back to Columbia, let's start our interview by going through these old copies of the *NY Post*. The first headline reads “STUDENTS TAKE DEAN HOSTAGE.” What were you doing, Dad, on that fateful day of Tuesday, April 23rd when all of this began?

Richard: That day, as usual, I taught some French classes in the morning; then at noon I turned out to the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) rally at the sundial in the middle of the campus, where I had often spoken about the War in Vietnam, based on my knowledge of France’s imperialist failure there. A good-sized crowd had gathered and was hesitating about whether or not to do an ‘action.’ Participatory democracy in practice. Everyone was frustrated because our attempts to negotiate with the administration over the construction of the Jim Crow gym had failed. With my prompting, Mark Rudd, the leader of the SDS ‘action-faction’ and good friend of Mom and me, decided to lead the group over to Morningside Park, which had just been blocked off by a chain-link fence and where Columbia had already started excavating.

Jenny: The gym.

Richard: Yes. Columbia was planning to take over Morningside Park — to rip up this public park to build a private gym and there was outcry in the neighborhood and on the campus about this.

Jenny: Just to get our bearings here, Morningside Park runs from W. 110th Street to W. 125th street in the valley between Columbus Avenue and Harlem Proper. This is my neighborhood. There's now a fountain and pond with geese at the excavation site and a very popular baseball diamond. Remember, we celebrated last July 4th, there with a live band playing patriotic music and the whole neighborhood having picnics and cook-outs.

Richard: Yes. It was a beautiful moment for me. I really believe we saved that Park and it's wonderful that you and your friends

are enjoying the fruits of our labor.

Jenny: If you guys hadn't knocked down that fence, we wouldn't have been sitting there.... What happened next?

Richard: After some pushing and shoving with cops, we finally filtered back to the campus and ended up in the lobby of Hamilton Hall, where I had my office and was supposed to teach a mid-afternoon class in Humanities. This was the 'Great Books' course that Columbia had put into the curriculum at the time of WWI so that young ROTCs, who would then go off and fight for democracy, would know the canon/tradition for which they were laying down their lives. We read everything from Homer and Plato through Old and New Testaments and on through Montaigne and Voltaire (my specialty). Enough culture to give a sense of superiority and help breed a native American officer class. But the canon can also be read against the grain.

Jenny: What do you mean, Dad?

Richard: Today they call it 'deconstruction.' Back in 1968, I had a whole back row of Navy ROTC students (Columbia was all-male) who regularly came to class in beautiful navy blue and white uniforms. In the next row, I had young orthodox Jews in the class who knew the Old Testament 10 times better than their bearded (to look older) professor. In fact, I was barely 6 years older than the freshmen and only 3 years older than the seniors who were taking the course late. With these guys, we read Thucydides' account of the war between Athens and Sparta in which Athens (a democratic, but imperialist power) sent an army over across the water to Sicily to conquer Sparta's ally, Syracuse — just like the U.S. invading Vietnam in the long war with Russia. Of course, the Athenians ended up losing both their army and their democracy. These were very bright NY students. The young officer candidates were well aware of the analogies. Then we went on to analyze the Old Testament with genuine *Yeshiv-abuchas* who knew it in Hebrew. It was a great class and a great time to be a teacher, full of what today we call 'teaching moments.' The campus was already very sharply polarized between pro- and anti-war and right and left — and the class was held in Hamilton Hall, by now occupied by SDSers, Black students from the Afro-American Society(SAS), and others. They were sort of

besieging the Dean's office and would eventually sequester him there.

Jenny: Right. Here's the *Post* front page with a big headline 'COLUMBIA STUDENTS HOLD DEAN 24 HRS.' But back to your afternoon class....

Richard: So first I milled about with the students, and then it was time for me to go upstairs to my Humanities class, to which everyone had unexpectedly shown up! I greeted them and said something like: 'I know there's a lot going on downstairs and, like me, you all have opinions about it, but today we're finishing Spinoza, which is a very hard subject, and I've worked very hard to prepare for the class so if you've also prepared and you want to keep reading Spinoza, the subject is Freedom. So we took a vote and it was unanimous for holding class! We did, and it was a very lively discussion.

After 50 minutes, I went back downstairs and now the entire lobby was jammed with students. Some, mostly Blacks, were ostensibly guarding the door to the Dean's office. It was clear that they would remain there and hold the building until they got an answer from this Dean, who was a sweet jock named Harry Coleman. I hung out with the kids and made a little speech about what the student movement was doing in Europe, and around 7 pm I got hungry and realized they would stay there all night and sleep on the floor in the classrooms. I had no interest in that so I went home to Julie for dinner. I had already had a big day.

Jenny: The next day must have been even bigger, right?

Richard: Looking back, I would say it was one of the biggest and *happiest* days of my life! I don't know where all that energy came from. It was like education in action.

Jenny: That's what's written on your sign in this picture in the



Post Photo by DeLacia
Instructor Richard Greenman
teaches outdoors.

Post. The sign stuck to a tree over your head reads: ‘Dick Greenman’s class, Education in Action, meets here. 2:00.’ And below a *Post* editor wrote a caption reading “Instructor Richard Greenman teaches outdoors.” Like they can’t read? They’ve always got to put an extra ‘n’ in our name.

Richard: That picture was taken a few days later, after the Big Bust, during the actual strike. You can see the bald patch on my head where the doctor shaved it after I got clobbered by a cop, but we’re getting ahead of our story. ... The next morning I made sure to get up early, and put on my ‘professor’s disguise’ (tweed jacket, rep tie, khakis, button-down collar and pipe), and return to the campus refreshed and ready. I put on an *espresso* and opened the *N.Y. Times*, which had been delivered around 6 a.m. Lo and behold, the headlines announced that, during the night, the Columbia students had occupied two more buildings! The Black students of SAS were holding out in Hamilton, and by mutual agreement, the Whites and SDS had seized two more. The hard core of SDS were ensconced in President Kirk’s luxurious office with a Rembrandt on the wall (which an art history student claimed was probably *school* of Rembrandt). The others were in Fayerweather, where I had lots of friends because it was occupied mainly by grad students, students from professional schools and intellectual type undergrads from Barnard and Columbia. You can imagine I was totally elated when I read the headlines, and so I ran to the subway and down to 116th Street to see what was happening. At that hour, the campus was deserted. I walked up to Low Library and the first thing I saw was my favorite SDSer Mark Rudd sitting on the window sill of President Kirk’s office with one foot in and one foot out and I couldn’t tell if he was coming or going.

Jenny: The headline of the *N.Y. Post* reads ‘Columbia Rebels Seize More Buildings’ and there’s a front page photo of students boosting themselves up to the window into President Kirk’s office in Lowe Library.

Richard: Yes, that was taken during the excitement the night before while I was home in bed. Now, it was the cold light of dawn. I had missed out on the long, lonely night the drastically reduced group of occupiers had spent in the *sacrosanct* of Columbia Uni-

versity waiting for a police bust in at any minute. It must have been scary in there cut off from the world. So there was Mark and I showed him the newspaper headlines and said, 'Mark, don't be a schmuck, we've won. Get back in that building!' We've laughed about that together many times over the last years.

Then, I went over to Hamilton Hall where my office was and where the Black students had now set up a serious barricade and let it be known that they were in solidarity with SDS on the demands over the gym, Vietnam, and over the punishment of students who had demonstrated. Soon, some of the other professors who taught at Hamilton started showing up, as well as an old friend of mine, Sydney Von Luther from 1199, a Black union organizer whom I had worked with for years through Columbia CORE trying to organize Columbia's cafeteria workers (mostly Black and Puerto Rican) into a union. In fact, back in the 30s, James Wechsler, the student editor of the Columbia daily *Spectator* (who was later the editor of the *N.Y. Post* for many years) got in trouble for supporting the cafeteria workers under autocratic Columbia President Nicholas Murray Butler, whose sister had the concession of the cafeteria and was as violently anti-labor as her brother, a former Republican vice-presidential candidate. When Columbia's football cheerleaders chant, "Who owns New York? We own New York!", they ain't just whistling Dixie.

My friends in CORE and I had previously tried to get help from the restaurant workers' union, but that union finked out on us. Local 1199, however, did not. And thanks to our effort, all Columbia cafeteria, buildings/grounds, and later, secretarial workers are unionized and have benefits today. This — like the preservation of Morningside Park — is one of the great long-lasting victories of Columbia '68 I'm still proud of.

Jenny: That's great, Dad. So let's get back to when it all started. We're at Hamilton Hall the first morning of the occupations.

Richard: So, Sydney, the other teachers and I, almost spontaneously, became a nonviolent faculty cordon in front of Hamilton to avoid violence, and because we sympathized with the students inside and didn't want them attacked. Sydney had lots of Civil Rights experience, and so did some of the other sympathetic faculty members whom I knew and who were also locked out of their offices. We were thus able to fend off a crowd of aggressive,

jock-like White students who wanted to charge in and mix it up with the Black students inside. Who organized this phalanx, which later took form as the anti-strike ‘Majority Coalition?’ I was told at the time that Dean Truman or people from Truman's office had gone around to the fraternities the previous night, and whipped up opposition among the conservative students. It was from this spontaneous group experience that the famous Ad Hoc Faculty Committee I talk about in my article was formed. We then fanned out to do our non-violent picket in front of the other occupied buildings.

Jenny: Where did you end up, Dad?

Richard: I was sent over to occupied Fayerweather Hall, where students were starting to gather for early morning classes (it was either 8 or 9). Again, a phalanx of athletic-looking students appeared, all fresh-faced and scrubbed, carrying piles of books and demanding to attend their classes, in pursuit of which they were willing to break through the feeble barriers erected by the Weenie grad students and beat them all up. With a few other Professors, I held onto the high ground at the top of the steps leading to the doors, from which I was able to look down at the gathering mob. I recognized a student in the crowd moving up, called out his name, and said: ‘Why Mr. So-and so, I've never known you to be up so bright and early and so eager to absorb knowledge.’ Of course, that got them laughing and I persuaded them to sit down like gentlemen and scholars and discuss the matter, rather than having a brawl which would be unseemly on an Ivy League college campus. I told them, ‘If you're so eager to learn philosophy and political science, well, there is something exciting happening here and now on this campus and we're part of it. So let's discuss it.’ Isn't that what college is supposed to be about? Today, we would call it an ideal ‘teaching moment.’ It was in that context that I said something about education in action which got picked up by the next day's *N.Y. Times*.

Jenny: Right. Here's your quote: ‘There can be no education and no thought that is divorced from action.’

Richard: So that's how I got them all to sit down on the lawn in front of Fayerweather, and we held a discussion — you could call it a teach-in. Next, I gave the floor to a famous sociology profess-

or, Amatai Etzioni, who was standing next to me on the steps.

Jenny: Oh yes, here's his picture talking in front of the crowd on page 5 of the *N.Y. Post*. We can see your ear behind him while he's talking into the Radio 88 microphone. The caption reads: 'International expert on arms control placates students in front of Fayerweather Hall and things cool off a bit, for a while.'

Richard: Well, things heated up the next day when William F. Buckley Jr., picked up that *Times* quote in his nationally syndicated column and hauled me over the coals.

Jenny: Yes, here it is in the *Post* from April 30. "Professor Richard Greenman of the French department announced, in the accents of Charlotte Corday, that 'there can be no education and no thought that is divorced from action.'" The trouble with that statement is (a) it isn't true and (b) even if it were, it is no justification for what the authorities of Columbia have been tolerating.'

Richard: The next day I dashed off a note to the *Times*: 'Dear Bill, It's Greeman, not Greenman and Marat, not Corday,' but he never answered. I bet one of his fact-checkers bit the dust that day.

Jenny: Of course, we're Greenmans, but who are those other people, Marat and Corday?



Richard: Jean-Paul Marat, known as the 'friend of the people,' was the extreme left fiery Jacobin journalist and agitator of the French Revolution, hated and reviled as a monster by all conservatives. Obviously, Buckley had me in mind for the part. Charlotte Corday was a beautiful conservative young woman from the provinces who traveled to Paris, bought a kitchen knife and stabbed Marat in his bath (where he did his writing because he suffered from psoriasis). In my day, every student knew the famous painting by the revolutionary artist David, showing his corpse sprawling in bathtub.

Jenny: Now I remember. There was a famous theatrical production by Peter Brook of a play called 'Marat/Sade.'

Richard: Right, that was Peter Weiss' script: '*The Assassination and Persecution of Jean-Paul Marat as performed by the Inmates of the Asylum at Charonton under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade.*' I really savored the irony that Buckley was implying that I wasn't fit to teach while he didn't know the difference between Marat and Corday! It gave me a big kick that a pretentious prig of an intellectual snob like Buckley would've made such a really ignorant mistake.

Anyway, back to campus. After standing all morning in front of the occupied buildings, we faculty picketers and sympathizers ended up gathering in the graduate lounge at Philosophy Hall, where my Graduate Department, French and Romance Philology, had offices upstairs. The lounge was huge, comfortable and always had tea going. After some discussion, we formed an '*Ad-Hoc* Faculty Committee' to express our concerns in this crisis. I loved those Latin words, *ad-hoc* ('to this' purpose), which gave our spontaneous, unofficial gathering of liberal and radical faculty, mostly untenured, a bit of academic *cachet*.

'The Center Falls Out,' the analytical piece that I wrote for *Radical Teacher* at the time, criticizes the fact that the liberals caved in, and that all that *ad hoc* good will and courage was co-opted by a few ambitious faculty members. So the article comes off negative. But what I remember best was how wonderful all of these people were. How our meetings, though a little bit chaotic, were full of passions, erudition, and fun. Here, for the first time ever, faculty members who had been infantilized by the Administration, found their voices. When we faced off against our former Dean, now University Vice-President, David Truman, it was a thrilling moment which made me think of the beginning of the French Revolution when the Estate General first met at Versailles, and for the first time the Third Estate, the middle class, was allowed to stand up and speak for itself. I have such clear memories of my colleagues, like Jeffrey Kaplow, a young Marxist History Professor and specialist of the French Revolution, with a clear high voice and a brilliant sarcastic wit. He's an actor now in London, but still writes left-wing history. And, of course, there was Eric Bentley, the famous downtown theater critic, translator of Bertolt Brecht and founder of a local cabaret called The DMZ (after the so-called Demilitarized Zone in Vietnam). Columbia had given him a professorship, and he now loudly

threatened to resign. Also, Terry Hopkins and Emmanuel Wallerstein, two brilliant semi-Marxist global analysts from the Sociology Department who went on to found the Braudel Institute to study global long term economics. I shouldn't forget Alexander Erlich, an old Polish Socialist, the son of Polish Socialists murdered by Stalin, whom I later met on the Broadway Subway with a red cocarde in his lapel, on his way to a Socialist May Day meeting. These were wonderful colleagues and people who are still — those who are alive — committed to the same ideals.

After Dean Truman told us *ad hoc* faculty that it didn't matter what we thought and that he was going ahead with his police plan, he left the hall under cries of 'shame!' Then we made a plan to get together and to provide a *cordon sanitaire* protection for the students by non-violently blocking the buildings that had been occupied. Including Avery Hall, the Architecture School, whose students had erected a symbolic blockade of beautiful cardboard with ribbons. We were expecting a blood bath, which is exactly what happened two weeks later. So we all fanned out to different places. I really wanted to go to Hamilton Hall, partly out of my sympathy for the Black students, and partly because that's where my office was.

But I was sent to a tricky spot, the entrance of Low Library, in the basement of the building the police had their headquarters. A bunch of faculty members were standing on the porch, on the concrete steps that lead into the big door, maybe 20 of us there, including Eric Bentley and several others I knew very well. We were allowing police and other officials to go through our line as a matter of course. Suddenly, a whole phalanx of burly guys in trench coats came barreling up, and I put up my hand and said something like 'we're faculty, officers of the university, what's your business here/identify yourself,' and they didn't even slow down. The first guy walked right up to me, raised his arm and out of his sleeve came a blackjack with which he wrapped me on the top of the head (as my colleagues told me later). I didn't see anything but I sure felt it. I started to go down, but I was so f-ing mad that I punched him in the balls. I don't know if he felt it. I hope so. Anyway, the troop of plainclothes' goons marched through us and into Low.

Now I tried to sit up, and my colleagues look horrified since I was bleeding so beautifully (as the most trivial scalp wounds

CLOSING STOCK PRICES
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WEATHER
Tonight:
Partly cloudy,
low in mid
40s.
Tomorrow:
Mostly fair,
40s.
TUESDAY, APRIL 23, 1968
7:00 P.M.
7:00 P.M.
7:00 P.M.

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NEW YORK, FRIDAY, APRIL 26, 1968
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7
RACES

Columbia Yields a Point but
STUDENT REBELS
WON'T GIVE UP

By STEVEN MARCIN
With Joseph Feeney, Jay Levin, Bryna Tashman and Jack B. Rubin

Columbia University yielded on a key demand of student demonstrators today but the students refused to give up occupation of campus buildings unless they were granted amnesty.

The university said it would temporarily halt construction of the gymnasium in Morningside Park, one of the central issues in the dispute; it also suspended classes until Monday.

But the demonstration, now in its fourth day, continued with no end in sight. The protesters, who earlier in the day had taken over a fifth building—the Mathematics Bldg.—said they were prepared to remain inside all of them indefinitely.

Student supporters gassed up food through windows to the demonstrators throughout the day.

The announcement about the gym came after a shouting match broke out between a detail of plain-clothes men and 24 faculty members who were standing with linked arms outside Low Memorial Library. It was the first major incident since the demonstration began four days ago.

One teacher, Richard Greenman, a French instructor, suffered a 5-inch cut in his scalp, and an elderly woman was knocked to the ground. Greenman was released after treatment at St. Luke's Hospital and the woman was not seriously injured.

There were conflicting reports as to what caused the incident.

There were these other developments:
Faculty members, campus security police and city police set up checkpoints at the main gates of the campus and in the lobbies of the dormitories, admitting only persons with student identification cards.
They acted upon about 500 Negro high school

Continued on Page 8



Post Photo by

will). They helped me to my feet, and when I touched my head where it hurt and looked at my hand, I could see it was all covered with blood. And, of course, cameras were all flashing because this entrance was where the press had gathered. WKCR, the college radio, was broadcasting remote; *the Post* was there and people from TV. Never at a loss for words, I stood tall and held up my hand on which the blood was quite visible, and announced to the assembled press what had happened. And that's

when the picture was taken that you see on the front page of the next day's *Post*.

Jenny: This was about 1 a.m. on Thursday, April 26th, right? The headline of the *Post* says, "STUDENT REBELS WON'T GIVE UP". The caption reads "**Richard** Greenman shows what he claims was blood."

Richard: Didn't Mark Twain once say: "I don't care what they write about me as long as they spell mu name right?" So this was my Andy Warhol '15-minutes of fame.' My only regret is I was more famous for getting hit over the head than for what was in my head. But I was feeling elated.

Jenny: Elated? How?

Richard: Yes, elated that I was able to seize the time (as the Panthers were saying) when the press was focused, and focus it on the inevitable consequences of bringing carloads of heavily armed police to campus to enforce the trespassing laws in the middle of the night. This was a storm-trooper operation. I was able to express this in a way that might make a difference. Just then the big door opened and a faculty colleague who was working with the administration came to ask how I was (he had heard the story) and to extend David Truman (the Dean's) offer of help/concern. He held out his hand and, of course, with my flair for the dramatic, I shook hands with him and covered his hand with blood. I said to him, "Take this back to David Truman and tell him the blood of faculty will be on his hands if he continues with this police business!" He was a colleague from the Russian Institute who came from an old Menshevik family and took guitar lessons in Jersey with your Grandmother Mira. I think I felt comfortable enough with him to pull a stunt like that. The next thing that happened was comical. I thought of your mother.

Jenny: Oh, geez, she must have been worried out of her mind.

Richard: You don't even know.

Jenny: Um, I think I might!

Richard: So, as soon as I thought of Julie, I realized I needed to telephone her and reassure her because she must be going crazy. But here I was on an occupied campus and the only place I could

use a phone was down in the administration office, which was filled with police! Of course, how could I go down there?

Jenny: No cell phones, eh?

Richard: No! So after having cavalierly dismissed Truman's offer of assistance, I find myself needing to use the phone, and probably the toilet too! Here I am, thoughtlessly fearless when confronting a phalanx of goons, suddenly going to pieces thinking of my wife at home! Anyway, I knocked on the door, and most humbly (now) asked if I could use the phone. They took me downstairs and I could see the whole police command. I called Julie.

Now, Julie was staying nearby at the apartment of Peter Haydu, another faculty member of the French department (whom I heard from just a few months ago, apropos of the Columbia Re-union).

So I had his number and I called. I spoke to Marie-Helen, Peter's wife, and I told her what was happening and she's telling me that Julie's hysterical. They were listening to the radio (WKCR) which was reporting just then that they'd hit a French professor, and he's going down, right then. Right now, in Julie's point of view! In any case, it was being simulcast (but 10 minutes late) so my wife is hearing on the radio that I'm dead and I'm on the phone trying to convince her I'm not! I mean, a head wound bleeds a lot, but if you don't have a concussion or crack your skull, it's OK. What hurt was the stitches! After the phone call, I dragged myself through now-deserted streets — the cops were rounding everyone up — and walked into St. Luke's hospital. As luck would have it, the guy on duty in the emergency room was a Columbia man with little sympathy for the rebels. Let's just say he didn't take too much care to make the stitches gentle! Well, I met Julie and we went home.

Jenny: That's kind of a big day! So, what do you think was the result of all this?

Richard: The result was that David Truman and President Kirk finally understood what was happening and what *would* happen — that it wouldn't only be my blood. That it would be a blood bath and they called it off. I can just imagine what the police felt, and what contempt they must have had for these 'liberals' on

campus who couldn't make up their minds; and it well may be that the reluctance of the police to return may have allowed us to continue our occupation of buildings much longer. Anyway, that was the upshot. The police were called off, the students were jubilant, and the whole situation was transformed. There was no way that Kirk and Truman could 'cry wolf' again or that Mayor Lindsey and the police department could come back. We won more time! And in that time, more buildings were occupied, and more attention was focused on the Six Demands. High school students and outside agitators begin showing up on campus. More important, the majority of Columbia Students had time to argue the issues and eventually come over to the position of SDS, SAS and the sit-ins. That picture of my bloody hand was published the next day, Friday, and that was a new day at Columbia. The occupation had a new lease on life.

Sadly, it was during that period that the *ad-hoc* faculty committee — from having heroically defended the students — ended up getting boxed up in a neutral, and somewhat ambiguous, position between the student strikers on the one hand and the administration on the other, and eventually co-opted, demoralized, and dispersed by ambitious faculty opportunists.

Jenny: Yes, that's the story you cover in the article 'The Center Falls Out.' That's a great title and it sounds familiar, like I should know the reference, but I don't. Where did you get it from?

Richard: I'm not surprised you asked. The title is a quote from Leon Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* where he said that "in a crisis the center falls out," meaning that liberals become irrelevant and you end up with polarization between Reds and Whites. But my left academic colleagues for whom it was written didn't get it either. They thought I was (mis)quoting William Butler Yeats, a moderate, who, in a famous poem, *The Second Coming*, wrote:

*Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.*

Great poetry, but not quite what I meant. As for the rest of the story of the strike, I tell it in detail in the article 'The Columbia

Rebellion' where you can read about me and Julie both crying while watching the students being hauled off campus during the 'big bust' a week later. So Mayor Lindsay's cops finally agreed to come back to Columbia, and this time they out-did themselves in brutality — perhaps out of peak at being thwarted the first time by a quick-witted French Instructor.

Richard: Oh, Jenny, before we end this interview, there's one more story about Columbia 1968 which will interest you as an actress.

Jenny: Let's hear it!

Richard: Well, back in the 60s your mother and I were close friends with the Broadway and TV actor Hershel Bernardi, whom we met through Grandma Mira. Well, Heshie was an old Wallace Progressive and sympathized with the 1968 Columbia Student Strikers. At the time, he had just finishing playing Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof* on Broadway and was touring with his own program of Yiddish theater in English. So, after the Big Bust, he volunteered to sneak his players through the police cordon around Columbia and present a Left-wing play (I think by Peretz) called *Gymnasium*. It's about a Jewish student in Tzarist Russia facing anti-Semitism, and Heshie asked me to introduce the play to the packed hall of students and make sure they understood that *every word* in this play was written before 1910. You'll see why in a minute.

The plot goes like this: a boy and his parents are burning for him to study, but the quota for Jews at the gymnasium is infinitesimal and bribes, *etc.* are required to get in. (Raya Dunayevskaya told me of a similar humiliating experience in her own Russian girlhood.) Finally, the boy is accepted at some distant gymnasium and moves to that town with his parents. But on the



first day at school, he comes home at noon with his new school uniform all messy and announces that he and his classmates are on strike (against discrimination). This is the climax of the play. It's the big scene when the father (played by Heshie), shocked out of his mind at the idea of all that he has sacrificed for nothing, tries to talk the boy out of striking. He launches into a set-piece monologue, a long litany of all the world's problems, each punctuated with an ironic cry of 'strike!' ('*So you don't like discrimination? Strike! So food prices are too high? Strike!*') Finally, the old man runs out of steam. He starts getting convinced by his own ironic arguments. And, in the end, instead of raising his palms with irony and rolling his eyes in incredulity every time he gets to the word 'strike,' the poor father looks at his son and says, humbly and quietly, 'So, strike.' My eyes are swelling with tears just in the telling.

Well, you can imagine the incredible reaction this audience of striking Columbia students. Many of them, like me, were wearing bandages as badges of honor after the Bust and many were having the same problems with their own Jewish parents. They couldn't believe what they were hearing, and every time Heshie pronounced the word 'strike,' the audience went wild, shouting: 'Strike! Strike! Strike!' for a full minute. And then Heshie said the next part of his monologue, ending in 'strike,' and it all started again! I think it took poor Heshie twenty minutes to get through that five-minute monologue, but he was overjoyed. What an audience! What jubilation! And what a powerful thing theater can be, right *Jenny*?

Jenny: Right, Dad!



Where are the Riots of Yesteryear?

1968 in Historical Perspective [1988]¹⁵⁴

An Elegiac Evocation

Nineteen sixty-eight What a wonderful year that was! Rebel-
lions breaking out all over the f—king place. From Paris to
Prague, from Berkeley to Berlin, from Mexico City to Chicago —
in the ghetto, on the campus, in the jungles of Vietnam, even with-
in the councils of the Vatican — revolution is the happening thing.

¹⁵⁴ Published in *New Politics* on the occasion of the 20th Anniversary of the May 1968 uprisings.

A42 • The Chronicle of Higher Education • May 4, 1988 Students

Participants in 1968 Student Takeover at Columbia U. Return to Campus to Celebrate 20th Anniversary

By THOMAS J. DELOUGHBY NEW YORK

Former students at Columbia University, whose highly publicized week-long takeover of the campus here in 1968 helped catalyze the nationwide student movement against racism and the Vietnam War, returned to the campus last month to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the event.

The dress was casual and the mood nostalgic—and, at times, quite serious—as several hundred former protesters, many accompanied by their young children, recalled how they had taken control of the campus on April 23, 1968, to protest the university's involvement in defense-related research and its decision to build a gymnasium in a nearby Harlem park.

They also talked about "the bust," which ended the occupation on its seventh day. Police officers forcibly removed more than 700 protesters from the buildings and arrested them.

Pride, Regret, Sorrow, and Hope

During the opening session of the weekend reunion, the speakers—seated on a stage flanked by banners demanding the withdrawal of U.S. military forces from the Persian Gulf—told about 600 former and current students that the memories of the sit-in and the student strike that followed it had left them with mixed emotions, which included pride, regret, sorrow, and hope.

Several participants said they hoped today's college students would launch a similar movement to protest against racism and U.S. involvement in Central America.

Mark Ruskell, the former leader of the Columbia chapter of Students for a Democratic Society who led the protest in 1968, told a standing room-



Roger Greenman, professor of French at U of Hartford, at the 20th anniversary of the student takeover at Columbia U.

Mark Nelson, a professor of Afro-

People in motion — all kinds of people. People thinking, acting, daring, participating in an unprecedented historical crisis on an unprecedented international scale. Sending sparks of inspiration and solidarity across frontiers of nationality, age, ideology, and class. Sparks illuminating a moment of world-historical significance, challenging the old order, and illuminating possibilities of a different way of being, a new human order.



The place where the spark was kindled was Vietnam. There, poor peasants, city workers, Buddhist monks, and nationalist intellectuals led by the Communists under Ho Chi Minh successfully defended themselves against brutal attacks, first by the

French Army and then by the Americans — the ‘anti-colonialist’ Americans, whose 1776 Declaration of Independence was included *verbatim* in the Basic Program of the Vietnamese National Liberation Front. The Vietnamese were ingenious in their audacity, fighting with bicycles and bamboo sticks against B-52s and flame-throwers. Their popular rising during Têt (the Vietnamese New Year) inspired solidarity and sympathy around the world and inaugurated the year of the rebels. Images of beautiful Vietnamese faces and bodies agonized in torture and defiant in dignity girdled the globe through the technological wizardry of television. In the flickering light of the tube My-Lai became the global village.

From deep down in another colonial jungle — the Magnolia Jungle of U.S. racism — came another spark. Struck by Rosa Parks, kindled by Martin Luther King and the brave young people of SNCC and CORE, it burst into flame and burned its way through the cities of the oldest and most complacent of capitalist ‘democracies,’ incinerating the vestiges of McCarthyite conformity and awakening a new generation of white youth to the joys of sex, drugs, rock and revolution.

France: May-June 1968

In response to police repression of anti-Vietnam war protests, the Latin Quarter is occupied by student rebels — eventually by rebel youth of all classes and all ages demanding nothing short of a

Show Solidarity with the
French Revolution - 1968!!

Up Against the Wall - DeGaulle!! Up Against the Wall - DeGaulle!! Up Against the Wall



Millions of French workers, peasants and students have told the French bankers and billionaire corporations that the country they've worked and studied to build over many generations by rights belongs to them - NOT to the small clique of millionaire parasites who claim to "own" it. The massive struggle was sparked by students securing their universities, students to limit faculty conditions there. It gained momentum as the French masses, both the workers and the lower school class who lived under steadily worsening conditions during the DeGaulle regime, struck and seized the factories where they produced the wealth of society.

We want to show our solidarity with the IMF French Revolution against the French Imperialist Ruling Class in order to enable us to further expose and expose the US Imperialist Ruling Class which is today sending our brothers to die for their profits in Vietnam. And bring closer the day of the American Revolution against that small clique of millionaires who monopolize our resources and usurp the wealth of our society and seek to monopolize it for their own ends.

DEMONSTRATION - Sat. June 1, 12 noon at the
French Consulate 934 Fifth Ave. • 75th St.

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DeGaulle!! Up Against the Wall - DeGaulle!! Up Against the Wall

new society. Their slogan: 'All power to the imagination!' As in 1789, 1830, 1848, 1871, Paris is in revolt. Eros is in the ascendant. Handwriting on the walls: 'The more I make revolution, the more I want to make love — the more I make love, the more I want to make revolution.' The spark spreads to the aircraft and auto factories, then to the railroads, the buses, the labs, the big stores, the administrations. In every school, factory, office people are organizing 'Action Committees' to coordinate their struggle and reorganize their workplace. Power is in the streets. President de Gaulle, *le grand Charles*, is mysteriously absent.

Ten million French and immigrant workers are on a general strike. They have their own agenda. Not higher wages, but workers' power, self-management, an end to hierarchy. Corporate managers and Communist union officials are equally nonplussed at the popular slogan, 'Humanity will finally be happy when the last capitalist is hanged by the guts of the last bureaucrat.' The detonator was the student uprising; the powder charge, the working classes. The target, the whole established order... In short, a pre-revolutionary situation.

Czechoslovakia: August 1968



Half a million Russian troops invade Czechoslovakia to crush attempts to democratize and humanize the Communist regime. The massive resistance of students, workers, intellectuals and reform-minded Communists sparks worldwide sympathy. Behind the

Iron Curtain, solidarity demonstrations are held in Poland, Hungary, East Berlin, even Leningrad. In the U.S., protestors brutalized by the Chicago police at the Democratic Convention brandish signs reading 'Welcome to Czechago.' 'Welcome to Prague' is spray-painted on the streets of Berkeley during the battle for People's Park.

Although the Czech experiment in 'socialism with a human face' is forced to capitulate before the armed might of what is euphemistically known as 'Actually Existing Socialism,' workers and students, imitating their French counterparts, continue to form Action Committees demanding civil liberties and workplace democracy.

Internationalism

In all these movements, internationalism prevails over national chauvinism and racism. When the French government deports 'Dany-the-Red' Cohn-Bendit (a Jewish German national prominent among the Paris student rebels), thousands of French workers and students parade through the streets chanting 'We are all German Jews.' The General Assembly of Student-Worker Action Committees call for 'The Abolition of the Status of Foreigner in France!' — this despite the French Communist Party's patriotic appeal to 'national feeling.'

The unity of the New Left, East and West, is incarnated in the person of 'Red' Rudi Dutschke, the dissident East German Communist student who became the outstanding leader of the SDS in West Berlin. His shooting by a right-wing fanatic echoes the shots that killed Martin Luther King the previous week. In Mexico City, the sham internationalism of the Olympic Games is unmasked by victorious U.S. athletes raising their clenched fists in the Black Power salute and by the protest of the Mexican students - brutally slaughtered in the Plaza of the Three Cultures by the police of the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party.

Nineteen sixty-eight: a year of triumph and tragedy. A moment when the news was dominated, not by the pronouncements of boring bureaucrats, but by the daring deeds of people in protest and masses in motion. At a time when we ourselves were the spectacle we watched through the magnifying and distorting lens of the media. When bold, surrealistic slogans, like 'Do it!', 'Burn, baby, burn!', 'All power to the imagination!' 'Freedom NOW!'

and 'Everything is possible!' seemed perfectly reasonable. A time when everyone was young, when rebellion was in the air, when life meant struggle and it was exciting to be alive.

Do I wax nostalgic? Looking backward over two decades, one is tempted to paraphrase François Villon, the student-rebel-poet-thief of 15th Century Paris, and inquire: 'Where are the riots of yesteryear?' However, the purpose of the proceeding exercise in elegiac evocation is not to poeticize the remembrance of things past. It is rather to recall to the reader's mind true-life images of an actual world-historical moment: memory-pictures which, from today's viewpoint, would seem fantastic, were they not factual. With these images in mind, then, let us attempt more soberly to evaluate the movements of the 1960s in historical perspective: the positive, the negative and the prospects for the future.

Backlash, or the Sixties Suppressed

If nothing else, the worldwide mass revolts that culminated in the revolutionary year 1968 disproved for our generation the pervasive myth of the invincibility of the system. Since 1968, we have undergone two decades during which the establishment has devoted the full force of its apparatus of repression and propaganda to the task of erasing the memory of what happened in the '60s. The rebellions, near revolutions, and mass protests have disappeared down the memory hole as far as official history is concerned. In a frantic effort to avoid an inconvenient repetition, the media and the ruling elite have pulled out all the stops in their campaign to discredit and destroy even the memory of that glorious decade.¹⁵⁵

For example, the media create and perpetuated the ugly myth of anti-war protesters spitting on returning soldiers, when in fact the movement set up G.I. coffee houses near Army bases where soldiers could relax, be themselves and escape for a moment the

¹⁵⁵ *Update, June 2007.* New proof of 1968's still-potent charge. — after not twenty, but now forty years: Nicolas Sarkozy, the successful Right-wing candidate in last month's French Presidential election, devoted his final speech of the campaign to.... 1968-bashing! According to Sarko, we 68'ers are responsible for today's 'intellectual and moral relativism,' 'brought cynicism to society and lowered the political and moral level.' Further more, we 'encourage criminals.' 'We must turn the page of May-68' Sarkozy concluded (*Le Monde*, May 2, 2007).

brutality and brainwashing of Basic Training. It is remarkable that despite this orchestrated slander campaign, so many people in the United States continue to be wary of foreign adventures in places like Nicaragua and El Salvador, to the point where the Reagan Administration, which came to power eight years ago with the destruction of Nicaragua as the number one item on its agenda, has had to face total failure. Indeed the derogatory phrase 'Vietnam Syndrome' (labeling a cure as if it were a disease!) is designed to conceal one of the most remarkable phenomena of world history: for the first time in human memory, the native population of a powerful imperialist nation (including many in the military) forced the abandonment of an oppressive war of conquest against a rebellious semi-colony. Neither the Athenian *demos* nor the Roman *plebs* had the courage and wisdom to effectively oppose their own imperialist leaders. The result was the destruction of democracy in Greece and Rome. The people of the United States have every right to be proud of our record of resistance and our continued opposition.

The Balance Sheet

Among the other great achievements of the '60s was the end of two centuries of legal segregation and oppression of America's Black former slave population. Add to this the official recognition of the rights (and the historical oppression) of women, gays, Hispanics, and the handicapped. Moreover, the dawning awareness of the danger to humanity's survival posed by pollution and nuclear war represents a new and universal consciousness capable of uniting the mass of humanity in a common struggle. Finally, the establishment has not forgotten that our movements, however feeble and disorganized, succeeded in unseating and forcing the retirement of three of the most powerful and popular rulers of dominant nation states: Lyndon B. Johnson, Richard Nixon, and France's Charles de Gaulle.

It is hardly surprising that the battle of 1968 did not end in a decisive knock-out against world capital in its 'private' and bureaucratic forms. What needs remembering 20 years after is the fact that we won a couple of rounds on points and struck a nasty left jab which sent the Establishment reeling to its corner. Nor is it surprising that the forces of repression and reaction returned to

the fray stronger and more determined to crush the revolutionary elements; indeed, it is in the nature of things. As Rosa Luxembour­g so elegantly put it, ‘Every revolution is doomed to failure except the last one.’

A Failure to Build on Victories

The real shortcoming of the movements of the '60s was not that we failed to annihilate a vastly superior antagonist, but that we failed to acknowledge, consolidate, and build on some of our very real and remarkable victories. For example, in the United States in 1970, the youth movement achieved a very high stage with the first nationwide general strike of students — spontaneously organized in response to Nixon’s invasion of Cambodia, the repression of the Black Panther Party, and the murder of Black protestors at Jackson State (Miss.) and White students at Kent State (Ohio). For the first time, a majority of students, not just in elite schools like Berkeley, Columbia, and Ann Arbor, but, in the hinterlands, was prepared to defy the authority of schools, parents, and the live ammunition of the police and the National Guard in full awareness of the potentially deadly consequences of their commitment. Moreover, the 1970 protests were not confined to the ‘single-issue’ of winding down a losing and unpopular war. They also struck to the root of the most critical domestic issue of the decade: Black liberation. If personal self-interest — the threat of the draft — may originally have awakened the student youth to politics, in the end, they called the whole system into question by their actions.

The tragedy of 1970 was that far from building on what can be seen historically as a remarkable victory for spontaneous direct action — thwarting the plans of the Nixon-Kissinger Administration to expand the war in Southeast Asia and eradicate the militant Black leadership — the movement retreated into quietism and despair. Instead of planting the flag of victory on the high ground that had been conquered in an open struggle and congratulating themselves on their new power, the students succumbed to pessimism. Unaccustomed to measuring tactical victories in terms of a long range revolutionary strategy, the students, and to some extent the Black militants, mistook a partial gain for a defeat. This failure to consolidate and capitalize on a new, higher stage of struggle had both subjective and objective causes.



The Scuttling of SDS

On the subjective side, the break-up of SDS in 1969 deprived the student movement of a national organization in which to gather and channel the new energies or prepare them for the next stage of struggle. This organizational quasi-suicide cut the new forces of radicalized youth off from each other and from a core of experienced, seasoned leadership capable of orienting the expanding movement.

The Progressive Labor Party, the Weatherpeople, and the other self-appointed elites and vanguards in SDS bear a heavy responsibility for disarming and disorganizing the radical student protest movement at the very moment it was about to achieve majority status and provoke what a Presidential Commission on Campus Unrest described as an ‘unparalleled crisis’ in American history. Through their ‘rule or ruin’ tactics, the Maoists and Weatherpeople more-or-less deliberately scuttled a fast-growing, radical, mass-based youth organization with a distinguished history. By turning their backs on the SDS tradition of participatory democracy and multi-tendency radicalism, they reneged on the promise of further mass organizing and political growth among the majority of youth. By opting for obsolete, elitist forms of struggle — vanguardism and terrorism — they effectively alienated the sympathies the movement had slowly gathered over years of escalating struggle. Worse still, they destroyed the vehicle through which it could develop further.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ *2008 Note.* On the occasion of the refounding of SDS this Winter, remorseful Weatherman Mark Rudd ruefully recounted dumping the SDS membership

The self-proclaimed super-revolutionary vanguardists in SDS were in effect *retrogressionists* with respect to the new forms of organization — radical, spontaneous, community-based, self-developing — which were the historically specific creations of the 1960s. Moreover, by refusing to recognize the role of youth and students as a new revolutionary subject with its own inner dynamic, they cut off the possibility of alliances with other actors on the revolutionary scene: Blacks, women, national liberation struggles, and the working class.

To form effective alliances, a social group must be organized and capable of united action, of throwing its weight into the struggle alongside of other radical social forces. In the modern world, youth and students represent such a force. In May 1970, half of the United States' 8 million students and 350,000 faculty members were on strike against racism, imperialism and university complicity with the war machine. This was a considerable social force in itself, one capable of opening and prolonging a political crisis, and of lending important weight to other social forces — the Blacks, the minorities, the women — who were already in motion. If something like the French student-worker revolt of May 1968

with its general strike of 10 million was probably not on the agenda for the U.S. in 1970 (for reasons we will discuss later), there is no doubt that a golden opportunity was lost.



"Shut Up and Act Young"

The Role of Youth

Let us note the historical lesson for future reference: like the Black liberation struggle and the women's movement, the students and youth need and are entitled to their own or-

files into Lake Michigan. Imagine how much more powerful the spontaneous campus risings of 1970 would have been if connected and coordinated through this national network.

ganizational vehicle for self-development and struggle. The course of history *may*, in some objective sense, ‘subordinate’ the youth within the broader struggle of the workers, but for elitist super-revs to choose to subordinate it to their chosen idea of ‘true vanguard’ is dangerous nonsense.

Granted, the U.S. is different from France, but, if the French worker-student uprising of May-June 1968 proved anything, it proved that a student movement could serve as a ‘detonator’ for a social revolt that would unleash the fundamental economic antagonists in the social struggle — the workers *versus* the capitalist state — and involve the near-totality of the population in revolutionary activity. It proved that social revolution — despite the hoary prognostications of decades of liberal theorists and neo-Marxists — was still on the agenda in advanced capitalist countries. Most of all, it proved (in the root sense of ‘tested’) the fragility and vulnerability of the seemingly invincible hegemonic bureaucratic-capitalist superstructure — the progressive modern state. The spectacle of the police in disarray, the government paralyzed, and the army confined to barracks (for fear of fraternization) is a specter that continues to haunt the corridors of power - even if the radicals have momentarily forgotten it. Like the failed pan-European revolutions of 1848, like the doomed Paris Commune of 1871, like the abortive Russian Revolution of 1905, the revolutionary year 1968 heralded the appearance of new revolutionary subjects, revealed new forms of struggle, and foreshadowed future possibilities.

The significance of 1968 twenty years later is less in its more-or-less predictable failure, than in its promise for the future. Call it, if you like, a ‘flash in the pan.’ It was, nonetheless, a flash sufficiently bright to illuminate, however briefly, the possible shape of things to come. This being the case, we have no choice but to return to the history of the rebellions of 1968 as to a living lesson, a roadmap which *may* point to possible pathways — perhaps the only roads — toward human survival and a new society.

What Was Missing?

Let us look, first of all, at the negatives: the reasons why the rebellions of 1968 did NOT result in world revolution. I do not share the analysis of the celebrated Marxist philosopher Herbert

Marcuse, whom the media presented as the inspirer of the world-wide student revolts, but who, in 1968, publicly opposed them.¹⁵⁷ Marcuse's earlier revival of Hegalian Marxism (*Reason and Revolution*, 1941) and his synthesis of Marx and Freud (*Eros and Civilization*) were certainly seminal for many in the New Left. But, by the 1960s, Marcuse was seeing only negativity ('The Great Refusal') in our epoch of world-wide rebellion and theorizing workers in terms of *One-Dimensional Man* (his 1964 book).¹⁵⁸

On the other hand, Marcuse's analysis did have the virtue of focusing attention on a salient feature of the 1960's: revolt in the 'periphery.' Whether we consider the national liberation movements on the geographical periphery of the industrially developed world, or the 'peripheral' elements within it — the racial and ethnic minorities, the women liberationists, the youth, the unemployed, the disaffected intellectuals — we are looking at elements on the fringes. The fact that this rag-tag assortment of illiterate peasants and alienated intellectuals, dark-skinned ghetto-dwellers and middle-class students, outsiders, freaks and so-called 'lumpen' proletarians succeeded in uniting to knock the establishment off balance, is a remarkable testimony both to the fragility of the system, and the maturity of oppressed humanity in our epoch of capitalist decadence.

The received wisdom of traditional 'Marxism' (Communists, social-democrats, even Trotskyists) considered these diverse 'elements' as essentially passive at best, and, at worst, as potential reactionary shock-troops in moments of crisis. Only under the 'firm leadership' of the advanced proletariat and its 'revolutionary vanguard' (the Party), it was believed, might they 'go over' to the revolution. Yet 1968 presents the spectacle of these very peripheral elements joining forces, generating their own leadership, mounting new and ingenious forces of struggle, and provoking a social

¹⁵⁷ Marcuse was appalled by the student tactics of strikes and occupations. Having been hounded out of Nazi Germany as a Jew and a Marxist, Marcuse defended the 'liberal' U.S. university system, where he had been welcomed, as a sanctuary for free inquiry. The sight of students taking over campuses must have reminded him of the Hitler Youth. We rebels exposed U.S. universities — supposedly 'value-free' — as complicit with the Vietnam war, carrying out secret military research and processing students into future officers and docile corporate employees.

¹⁵⁸ Please see my essay, 'A Critical Examination of Herbert Marcuse's Thought,' *New Politics* Vol. VI, No. 4.

and political crisis — a *breach* in the continuity of authority. This radical rupture was all the more remarkable in the absence of two elements considered essential for the overthrow of capitalism: a world economic crisis and of a generalized intervention on the part of the working class.

Limits of the Struggle

The Sixties' revolts erupted during a period of relative prosperity — the post-WWII boom of capitalist expansion. Unionized workers in the West, relatively well-paid, were considered integrated and consumerized. Futurists worried over the problem of 'leisure time.' Students, more or less assured of lifetime employment at places like IBM, were free to reject capitalist society on moral grounds. The mass strikes of the working class in France and Czechoslovakia were the exception, rather than the rule. It is not surprising, given their isolation, that they did not develop in an insurrectional direction and confront the armed forces of the state.

Whereas Marcuse and others dismissed French workers' general strike as a sort of historical conditioned reflex, a throwback to the traditions of 1848 and 1871, one might argue the contrary case. The decision to stop short of the ultimate confrontation (and thus avoid a bloodbath) was perhaps a sign of the collective maturity and tactical wisdom, not only of the French (with their bitter memories of the massacres of July 1848 and the 1871 Commune), but also of the Czechs (who could hardly have forgotten the fate of the insurrectionary Hungarian Workers' Councils of 1956). It is hardly astonishing that the workers of France and Czechoslovakia chose not to become martyrs in the cause of an unlikely world revolution. What is astonishing is the fact that the overwhelming majority of the French workers refused to accept the Grenelle Agreements (including wage raises of up to 72%!) negotiated for them by the Communist and Socialist trade unions. It wasn't *more* money they wanted, but something else: new human relations in production. (A mass meeting of 25,000 actually booed the CGT leaders off the platform at the huge Renault factory at Boulogne-Billancourt near Paris.)



Dr. Benjamin Spock in anti-war march.

Astonishing but True

What is astonishing is the fact that during the French general strike, many enterprises actually resumed production under worker self-management and began exchanging their products with those of neighboring farmers, thus stripping the commodity-fetish off their labor and creating an embryonic socialism in the course of struggle! What is astonishing is the fact that many workers (backed by the students) continued to face the police in full-scale battles to defend their occupied factories long AFTER the official Communist- and Socialist-led unions had 'settled' the strike, and attempted to stampe the workers back to work with false reports that 'all the other' factories had returned. What is astonishing is the fact that the Czech workers, often led by rank-and-file Communists, actually intensified the organization of democratically elected factory committees AFTER the Russian invasion put an end to Dubcek's reforms.

Clearly, if these workers had no taste for traditional revolutionary martyrdom, they had no taste for traditional reformism either. If the Czechoslovakian mass strike had spread, say, to Poland in 1968 (instead of 1981), the Czech resistance might have taken a less passive, less 'Schweikian' form, and the outcome

might have been different. Similarly, if the French general strike had spread into Britain and Germany — as it did in a drawn-out form in Italy during 1969.

But, not so astonishingly, it didn't. It didn't for perfectly clear, objective reasons. The world economy was still enjoying the autumn of the long post-World War II boom. France, for example, had undergone a remarkable period of modernization and expansion during the Gaullist decade of 1958-1968, and in the U.S., L.B. Johnson was still able to deliver guns *and* butter, to pacify part of the labor movement and to co-opt an important sector of the Civil Rights movement by recruiting its leaders with paid jobs in his bogus 'War on Poverty' — all the while escalating his much more real and more costly war on Southeast Asia.

Only a Flash in the Pan?

Let us return, now, to our point of departure — Marcuse's critique of the movements of the 60s as essentially 'marginal' and their negative depiction as a mere 'flash in the pan' of no historical significance. History buffs and gun-freaks may recall that the expression 'a flash in the pan' refers to the misfiring of an old-fashioned flint-lock musket. The flint strikes a spark, the spark ignites the powder in the pan, but the main powder-charge in the breech fails to ignite. There is a blinding flash, but no bullet. This is an apt description of what happened in 1968.

On the other hand, the 60s revolts — be they of youth, oppressed minorities or peasants in the periphery — did display the potential to act as *detonators* (our 'flash in the pan' image again) for flare-ups of serious class conflict involving the essential polar antagonists of modern industrial society: the wage earners who produce goods and services *versus* the stockholders whose corporations own, manage or control the means of production and the state. Moreover, in both France and Czechoslovakia, the rebels and strikers had the active sympathy of the general population, further isolating the power structure to the point where the Army and even some of the police could no longer be counted on.

As we have seen, these pre-revolutionary situations flared up for a few weeks only, and then, unable to go forward, died out, like a flash in the pan. But does this render them meaningless

‘throwbacks’ (Marcuse) to a bygone age of class struggle? Not necessarily. The fact that a musket may misfire on one or another occasion does not render it any less a deadly weapon. Perhaps the powder was wet. The wet powder, in this case, standing for the absence of an economic crisis. Better timing next time. And speaking of next time, there is a striking time-lag — a *décalage* or out-of-phase character — between the period of widespread social and political crises of the 1960s and the period of generalized economic crisis we are entering today, East and West. Given this *décalage*, it is not altogether surprising that the revolts of the 60s remained largely confined to ‘the periphery’ and retained a quality better characterized as ‘revolts’ or ‘rebellions’ than as ‘revolutions.’ (Hence the essentially symbolic, even theatrical quality of many of their tactics, from non-violent sit-ins to Days of Rage, or from showering the stock exchange with dollar bills to planting bombs under it.)

Meanwhile, the brief flash of 1968 stands like a beacon of hope, illuminating the capitalist landscape, pointing to the vulnerability of the powers that be and to the potential of new revolutionary subjects like youth and peasant farmers to ignite a general conflagration.

Some Hairy Theories

Nothing fails like failure. On the negative side, the objective isolation of these ‘peripheral’ movements from the central, essential class struggle of labor and capital led to some hairy theories with unfortunate practical consequences. Among the more innocuous of these deviations was Charles Riech's theory of *The Greening of America* (1970) which predicted the peaceful transformations of the oppressive, exploitative and brutal institutions of U.S. capitalism through a revolution in consciousness (‘Conn III’) which would take over as soon as the long-haired students of 1968 were old enough to become Chairmen of the Board. In practice, the ‘Long March through the Institutions’ (as it was known in German SDS) changed little besides style.

Equally idealistic but far more pernicious were the various vanguardist theories based on the elitist dogmas of the ‘backwardness’ of the masses and its corollary, the need for a ‘Party’ of heroic self-proclaimed revolutionaries to lead them or set them an ‘example.’

Although couched in the language of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, this ideology was a reversion to the ideology of the 19th Century Russian Populists — the ‘Narodniks’ against whom Lenin had had to struggle to lay the basis for Russian Marxism. Yet in the lull that followed the explosions of 1968, many European and American radicals, impatient with slow, dialectical development of mass movements and hungry for shortcuts to revolution, unwittingly reinvented the idealistic ‘serve the people’ ideology of the Russian students of 1870 and unconsciously aped the anarchist and populist bomb throwers of 1880-1914.¹⁵⁹

Whose Violence?

On the level of the movement as a whole, incalculable damage was done by confusing the necessity for revolutionary violence (for example, self-defense as practiced by the original Black Panthers and Deacons for Defense, the militant occupation of private property and public space) with the counter-productive practice of individual terror. Rather than representing a step forward, the cultivation of individual violence was an index of the movement's isolation and decline.

Finally, the very weakness of the 60s rebellions (the absence of an economic crisis and generalized class warfare) paradoxically revealed the secret vulnerability of the power structure. Despite its monopoly of guns, police, prisons, political processes and information media, the Establishment's hegemony was severely (if momentarily) shattered by our rag-tag army of outsiders and freaks. The vaunted stability of de Gaulle's monarchy-by-referendum proved to be a house of cards, and it was not for nothing that Nixon whined about a ‘pitiful, helpless giant.’ The Emperor, albeit armed to the teeth, for a moment, stood naked for all to see.



Author's satirical self-portrait (aged 19) as Nachayev, Bakunin's evil genius.

¹⁵⁹ This repetition of history as farce would be laughable were it not for its tragic consequences — for the radicals themselves, for innocent by-standers, and for the movement. From my own N.Y. circle, Ted Kapchuck is dead and Dave Gilbert and Kathy Boudin are in jail for life. We have already seen how SDS was dismantled in the name of this ‘revolution.’

History, like geology, does not move forward at a uniform pace, but rather in fits and starts. Long periods of apparent uniformity are followed by volcanic moments of rapid transformation, summing up all that has come before and illuminating much of what is to come. I very much agree with George Katsiaficas¹⁶⁰ who characterizes the 1960s as such a 'world-historical' moment. Thus, the rebellions of 1968 (like the unsuccessful revolutions of 1848 and 1905) may be seen as heralding the appearance on the historical stage of new revolutionary subjects and new forms of struggle that may develop at a later date.

If this be the case, the forces of social revolution that were forced into retreat two decades ago, may very well, following a historical pattern of 20-year cycles, return to the fray with the coming of a new generation. How have conditions changed since 1968? Will the balance of forces — subjective and objective — be more or less favorable for the Return of the Social Revolution?

Favorable Signs [in 1988]

To this inveterately optimistic observer, the objective signs look favorable. To begin with, the strategic capability of the U.S. as policeman of the capitalist world has sharply declined since 1968. Twenty years ago, U.S. imperialism was able to mount a prolonged full-scale invasion 6,000 miles from home against a seasoned Vietnamese guerrilla movement with a protected rear and lines of communication to allies in Russia and China. Today, tiny Nicaragua, surrounded by Contra bases, more or less abandoned by the U.S.S.R., stands defiant, only 600 miles from the U.S., after 8 years of concerted attack. Meanwhile, Washington's credibility lies shattered by the Iran-Contra-cocaine scandal. In comparison with the non-entity of [G.H.W.] Bush, Singlaub and North, Nixon and Kissinger loom like giants (and even Nixon's bumbling White House Plumbers look professional).

If the Monroe Doctrine is showing signs of wear, the Brezhnev Doctrine seems altogether in shambles. The rumble of tanks moving, NOT out into Czechoslovakia but home from Afghanistan (with their tails between their treads), can only be sending one

¹⁶⁰ For the best overall view of the Sixties, I recommend George Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of 1968*, South End Press, 1987.

message to East Europe's Communist dictators Husak, Geirik, Jarelzowsky and Company: 'Sink or swim. It's every man for himself, boys!' Not only did Gorbachev knock the military props out from under the ruling bureaucrats of the Warsaw Pact, he also removed the ideological props. Whatever *glasnost* and *perestroika* may mean in Russian, translated into East German, Hungarian, Czech, and Polish they have got to revive the hopes (and fears, for the bureaucracy!) of 1953, 1956, 1968, and 1981, respectively. Be that as it may, the rigid, bi-polar Cold War system with enforced social immobility based on the mutually agreed upon threat of the 'Enemy Without' is a thing of the past. The genii is out of the box. The superpowers suddenly don't seem so super any more, and humanity has less reason to fear and more reason to dream and to dare.

Economic Crisis?

On the economic front, it is clear that the world's dominant economic systems are on the brink of crisis.¹⁶¹ On the one hand, it is difficult to imagine the U.S. economy escaping the logical consequences of a rapidly declining balance of trade, a huge internal debt (both governmental and private), and billions of uncollectible loans to impoverished Third World countries. With savings institutions in deep trouble and the stock market, unchastened by Black Monday, battering on unhealthy speculation, laundered drug-money, and unproductive takeovers, it is likely that things may get a whole lot worse before they get better.

Whereas in 1968, the labor bureaucracy would drag a relatively well-paid layer of the working class 'part of the way with LBJ,' today, plant closings, cut-backs, and take-backs have eroded the influence of the social-patriotic class-collaborationists of the AFL-CIO. How long can the Johnny-One-Notes of the UAW go on trumpeting 'Buy American' when it is obvious to every worker that 'American' companies are in fact transnational

¹⁶¹ 2008 Note. Ruefully re-reading my 20 year-old doomsday prediction I am reminded of the humorous brag: « We Marxists have predicted five out of the last three recessions. » On the other hand, the objective conditions I noted in 1988 — debt, speculation, balance of trade, plant-closings, globalization — continued and intensified, while many of the regulations put in place in the 1930's to prevent another 1929-type Crash were removed. I don't want to be an I-told-you-so, but I told you so.

and that the job security of U.S. workers has been sacrificed on the altar of cheap labor in foreign lands? And if management can get away with paying garment workers 16 cents an hour in El Salvador, what chance does any worker — White, Black, or Latino — have asking for \$16 an hour or even \$6 an hour in L.A.? The answer is, 'Let's put the INTERNATIONAL back in UNION!' (Are you listening, International Ladies Garment Workers' Union?)

The beginnings of an anti-imperialist Central America solidarity lobby within the AFL-CIO is evidence that many U.S. workers understand that they are being forced to compete with the victims of anti-union right-wing dictatorships propped up by U.S. workers' tax dollars. Meanwhile, the situation of the Black and Hispanic labor force in the U.S., bad enough in 1968, has, if anything, worsened. To this reservoir of anger and revolt, Reaganomics has added millions of women forced into the labor market for survival, and thousands of skilled white workers who have been thrown out of work or forced into low-pay service jobs.

Capitalist Internationalization

The internationalization of capital has been the cutting edge of a generalized attack on U.S. labor's historical living standard — an attack designed to reduce us all — White, Black, male, female, young or old — to the level of subsistence. Cutbacks in health care, housing, education and job safety combine with 'deindustrialization' to increase our insecurity and fear. All this takes place with the tacit complicity of the AFL-CIO leadership who blame everything on the Japanese and provide an easy out for the politicians and the corporations. As a result, union membership has declined to the level of the 1920's. Only a new, militant and internationalist labor movement (allied with other community forces) can possibly turn this situation around.

On the other side of the 'deindustrialization' equation stand the new proletarians of Korea, Taiwan, and the other 'Little Tigers.' A generation ago, they were peasants. Today, they are industrial workers in the most advanced and most profitable sector of the world economy, increasingly impatient with low wages, long hours, harsh conditions, and the U.S.-backed authoritarian regimes that enforce them. Unlike the peasant guerrillas of the 1960s, these

workers have the power to attack the system where it hurts.¹⁶²

Some Big ‘Ifs’

If the internationalism that characterized the movements of the 60s comes back to life and creates active links of solidarity among the workers in the various branches of the new multi-national capitalist system, then ‘everything is possible’ will cease to be a mere slogan. If the new subjects of revolution that revealed themselves in the mass movements of the 60s — the youth, the women, the oppressed minorities, the poor peasants, the new working class of educated technological and office personnel — join forces with these industrial workers in a situation of economic crisis, then humanity may yet find a way to its humanness and in the process save itself — and this beautiful world — from destruction.

These are all big ‘ifs’ — hypotheses based on selected evidence using a historical method that by definition lacks the verifiability (repeatability) of physical science. They are the best — indeed the only hopeful — hypotheses we have. Possibilities... perhaps slim possibilities, but possibilities nonetheless, and thus a pathway opened toward a solution to the crisis of a society so decadent, so hell-bent on self-destruction, that the alternatives of ‘socialism or barbarism’ might better be restated as ‘socialism or planetary extinction.’

There are so many time-clocks ticking their way toward an all-but-inevitable Armageddon, that, without the hypothesis of worldwide social revolution, it is only a matter of which form of annihilation we will succumb to first. An ‘accidental’ thermonuclear war *à la* ‘Strangelove’ or one unleashed by maniacal theorists in Pakistan or Israel? The destruction of the ozone layer or the greenhouse effect? Overpopulation or universal starvation provoked by drought due to the destruction of the world’s rainforests?

¹⁶² *2007 Note:* Twenty years later, the Asian Tigers have been joined by China, a 2000 pound industrial Gorilla — with a new, militant proletariat of billions. Let us note that in China in 2006, there were 87,000 violent strikes and uprisings necessitating armed intervention, according to *official* reports which likely underestimated the situation. The global proletariat, contrary to Western postmodernist, ‘End-of-Work’ dogma, has not ‘disappeared.’ It has merely changed its address.

Species Questions

“People do make their own history, but not in circumstances of their own choosing.” Marx’s remark is particularly poignant today when we may soon run out of circumstances (not to mention people). What were once class questions, social questions, political questions, have been qualitatively transformed into species-questions: questions of global survival. The global order, dominated by multinational conglomerates more concerned with short-term profits than future economic development (and increasingly propped up by repressive military-bureaucratic regimes), no longer even pretends to offer long-term solutions. Reformism, once the hope of liberal and social democrats, is (paradoxically) a viable possibility only in the Eastern Block. (In the U.S., liberalism — our chief antagonist in 1968 — has become taboo: the ‘L’ word).

Thus, if we eliminate Divine or extraterrestrial intervention, we are forced to the conclusion that only human activity on a world scale — the mass activity of the powerless and oppressed, be they landless peasants and sweated laborers in the Third World, rebels fighting the ‘socialist bourgeoisie’ in the Second, or the relatively privileged technological new working classes in the post-industrial First World — can prevent extinction and open the way toward the reconstruction of a rational, humane society.

To be sure, such a radical perspective sounds hopelessly Utopian today with Thatcherite neo-capitalism triumphant. Like everyone, I have my moments of despair. But, then, I think back to the rebellious world of the Sixties, to a time when ‘Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive/ But to be young was very Heaven!’¹⁶³ I also remember that what happened once can happen, in perhaps more favorable circumstances, again. The ‘flash in the pan’ that sparked up in the Sixties was like a flare illuminating a dark battlefield. Its momentary brilliance revealed a capitalist adversary much weaker than we had imagined and a host of global allies we didn’t know we had. Not enough to win, but future times may be more favorable. Today, we see the circle of the rich and powerful growing smaller and smaller, the numbers of excluded

¹⁶³ William Wordsworth’s recollection of his experiences in the French Revolution (the *Prelude* of 1850.)

and exploited growing larger and larger, and with it their resentments, their hopes and their world-wide demand for justice. '*Ce n'est qu'un début! Continuons le combat!*' ('It's only a beginning! Keep the struggle going!')

Part IV

Killing the Jews

Schindler's List, or E.T. Goes to Auschwitz



Good intentions don't necessarily make good movies. Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* was inspired by the director's revulsion at ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and other forms of racism. His highly acclaimed film about the fate of Jews in Nazi-occupied Poland couldn't have come at a better time what with so-called "revisionist" historians denying the reality of the Holocaust and gaining credibility. Spielberg's moving story and vivid images brought the reality of the systematic destruction of European Jewry home to millions of viewers, not only in the U.S., but also in Germany and East Europe, where the

subject has been taboo for fifty years. Yet, if *Schindler's List* has all the power of a major Hollywood production, Spielberg's deeply flawed film also embodies Hollywood's failings.

Schindler's List is based on the true story of Oskar Schindler, a Nazi businessman who saved 1100 Jews from the gas chambers. He did so by employing them as slave laborers in an enterprise originally capitalized by squeezing money out of ghettoized Jews in Cracow, Poland. The exceptional story of the emergence of Schindler's underlying decency and of his remarkable success in beating the Nazi system deserves to be told. *Schindler's List* will certainly be seen by millions who will never be exposed to gritty documentaries like *Shoah* and *The Sorrow and the Pity*. With its happy ending and its focus on an identifiable Everyman character, Spielberg's film is able to confront mass audiences with a subject so horrifying as to be quite literally unbelievable. But does *Schindler's List* truly succeed in awakening its mass audience to the reality of the Holocaust experience? Alas, in curious, but quite specific ways, Spielberg's film actually invites its audience to deny that reality. The Holocaust, a "Myth"? To begin with, the film explicitly fails to contradict the revisionist thesis that Nazi's use of gas chambers at Auschwitz for mass extermination of Jews is a "myth." The first mention of the gas chambers in the film is a rumor, which Schindler's Jewish women refuse to believe: "Why kill us?," they reason. "We are valuable workers for the German war effort."

Then, as the film reaches its climax, these women, whose lives the audience had considered "saved" (Schindler had bought them from the Nazis), are shipped to Auschwitz by mistake. Our expectations are suddenly reversed. We witness the horror of the train entering the Death Camp... night and fog, dogs and searchlights. The shaved heads of naked, terrified women herded into sealed chambers marked "Bath-Disinfectant." Hysterical farewell embraces: the terrible rumor was apparently true. As we watch and listen in horror, the shower-heads begin to hiss, and out comes — water! Fresh, cool, life-giving water to soothe and cleanse the parched throats and bruised bodies after the slave-labor camps and the cattle-cars.

This stunning anti-climax is never explained, and the audience is only too glad to have been spared the horror. Next morning, Schindler arrives like John Wayne and rescues "his" Jewish

women for the second time. As the women re-embark on the train to safety, we get glimpses of dead bodies and smoking chimneys. Viewers who already believe in the gas chambers are free to imagine what they believe. So are Holocaust-deniers, who are free to imagine that the bodies represent workers who died of disease and the smoke from the chimneys comes from the factory. Nothing has been shown but a shower-bath. At the heart of Spielberg's darkness there is — avoidance.

After this central anti-climax, his film has no place to go but down, and it wallows in bathos for the next undramatic hour or so. We are treated to endless scenes of tearful re-uniting, lip-quivering gratitude, and heroic modesty with “Schindler’s Jews” (they are never referred to otherwise) standing around their Gentile savior in carefully choreographed groups with dumb grins on their faces, like the Munchkins after Dorothy has saved them from the Wicked Witch. The audience walks out numbed, as if they had attended a B’nai Brith Awards Ceremony minus the boiled chicken.

The Jews of Silence

Even during the first half of the film, which is far more dramatic and historically grounded, “Schindler’s Jews” are never developed as characters. Jews are depicted merely as objects of Schindler’s benevolence or as victims of the Nazi’s cruelty. There is no space in Spielberg’s very long film for developed dialogues between Jewish husbands and wives or Jewish parents and children. Indeed, Spielberg’s Jewish “characters” only get to speak when they are spoken to — by Nazi officials or by Schindler himself. The actors are reduced to speaking lines like “*Ja, Herr Direktor,*” or later, tearfully and gratefully: “God bless you, *Herr Direktor.*” Rarely do we hear Jews talk to each other. The two exceptions to this rule are themselves remarkable for their curious ambiguity. One is the scene, cited above, where a Jewish woman passes on a rumor about the gas chambers to her companions and is disbelieved. In the other, a circle of idle Jewish men are shown schmoozing in a Krakow street, having just been herded into the ghetto and deprived of their occupations. They conclude that “Here, we are free.” Again, at the heart of darkness — avoidance.

Visually, too, Spielberg focalizes his Jews almost exclusively

through Schindler's Gentile eyes. For example, we look down with Schindler and his mistress (on horseback) from a cliff high above the Krakow ghetto as we watch the SS round up the Jews for the camps. Although the film is shot in black and white to give it a documentary flavor, during this scene the dress of one little Jewish girl is tinted red, which enables the audience, looking down with Schindler, to follow her individual fate during the roundup. Later, we see the red dress again through Schindler's eyes as the child's body is dragged by on a cart at Auschwitz while Schindler is loading "his" Jewish girls on the rescue train. Thus does Spielberg "individualize" Jews.

To be sure, during the scenes of the SS roundup of the ghetto Jews, we are shown a few examples of Jews taking action to save themselves. However, they are soon captured and brutally killed. In Spielberg's Krakow there is no salvation outside of Schindler's list (although in real life, some Jews did resist, and even survive).

The visual and auditory messages are clear. There are two types of Jews: passive victims of the Nazis and passive benefactors of Schindler. The Jewish "characters" barely even rise to the level of stereotypes; their main function is to act as stand-ins for the actual names on the real-life Schindler's list. There is hardly a need for actors (as opposed to extras) in this production, although Ben Kingsley struggles manfully with the ungrateful role of the grateful Itzhak Stern, Schindler's Jewish accountant and reluctant confidant.

Indeed, Spielberg dispenses with actors and actually shows us the real-life survivors at the end of his film. A dozen of Schindler's Jews, most of them in their eighties today, file by the real-dead Schindler's grave, smiling and grateful, and above all silent. As the survivors place stones on the tomb, the audience reads subtitles proclaiming their names — remembered from the famous List. I suppose one could argue with the authenticity of this dubious shift from fiction-film to documentary, but I would gladly have accepted it, if only, at long last, Spielberg had allowed some real-life Jews to speak for themselves! No wonder Claude Lanzmann, whose documentary *Shoah* is made up entirely of first-person survivor narratives, protested *Schindler's List*.

Schindler Unmasked

Schindler alone is active in Spielberg's film. He is the omnipotent entrepreneur who pits his capitalist skills against the omnipotent SS and wins: first by piling up a fortune exploiting Jewish slave-labor, then by keeping his business going in the face of the "final solution," eventually by rescuing his Jewish workers.

In Spielberg's fable, the capitalist ethic is thus depicted ambiguously as saving humanity, or at least a remnant of Jewish humanity. To his great credit, Spielberg also shows us the larger reality, which is the fact that the camps were all slave-labor enterprises run at a profit for German businesses. What the film perhaps cannot be expected to show is the big picture — that Nazism was the final solution to the crisis of German capitalism. To be sure, Spielberg's film makes tricking the Nazis look almost easy: a little bribe here, some psychology there and voilà! Of course, Schindler is as much a con artist as an entrepreneur, but he soon has the sinister SS buffaloed, much as, in the world of TV, Hogan's Heroes pull the wool over the eyes of their cute dumb German captors.

This is the level on which Spielberg's film fails to convince both as document and as drama. Like Hogan's Heroes, Spielberg's Jews remain fat and relatively well-dressed throughout World War II! They look nothing like the photographs of skeletal concentration camps survivors that horrified those of us who were alive in 1945 when the camps were liberated and which continue to shock today. In Spielberg's sanitized "ET Goes to Auschwitz" version of the Holocaust, Schindler's Jews are not even believable victims.

Thus, during the final self-congratulatory sequences set in Czechoslovakia, where Schindler has managed to install "his" Jews in a factory in his home town, the Jewish extras appear as chubby and grateful as the happy slaves on Scarlett O'Hara's plantation. In these crowd scenes, Spielberg's well-fleshed extras are shown massed, Hollywood style, like Dorothy's Munchkins. Why didn't Spielberg, that stickler for visual authenticity, bother to hire out-of-work actors with AIDS as extras? After all, they used real midgets in *The Wizard of Oz*.

Even the extras' costumes fail to convince us they have endured five years in the camps. Their "slave" outfits look as fresh

as if they had just been sewn by the mothers of the Hollywood Hills Jewish Center for their children's' Passover Pageant. No wonder there wasn't a wet eye in the house, when I saw *Schindler* at the East Hartford shopping mall Cinemas.

Even the character of Schindler, whom Spielberg does attempt to develop as an individual, gets spoiled and sentimentalized in these concluding scenes. Throughout the film, Schindler had appeared as an opaque figure, a cynical bon-vivant who, having consciously chosen to make his fortune out of war and slave-labor, inexplicably stops short of implicating himself in the ultimate Nazi horror and chooses to invest part of his profits in bribes to save the workers who have made him rich. The poker-face he uses to deal with the SS is an ideal mask to conceal his motives from the audience and create a totally credible character whose singular aura is enhanced by mystery.

Then Spielberg throws it all away by having Schindler remove his mask before his final getaway. While his chorus of grateful Jews masses around his waiting Mercedes, Schindler breaks down blubbing about how many more Jews he might have saved if only he had drunk less Champagne! It is as if, at the end of *Casablanca*, Captain Renault (Claude Rains), the Vichy Police Captain who saves Rick Blaine (Humphrey Bogart), had begun beating his breast about how guilty he felt lining his pockets instead of exiting on the immortal line: "I am only a poor corrupt French official!" Alas, Schindler's tear-jerking exit scene is more of a homage to Dorothy's or to ET's farewells than to Claude Rains' and Bogie's tight-lipped, cynical/sentimental departure from *Casablanca*.

Schindler's weepy exit lines not only destroy him as a consistent character; they also undermine the logical premise of the plot by suddenly making it appear that this unscrupulous con-man-cum-entrepreneur had secretly been nourishing some sort of benevolent plan all along! But only a cynical Schindler who had no scruples about spending his evenings wining and dining Nazi mass-murderers to win contracts could possibly have brought off this tour de force rescue under the very noses of the SS.



Spielberg's sentimentalized Hollywood ending not only breaks with dramatic consistency, it also violates historical reality. According to Thomas Keneally, the author of the nonfiction novel on which Spielberg based his film, the real Schindler actually fled with a small fortune in jewels he had stashed away. The final horrendous inaccuracy occurs after Schindler's departure, when Schindler's Jews march off into the sunset over the green fields of Czechoslovakia (now in Technicolor like the Munchkins after Dorothy drops out of grim, black-and-white Kansas and saves them). As the camera pans back, the music comes up in a magnificent chorale of triumph and liberation, sung in Hebrew. One imagines some traditional Jewish song or one born of the Holocaust, like the authentic camp song "Peatbog Soldiers." But no! I immediately recognized the strains of "Jerusalem of Gold," the stirring anthem commissioned in 1967 to celebrate the victory of the Israeli Defense Forces over the Arabs — a hymn familiar to anyone who has been a tourist in Israel or attended an Israel fundraiser. Let's not even talk about the ideological twist this 1967 Zionist song gives to this story of the Holocaust — especially for the Jewish audience. Have Schindler's Jews been transmogrified by Spielberg into Rabin's Israelis?

One might also object to Spielberg's exclusive focus on Jews as Holocaust victims, to the exclusion of the millions of Communists, Socialists, Gypsies, Christians, homosexuals and resistance fighters who were sent to the camps. But again, my quarrel is with the film Spielberg DID make, not the one he didn't. To conclude: I had entered the theater with much trepidation, having grown up during the Holocaust, an American descendant of Krakow Jews, and one who is easily upset by graphic movies. I left the theater dry-eyed, with a distinct taste of cold boiled chicken in my mouth.

Will the Real Holocaust Deniers Please Stand Up?

I have long believed that discussions of the Holocaust focused far too much attention on the murderous activities of the Germans and their pro-Nazi Axis accomplices, while neglecting the complicity of the Allied ‘United Nations’ and neutral governments. True, the Nazis, abetted by their French, Croat, Hungarian and other collaborators, performed the actual ethnic cleansing by rounding up the Jews, seizing their property, and shipping them off to the concentration-camps and the death-ovens — setting the example for today’s Serb and Croat Red-Brown dictatorships to imitate. But Hitler’s dream of a *Judenrein* (“cleansed of Jews”) Europe could not have been achieved without the complicity of the U.S., Britain, Russia, Switzerland, the Vatican, *et al.* — any more than Milosevic’s and Tudjman’s dreams of ethnically cleansed Yugoslavia today.

I use the word “complicity,” not in some vague, passive, moral sense, but in the strict judicial sense. For the neutral and Allied governments were witting accomplices before, during and after the fact of Nazi war crimes against the humanity — and what is more, accomplices who shared in the spoils of money and property stolen from the Jews! Consider the following: 1. The Allied governments were accomplices *before* the Holocaust in that they systematically shut their doors to the persecuted Jews of Germany and the Nazi-occupied territories who had legitimate grounds for seeking asylum under international law. 2. The Allies were accomplices *during* the Holocaust in that they systematically hid the knowledge of the death-camps, thus lulling the Jews into believing the Nazi cover-story of “labor camps” and enabling the Hitlerites to round up their ignorant victims “like sheep.” 3. The Allies were accomplices *after* the Holocaust in that they sys-

tematically helped the Nazi war criminals to escape with part of the booty they looted from the Jews, while hiding their own part of the booty in secret vaults where the Jewish survivors could not claim it. Please allow me to develop these three deliberately provocative accusations in more detail:¹⁶⁴

1) Jewish Exclusion. By refusing the Jews (and left anti-fascists) asylum, the foreign offices of Britain, the U.S., and their dependencies in Latin America deliberately condemned millions to persecution and eventual death.¹⁶⁵ These governments uniformly refused to recognize Hitler's persecutions (including the murder of anti-fascists and other non-Jews) as an international emergency. Instead, they punctiliously enforced the most absurd provisions of their immigration codes and visa requirements. The notorious anti-Semitism of the classes from which Western diplomats were then recruited does not suffice to explain the systematic rejection of these useful and otherwise inoffensive refugees. Although the diplomats' vile upper-class caddishness was given free rein, the racist policy decisions were made at the top for reasons of state, racism being the health of the capitalist state.

This closed-door policy of the capitalist democracies faced with Hitler's campaign to create a "Jew-free" Reich during 1933-1945 was historically unique and a direct cause of the "Final Solution." After all, there was nothing new or original in Hitler's plan to scapegoat the Jews, persecute them, steal their property, and then get rid of them, leaving his Empire free of Jews. The *Führer* was only following in the noble footsteps of European sovereigns over the centuries. In 1290, King Edward banished all Jews from England. In 1306, Philip IV expelled all Jews from France, seizing their property and money owed them. In 1492, Ferdinand and Isabella celebrated their marriage and the unity of the Spanish monarchy by expelling the Jews, and so on... However, previous to 1933-1945, other states had always been found

¹⁶⁴ Everyone interested in this question should start with Arthur D. Morse's pioneering exposé *While Six Million Died : A Chronicle of American Apathy*.

¹⁶⁵ Imagine the effect of post-war economic development of the South American republics if their governments had taken in a couple of million Jewish engineers, businessmen, teachers, doctors, lawyers, scientists, skilled bakers, jewelers, tailors and mechanics. Within a generation or two, this leaven of European technical and entrepreneurial skill would have enabled Latin Americans to free themselves from dependency on the U.S., climb out of poverty, and develop modern capitalist economies.

willing to welcome the fleeing Jewish refugee populations, if only to use them, squeeze them, and expel them subsequently. The unique difference in 1933-1940 was the democracies' systematic refusal to follow tradition, leaving Hitler little choice but to introduce the "Final Solution."

2) Holocaust Denial. By systematically ignoring, downplaying and keeping secret a multitude of reliable intelligence reports and survivors' tales establishing beyond reasonable doubt the existence of the death-camps, the Allied governments aided and abetted Hitler's maniacal crimes. Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin were thus the original "negationists" whose denial of the Holocaust while it was happening enabled it to happen. There is no question that they "knew."

Although Roosevelt issued an order to his staff not to show him any documents concerning the Holocaust (Nixon didn't invent 'plausible denial'), and turned a deaf ear to Eleanor's pleas for Jewish and anti-fascist refugees (among them Victor Serge), the other Allied governments officially acknowledged the fact of the Holocaust... and proceeded to do nothing to stop it. Nonetheless, on August 24, 1941, Radio Moscow transmitted the Appeal of the Soviet Jews: "The very existence of the Jewish people is today in doubt." On July 1, 1942, Jean Marin talked about "gas chambers" on the Free French radio broadcasting from London. Finally, in December 1942, a declaration was signed by eleven Allied governments and the Free French Committee: "The German authorities are carrying out Hitler's often repeated intention to exterminate the Jewish people in Europe."¹⁶⁶ How widely was this epochal news circulated? In 1945, when the camps were finally liberated, the G.I.s and accompanying journalists saw the extent of the horror, they were totally incredulous. *Nothing* had prepared them for what they stumbled into on their advance through Germany and Poland.

All the justifiable furor over the *post-facto* scribbblings of negationist 'historians' like Faurisson and his miserable defenders ironically serves to cloud the issue of the active complicity of the negationist governments and statesmen during the commission of the actual, and preventable, crimes against humanity. Instead of

¹⁶⁶ Denis Peschanski, "Extermination des juifs: que savait Vichy?" *Nouvel Observateur*, Sept. 18, 1997.

daring the raise the question of the guilt of Hitler's international accomplices, journalists and scholars touch at most on the question, "What could they have done?" The answer is: "a great deal." The conventional arguments over whether bombing the camps and the rails leading to them would have "diverted" planes from "important military targets" are hardly worth considering in the light of the useless bombing of Dresden. In any case, it was not by withholding the bombers but by withholding the truth that Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin ultimately condemned the European Jews to destruction.

It takes only a little historical imagination to picture what might have happened if the Allies had systematically used their radio, airdrop leaflet, and underground propaganda apparatus to spread the word about the death camps among East European Jewry. By 1943, London was crawling with escaped Jews clamoring to tell their authentic stories in Yiddish and every language of Nazi-occupied Europe reached by Allied broadcasts and propaganda. Assuming the word reached only half the Jews and was believed by only half of them, the effort would still have resulted in a minimum of one million who could have hidden, run away, perhaps armed themselves and resisted. Now imagine the problems that a million refractory Jews would have created for Nazi administrators like Eichmann, whose vast and minutely-organized roundup operations depended on his victims' near-total passivity and cooperation. Apparently, Eichmann had only a couple of hundred troops in his command. Imagine the diversionary effect on the Nazi war effort if troops had to be systematically diverted to hunt down, round up and guard these Jews.

But why not take this perfectly likely scenario one step further? Among the million-odd European Jews who might have heard and believed the truth about the fate Hitler had in store for them if the Allies hadn't deliberately kept it from them, there would have been a certain percentage who would have attempted not just to escape, but to resist — as they finally did in the Warsaw Ghetto. For if many European Jews were a-political, pious and passive (like their non-Jewish counterparts), there were also plenty of hot-headed teenagers, Zionists, Bundists, Socialists, veterans of the First World War ready and able to fight. And if the Jewish resistance trapped in the Warsaw ghetto was able to inflict real harm on the Nazis with homemade weapons, what

might a Jewish Resistance have accomplished if coordinated, supported and supplied by the Allies, like the French, Italian, Yugoslav and other Resistance movements were?

There is nothing absurd about this notion. After all, the U.S. wartime OSS (Office of Strategic Services: predecessor of the CIA) went to great lengths to recruit its officers among such unlikely groups as labor agitators, Communists, Spanish Civil War veterans in order to drop them behind the Nazi lines and link up with their counterparts in the local *maquis*. So why didn't they send anti-fascist American Jews to help the Jews to resist? The sad fact is that the idea never occurred, even, for example, to the Jews who were active in the French Resistance itself.

Forget, for a moment, the number of Jews who might have been saved by such a policy. Just think of the diversion it would have caused behind the Axis lines and of the number of Allied lives that might have been saved. And this at the minimal cost of extending to the Jews the same programs of propaganda and strategic support services the Allies aimed at stirring up the other peoples of occupied Europe, indeed at the "cost" of NOT suppressing the truth of the horrors of Nazism in the case of the Jews!

Excuse me for insisting at length on this point. The veil of "military expediency" has always concealed what seemed to me the blatant guilt of the Allies — what is usually perceived as their "failure to help the Jews." But if military expediency dictated sparing Allied lives and materiel by encouraging the resistance of the Jews with the same cynicism with which the OSS encouraged the resistance of the Communists, the Gaullists, the Mafia, the Poles and *tutti quanti*, then the truth behind the veil is revealed. The truth is the predominance of Allied anti-Semitism and the complicity in Hitler's genocidal crimes of the original Holocaust deniers, Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin and their aides.

3) After the fact: Hiding the criminals and sharing the loot. It has now become general knowledge that the Vatican and the Allied Occupation forces and intelligence services (principally the OSS/CIA) conspired with neo-Nazi and anti-Communist networks throughout Europe and Latin American to organize the famous "rat-lines" which enabled thousands of notorious Nazi war-criminals to escape prosecution and reach safe havens. Indeed, the charge that the democratic governments were Nazi ac-

complices after the fact of the Shoah is barely controversial, since, in recent years, retired Allied intelligence officers have willingly told their tales, either out of guilt or in order to justify coddling Nazi war criminals as recruits in the anti-Communist crusade.

We now know how the “rat-lines” network systematically sought out Nazi war-criminals, concealed under aliases in the teeming displaced persons camps, hid them in churches and monasteries, got them visas and false papers, organized their escape to Latin America, and employed them as advisors and agents. For example, in training the torturers employed by the right-wing Argentinean *junta* and then loaned to the CIA to train the Nicaraguan *Contras*. So it is hardly a surprise that the world had to wait until most of the criminals had died natural deaths before learning how carefully and for how long they were protected.

The more shocking revelations of 1997 concerned the disposal of the booty the Nazi killers looted from the Jews they murdered. Not only did the Swiss banks knowingly welcome Nazi deposits that probably included gold from the teeth of death-camp victims, the banks also systematically concealed from the Jewish survivors and their relatives the records of their wartime holdings in order to embezzle the money for their own profit. Financial institutions in the U.S., Britain, and Sweden also profited by concealing confiscated Jewish wealth during the post-War period when Jewish Holocaust survivors continued to suffer and die on the road, or in Allied displaced person camps for lack of money to pay for food and medicine. Hannah Arendt coined the phrase “the banality of evil” to describe the personality and activity of Nazi bureaucrats like Adolf Eichmann.

Looking soberly at the chaotic picture of half-destroyed Europe in the months after the victory of “democracy” over “Nazism,” one almost has the impression that the Allies set out to finish the extermination job begun by Hitler. Indeed, in post-war Poland, thousands of returning Jewish survivors were murdered and despoiled with impunity. Jewish camp survivors wandered Europe for years as starving and homeless as DP’s (Displaced Persons) with no support from the Allied governments and little charity from U.S. Jewish congregations, which had done little or nothing before and during the Holocaust for fear of bucking the government and attracting unfavorable attention to themselves,

returning Jewish survivors.¹⁶⁷ On the one hand, we see the Nazi victimizers rescued, coddled, and helped to flee; on the other the Jewish victims despoiled, neglected, persecuted, confined and forcibly prevented from fleeing to Palestine.

Why do I feel so particularly outraged, indignant and angry over all this particular hypocrisy? I had grown up believing that WWII was fought to defeat fascism and save the Jews from Hitler. At home, they worshiped Roosevelt. In my little bed, I imagined the Allies were protecting me and other Jewish children against the ultimate Bad Guys. Then I learned the truth. We were betrayed. World War II was ending as I was learning to read and learn about the world. Only once did I dare glimpse a photo in a book of skeletal Jews in striped pajamas as a little kid. After that, I walked carefully *around* the place that book was kept. But my parents read papers and magazines like *The Nation* and the left-wing *National Guardian*, and our daily paper was the independent (no ads) *P.M.* whose star reporter was I. F. Stone, my hero and role model and a family friend. In 1946, he covered the refugee story and wrote a sensational book, *Underground to Palestine*, describing the plight of the homeless Jews in a heartless world. Also the Negroes: *P.M.* was the only paper that regularly covered the lynching of returning African-American G.I.'s that was taking place all over the South. They got betrayed too. All this was discussed over endless cups of coffee (mine mostly milk) in our kitchen, and as they say, little pitchers have big ears.

At that time *N.Y. Post*, which most liberal Jewish NYers read, was violently anti-German, forgetting that Hitler had sent all the German Socialists, Communists, trade-unionists and anarchists to the concentration camps before he hit on the Jews. This was the theory of "collective guilt" which Victor Serge satirizes in his novel *Unforgiving Years*. Then, a few years later, suddenly the 'Good' Germans were on our side against the nasty Russians and nobody talked about the thousands of Nazi administrators, profiteers, torturers, judges, police chiefs, professors who escaped the quickly-curtailed Nuremberg war crimes trials and were now back, administering, judging, policing and professing, if not torturing.

¹⁶⁷ I am not making this up. The official commemorative histories of local congregations which I have perused in West Hartford and Philadelphia while visiting relatives, both explicitly express regret and embarrassment at their temple's inaction during the Holocaust years.

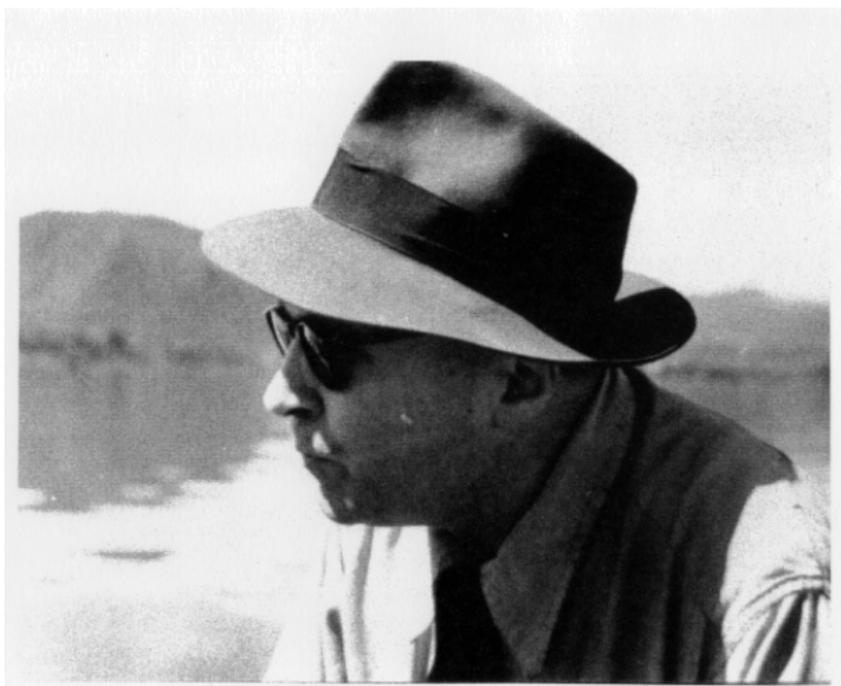
I was eight when the Jewish State was declared in Palestine. I learned that Jews could fight for themselves. Their cry was “Never again like sheep to the slaughter!” Sounded good. But how do you avoid going like a sheep when the whole world — including the democracies and the established European Jewish leadership — is telling you that the slaughter-house is a rest-home for sheep? Alas, many of these false leaders, these Judas goats, became prominent in Israel, as did the hardcore right wing Zionists who were ready to collaborate with Hitler to get more Jews into Palestine. So that, even Israel, for political purposes, is involved in the denial of Allied complicity in the Holocaust.

If my voice sounds hoarse in this article, it’s because I want to shout the truth from the housetops: *Put not your faith in princes!*

Part V

Back in the U.S.S.R.

Who Was Victor Serge, and Why Do We Have to Ask?



James Hoberman first asked this ironic question twenty-five years ago in the *Village Voice*, and alas it is still relevant today.¹⁶⁸ Jim was just launching the *Village Voice Literary Supplement* and he chose to kick off the first issue with a roundup review of a number of Serge's books (mostly translated by me) on the cover. He even took me to lunch. Serge has always

¹⁶⁸ J. Hoberman, 'Who was Victor Serge and Why Do We have to Ask?' *Village Voice*, Nov. 30, 1984.

had secret admirers like that. Unfortunately, he always had all the right enemies, too. On the one hand, Serge has been revered for generations by ‘a kind of secret international of admirers who read, reread and recognize themselves in his books,’ reports the French writer and former Serge publisher François Maspero. This international included writers and intellectuals as diverse as I.F. Stone, Irving Howe, Dwight Macdonald, Eric Fromm, Octavio Paz, John Berger, Yevgeni Yevtushenko, Edgar Morin, Régis Debray, Adam Hoschild, Christopher Hitchens and Susan Sontag.¹⁶⁹

On the other hand, Serge still remains outside the canon of Western literature and political thought. Indeed, how to fit him in? A quintessential internationalist in an era of exacerbated nationalism, Serge spent his 57 years wandering this planet as a stateless exile. His novels, written in French by a Russian, fell between the cracks of two national literatures. Serge remains a stranger not only in world of letters but also on the political Left. Indeed, the very richness of his complex identity as literary artist and revolutionary militant has apparently worked against him in both camps: Trotsky, in the throes of political polemic, dismissed him as a mere ‘poet.’ As for academic literary criticism, who ever heard of a Marxist militant writing serious literature?

On the political front, Serge was derided by orthodox Marxists as an ‘anarchist,’ scorned by anarchists as a ‘Leninist,’ and, by Communists as a ‘Trotskyist.’ However, although Serge’s successive political affiliations — libertarian anarchist, Bolshevik Communist, Trotskyist, socialist humanist — may appear eclectic, if not contradictory — his political evolution was, in fact, consistent. The central concept which guided Serge’s conduct throughout his revolutionary career was what he conceived as the militant’s ‘double duty’ to defend the revolutionary movement from *both* its external enemies (right-wing counter-revolutionaries) and its inner enemies (left authoritarianism, intolerance and bureaucracy). Serge first discussed ‘double duty’ in print in *Literature and Revolution* (1932), and it may be his most original contribution to revolutionary morality. The problem, of course, was how to balance these two duties of criticism and support from in-

¹⁶⁹ See below for quotations from their letters praising Serge and encouraging me as Serge’s biographer-translator.

side a movement. Although one could argue with the politics of any one of Serge's judgements (discussed below), I find his attitude of double duty as a whole exemplary — in the sense of setting an example to be followed.

Moreover, as distinct from many Western writers and intellectuals who flirted at one time or another with Communism — names like Hemingway, Dos Passos, Howard Fast, Malraux, Koestler, and Silone come to mind — Serge was a revolutionary and an internationalist more or less from birth, and he remained such to his death. Thus, in the 1930s and '40s, Serge's books were attacked or ignored by the Communist Party and its liberal anti-fascist sympathizers (for whom criticizing Stalinism was considered treasonable in face of the threat of Hitler). Yet, during the '50s, Serge, the die-hard socialist, was of little interest to Cold War institutions like the (CIA-sponsored) Congress for Cultural Freedom which did so much to establish the reputation of other anti-Communist intellectuals. Marginalized during his life, Serge was nonetheless a mainstream figure whose uniquely intense involvement recapitulated the experience of millions of Europeans whose social struggles energized the first half of the Twentieth Century. Participant-witness to revolutionary events in several countries, survivor of ten years in various prisons, author of some twenty books, Serge's life history reads like a novel. Indeed, he himself retraced his radical trajectory from Brussels to Paris to Barcelona to Saint Petersburg to Berlin to final exile in Mexico City in *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* and a series of what he called 'witness-novels.' His itinerary may be briefly summarized as follows.

Victor Serge (1890-1947)

Stateless son of exiled anti-Czarist Russian parents wandering Europe 'in search of good libraries and cheap lodgings,' Victor is born 'by chance' in Brussels, Belgium, 'along the roads of the world.' On the walls of his parents' humble lodgings, he later recalled, 'were the portraits of the hanged' 19th Century Russian revolutionary martyrs for freedom. These included the legendary N.I. Kibalchich, a distant relative who helped carry out the *Peoples Will* death sentence on Czar Alexander II in 1881. Home-schooled by these penniless exiled in-

tellecuals, Victor (family name, “Kibalchich”) grew up reading Shakespeare and Chekov in cheap editions with his mother and learning science from his father, a passionate, impecunious positivist who scorned public schooling as ‘stupid bourgeois education for the poor.’ The young Kibalchich thus imbibed the heady traditions of the Russian revolutionary *intelligentsia* while growing up desperately poor on the streets of Brussels. So poor that, at age eleven, he watches horrified



VICTOR SERGE

as his younger brother dies of malnutrition, while he himself survived on pilfered sugar soaked in coffee that little Raoul refused to eat. ‘Throughout the rest of my life,’ he recalled, ‘it has been my fate always to find, in the undernourished urchins of the squares of Paris, Berlin and Moscow, the same condemned faces of my tribe.’

At age fourteen, Victor is living alone, his mother having returned to Russia ill with tuberculosis and his father struggling to support a second family. He is active in the Young Socialist Guard and falls in with a group of young rebels who are far too militant for the staid Belgian social-democracy. Soon they turn to anarchism, which ‘demanded everything of us and offered everything to us.’ By 1906, fifteen-year-old Victor and his gang of Brussels apprentices are writing, typesetting, printing and distributing their own radical anarchist sheet, *The Rebel*. Victor writes under the pseudonym *Le Rétif* and shows a precocious maturity of style. The comradeship of other teenage rebels replaces Victor’s disintegrated nuclear family, even as the French individualist doctrine of ego-anarchism eclipses the broader social revolutionary tradition of his Russian forebears.

At eighteen, Kibalchich/*Le Rétif* heeds the call of Paris, where he barely survives tutoring Russians in French and translating Russian novels while devouring the contents of the Sainte-Geneviève library, lecturing on anarchist individualism, editing the individualist journal *l’anarchie*, and debating (and occasionally brawling) with right-wing French nationalists.

Meanwhile, his working-class Brussels buddies, angry, desperate, impatient of waiting for Utopia, unwilling to become

‘masters’ or ‘slaves,’ have turned to ‘illegalism’ — the anarchist practice of ‘individual repossession’ of property ‘legally stolen’ by the bourgeois exploiters. In 1911, they join up with a desperado named Bonnot and begin terrorizing Paris as the ‘tragic gang’ of anarchist bank-robbers — the first to use automobiles for the fast getaway (the police had bicycles). The bandits’ fate is indeed tragic: death in gun battles, Devil’s Island, the guillotine. Victor is appalled at the bloodshed, but out of solidarity he defends the comrades with his pen: ‘I am with the Wolves.’ Victor and his

lover, Rirette Maitrejean, are arrested at the office of *l’anarchie* where they also live. Victor is sentenced to five years as an ‘accomplice’ — essentially for refusing to rat on his comrades. Conditions in the French penitentiary at Melun are harsh. The inmates are forbidden any news from the outside, even as WWI grinds on with German shells exploding nearby. Serge’s first novel, *Men in Prison* (1930), is an effort to ‘liberate himself from the experience’ of those 1,820 days of silence, solitude, starvation, filth, brutality and mindless discipline.



Police photos of Victor (in Russian blouse) and the Tragic Bandits of Anarchy: Raymond ‘la Science’ Callemin (guillotined), Edouard Carouy (suicide in prison), Jean de Boë (survived Devil’s Island and returned to the Brussels labor movement).

Released from prison in 1917, Victor is expelled from France and comes back to life in Barcelona, where he works as a printer, participates in a revolutionary uprising and publishes his first article signed ‘Victor Serge.’ The title: ‘The Fall of a Czar.’ Soon Serge is attempting to reach revolutionary Russia via wartime Paris, where he is arrested a ‘Bolshevik suspect’ and held for over a year in typhus-infested camps where — ironically — he meets his first actual Bolshevik. Exchanged for a French officer held by the Soviets, he arrives in January 1919 in Civil War Petrograd (later Leningrad,

now St. Petersburg). On the ship to Russia, he falls in love with Liuba, the daughter of another repatriated revolutionary, the Jewish anarchist Alexander Russakov, who shares Victor's Utopian dreams and hopes for the fledgling Soviet Republic. They are shocked to discover the besieged revolutionary capital, no longer the scene of the lively debates and mass assemblies of 1917, lying silent, frozen, grim, surrounded by White armies armed by the victorious Allies. Serge's second novel, *Birth of our Power* (1931), chronicles his transition from Barcelona ('this city we could not take') to Petrograd, the city the revolutionaries had taken. The ironic title of Serge's third novel, *Conquered City* (1932)¹⁷⁰ plays on the ambiguities of political power exercised by revolutionaries under civil war conditions.

After taking his bearings in Russia among the anarchists, moderate socialists and more or less disenchanting intellectuals, Serge decides to commit himself to the revolution and eventually joins the Communists, whom he sees — despite his anarchist's misgivings — as its essential backbone. The Party immediately puts Serge's talents to work on the staff of the new Third (Communist) International, writing, translating, and organizing the Latin Languages publications section. He lives and works at the Hotel Astoria, commandeered by the Soviets, and eats at the table of the Executive with Zinoviev and other top Soviet leaders. He helps organize the first Comintern conferences in Moscow, where he acts as an unofficial guide to the anarcho-syndicalist delegates from France, Spain and Italy — among them, old comrades. To them, he confesses his fears about the increasing lack of freedom in Russia and his efforts — sometimes successful — to use his influence to save or succor Russian dissident anarchists fallen into the hands of the *Cheka* political police. His published pamphlets, like *The Revolution in Danger*,¹⁷¹ aimed at winning the sympathies of French anarchists to the Soviets, are much less critical of the revolution.

In 1921, Serge's loyalties are severely torn by the revolt of the Kronstadt sailors' Soviet (a "workers' council", in Kronstadt

¹⁷⁰ Both translated by Richard Greeman, Doubleday, Garden City, 1967 and subsequent editions. New York Review Books Classics will republish *Conquered City* in 2010.

¹⁷¹ Translated by Ian Birchall (London, Redwords, 1997)

composed of anarchists and dissident Communists) and its subsequent repression by the Communists. The sailors had seized the strategic island fortress to press their demands for more freedom,



Vienna, 1924: left to right Serge, with moustache, Antonio Gramsci, and Vlady held by Lucien Laurat

and the government was refusing to negotiate. Serge participates in the unsuccessful attempt to mediate the conflict by the U.S. anarchists Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman and Serge's anarchist father-in-law, Russakov. He looks on in anguish as volunteer Communists and rebellious Soviet sailors battle on the ice floes, locked in deadly fratricidal combat.

After withdrawing briefly from politics to an unsuccessful French anarchist agricultural commune on Lake Ladoga, Serge accepts a Comintern assignment in Germany. There, the prospect of renewed revolution poses a last hope for saving the isolated Soviets from smothering under a bureaucratic dictatorship in Russia. In Berlin, where Victor, Liuba and their young son Vlady live under an *alias*, Serge serves the Comintern as a publicist and journalist. Young son Vlady lives under an *alias*; Serge serves the Comintern as a publicist and journalist. Serge's articles on Germany reporting on galloping inflation, mass unemployment, mutilated veterans begging, strikes and abortive *putsches* were written under the pseudonym 'R. Albert' which I recognized in 1964.

They are now available as *Witness to the German Revolution*.¹⁷² He also doubles under various identities as a militant or ‘agent’ (in those days there was little distinction). When the German Communists are outlawed, after the *fasco* of the March 1923 Hamburg uprising, Serge flees with his family to Vienna, where he works for the Comintern press service and associates with Georg Lukacs and Antonio Gramsci.



Victor, Vlady and Liuba in 1928, one day after Serge's release from prison.

In 1925, despairing of renewed revolution in the West, Serge makes the suicidally idealistic decision to return to Russia and join the last-ditch anti-bureaucratic fight against Stalin and his allies as a member of the Left Opposition led by Trotsky. Expelled from the Party in 1928, arrested, interrogated for weeks in the notorious Lubyanka prison, Serge is released after his arrest provoked a scandal in Paris. Soon after his release, Serge suffers a near fatal intestinal occlusion and vows that, if he recovers, he will devote the time left at liberty to preserving the truth about the revolutionary upheavals he had experienced in the form of an epic series of ‘witness-novels’ — more lasting and superior, he thought, for the ‘formation of consciousness’ of new revolution-

¹⁷² Translated by Ian Birchall, (London 2000).

ary generations than formal history. Given the political impasse of Stalinism usurping the banner of socialism and his own precarious situation as a semi-prisoner in a police state, it was a reasonable political choice to devote his energy to the long-term hope for socialism.¹⁷³

Between 1928 and 1933, Serge is able to complete and publish in Paris three novels — *Men in Prison*, *Birth of Our Power* and *Conquered City* (about the siege of Petrograd). He also publishes two books of non-fiction: *Year One of the Russian Revolution*, the first comprehensive, documented history of the great events of 1917-1918 to appear in the West (preceding Trotsky's *History* by two years) and *Literature and Revolution*, a critique of both 'socialist realism' and vapid bourgeois literature. Meanwhile, in Leningrad, Serge is living in 'semi-captivity,' under constant surveillance, scrambling to make a living in a society where every door is closed to him, watching his beloved wife Liuba being driven insane by the persecution, and his colleagues of the Soviet Writers' Union being driven to suicide or silence. Serge ekes out a precarious living for his family translating into French novels by Gladkov, Chaguinian and Sholokov as well as (anonymously) volumes of Lenin's *Works*.

In 1933, Serge is again arrested and interrogated for three months in Moscow. In a letter prepared for publication in case of his arrest and smuggled out of Russia at the last minute, Serge defends individual freedom as essential to socialism and describes Stalinist Communism as 'totalitarian.' Refusing to confess to anything other than his personal opposition to Stalin's 'general line,' Serge is administratively exiled to Orenburg on the Ural, where he is joined by Liuba and teenage Vlady, already a budding artist.

Soon Liuba, now incurably insane and secretly pregnant, returns to Leningrad for psychiatric treatment. Deprived of work,



Watercolor of Liuba by Vlady, 1935

¹⁷³ Cf. Serge's letter to Marcel Martinet, Dec. 25, 1936, which dispels the Philistine myth that Serge, the consummate literary artist, became a writer as it were accidentally as a 'substitute political action' as propagated, most recently, by political scientist Susan Weissman (*Victor Serge: the Course is Set on Hope*)

Serge continues to write and survives in part on the postal insurance when his manuscripts sent abroad are mysteriously ‘lost’ by the Russian mail. Despite the cold, constant hunger and periodic harassment by the GPU political police, these years of deportation are — ironically — luminous years, thanks to the solidarity and intellectual stimulation within the group of exiled Communist Oppositionists. Like Serge, these seasoned fighters have refused to capitulate to Stalin’s betrayal of the revolution’s original principles. Condemned and deported, they are paradoxically free to think and speak their minds. Serge depicts the hardships but also the beauty of these exile years in his 1939 novel, *Midnight in the Century*.¹⁷⁴

Meanwhile in France, the ‘Victor Serge Affair’ has become a *cause célèbre* — embarrassing to the USSR at a moment when Stalin is desperately seeking an alliance with France against Hitler. After protests by intellectuals, militants and trade-unionists — along with the personal intervention of (then) pro-Soviet writers André Gide and Romain Rolland - Stalin eventually agrees to allow Serge and his family to leave Russia. But Serge remains in deportation since no Western democracy is willing to grant a visa to this dangerous anarchist (the French still have the 1917 expulsion order against him). Finally, Belgium agrees to open its doors. In April 1936, Serge and Vlado are reunited in Moscow with Liuba and baby Jeannine and board the train for Warsaw, but, at the Polish border, the GPU seizes Serge’s manuscripts completed in captivity: among them a poetry collection and two novels (‘the only ones I had time to polish’). Although Serge was able to reconstruct his poems from memory (published as *Resistance*¹⁷⁵), the novels remain lost, despite persistent searches in the Moscow archives.¹⁷⁶ We only know their titles and subjects: *Lost Men* (about the ‘tragic bandits’ of French anarchism) and *Men in the Blizzard* (about the Russian Civil War).

Serge’s arrival in the West, unlike Solzhenitsyn, a generation later, is greeted by silence — except for the Communist press,

¹⁷⁴ Translated with a Preface by Richard Greeman, Writers & Readers, London, 1982. NYRB Classics planning to reissue.

¹⁷⁵ Translated by James Brook with an Introduction by Richard Greeman, City Lights, 1972.

¹⁷⁶ For details, please see my ‘Victor Serge Affair and the French Literary Left’, *Revolutionary History* Vol. 5, No. 3.

which slanders him as an ‘anarchist bandit,’ and the Soviet Embassy, which strips him of his Soviet nationality (the only one he ever had). From precarious exile in Brussels (and, later, Paris), Serge struggles to support his insane wife and their two children — mostly by working in print shops — meanwhile writing furiously to unmask the ‘big lie’ of the Moscow show trials and Stalin’s murderous intrigues in Republican Spain. Although he continues to support Trotsky and translate his books into French, Serge’s support of the POUM (an independent Marxist party in Spain)¹⁷⁷ earns him the sectarian scorn of the orthodox French Trotskyists, further isolating him. Serge watches helpless when Andreu Nin, the POUM’s leader in Barcelona is kidnapped and tortured to death by Stalinist agents, but by organizing and international campaign from Paris, and thanks to the intervention of British Independent Socialists, he is able to save Nin’s colleagues from death at the hands of a Communist kangaroo court set up in Republican Spain. In France, Serge’s scrupulously documented, eyewitness books and articles exploding the myth of Russian Communism are greeted with silence by complacent intellectuals hypnotized by the ‘anti-fascism’ of Communist-manipulated popular fronts. His *From Lenin to Stalin* and *Russia Twenty Years After*¹⁷⁸ remain classic accounts of Stalinist Russia. Meanwhile, Serge and his comrades are living in a ‘labyrinth of pure madness’ as Stalin’s agents kidnap and murder Trotsky’s supporters in the middle of opulent, indifferent Paris. The French capital paralyzed before the looming war is the background of two Serge novels, *The Long Dusk* (1946) and *Years Without Forgiveness* (unpublished until 1972).¹⁷⁹

When Paris falls to the Nazis, Serge — accompanied by his companion Laurette Séjourné and his son Vlady — joins the exodus on foot and survives a Luftwaffe attack on the Loire. By

¹⁷⁷ The anti-Stalinist Unified Marxist Workers’ Party, often and erroneously described as ‘Trotskyist.’ George Orwell fought in its militia (*Homage to Catalonia*).

¹⁷⁸ Translated by Max Shachtman. See new edition edited by Susan Weissman, which also includes ‘30 Years After the Russian Revolution’ (1947) considered Serge’s political testament, Humanities Press, New Jersey, 1996.

¹⁷⁹ Victor Serge, *The Long Dusk* (French title *Les derniers temps* or ‘End Times’), translated by Ralph Mannheim, *The Dial*, N.Y. *Unforgiving Years*, translated with an Introduction by Richard Greeman, *New York Review Books*, N.Y. 2008.

now, Liuba has moved to an asylum near Aix-en-Provence where she is well cared-for (she lived into the 1980s) while Jeanine is being looked after by peasants in the country.



Villa Air Bel. Foreground, Varian Fry. Background standing: Jacqueline and Aube Breton and Victor Serge

The three refugees eventually find sanctuary in a Marseille villa rented by American heiress Mary Jayne Gold and Varian Fry of the American Refugee Committee and shared with André Breton and his family. Marseille is the last possible exit-point for refugees trapped in Vichy France, and Serge immediately re-baptizes the villa *Air-Bel*, '*Espère-Visa*' (Hope-for-Visa).

During anxious months of waiting, Serge works daily on the manuscript of his masterpiece *The Case of Comrade Tulayev*¹⁸⁰ and participates in the now-legendary Surrealist games and the Sunday gatherings with artists like Max Ernst, Victor Branner, Alfredo Lam organized by Breton. Underneath the gaiety, Serge and his fellow refugees are aware they are caught in a deadly trap. Vichy France has closed its borders and agreed to 'surrender on demand' to the Gestapo all anti-fascists refugees in its territory. Serge is on the Gestapo's list and those of the GPU and the FBI as well. Despite persistent efforts by Dwight and Nancy

¹⁸⁰ Translated by Willard Trask. New York Review Books in 2005. Preface by Susan Sontag.

MacDonald in New York, Serge is refused a U.S. visa.¹⁸¹

Finally, Serge and his son are able to secure Mexican visas, thanks to the solidarity of comrades of the POUM (now settled in Mexico) whose lives he had earlier saved in Spain. They board one of the last refugee ships out of Vichy France only to be arrested in Martinique and held for four months in Ciudad Trujillo (where he writes *Hitler Contra Stalin* for a Mexican publisher). After being again detained in Cuba, Serge gains what will be his final exile in Mexico City in 1941. Here, Serge finds himself isolated — unable to publish, boycotted, slandered and physically attacked by Stalinist agents, cut off from Europe by the war. Nonetheless, it is in Mexico that Serge completes his most enduring work — *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, *The Case of Comrade Tulayev*, and *Unforgiving Years* — all written ‘for the desk drawer.’ He investigates Trotsky’s assassination and collaborates with his widow, Natalia Sedova, on a biography, *The Life and Death of Leon Trotsky*. He also studies psychoanalysis, writes a short book on pre-Columbian archaeology and meditates on consciousness and death. He explores the meaning of the war not only in theoretical and political ‘theses’ but also in terms of dreams, earthquakes, volcanoes and luxuriant vegetation. All these elements come together in *Unforgiving Years*, which he finishes in 1946. In 1947, his heart gives out, stressed by the altitude and exhausted by years of prison and privation. Penniless and stateless as usual, Serge is buried in a pauper’s grave registered as a ‘Spanish Republican.’ His posthumously published *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* conclude:

Of this hard childhood, this troubled adolescence, all those terrible years, I regret nothing as far as I am myself concerned. ... Any regret I have is for energies wasted in struggles which were bound to be fruitless. These struggles have taught me that in any man the best and the worst live side by side and sometimes mingle - and that what is worst comes through the corruption of what is best.

Well, now that we have seen what a remarkable individual

¹⁸¹ For a wonderful read, see Rosemary Sullivan, *Villa Air-Bel: World War II, Escape, and a House in Marseille*, Harper-Collins, 2006.

Serge was, now it is time to address Jim Hoberman's other question, 'Why do we have to ask?' Apparently, Serge's books have had almost as hard a life as their author. Politically, their author had made 'all the right enemies' on both the left and the right. "Difficult to write for the desk drawer alone when you're past fifty," wrote Serge, isolated in Mexico at the end of WWII. "Yet in every publishing house there are two conservatives and at least one Stalinist. I'm beginning to think my very name is an obstacle



Serge with Laurette Séjourné and the painter Dr. Atl, in front of newly erupted volcano of Paracutin, Mexico, 1944.

to publication." Two of the manuscripts languishing in Serge's desk drawer were masterpieces: *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* and *The Case of Comrade Tulayev*. But there was little hope in post-war Paris, what with paper shortages and the influence of the Communists in publishing. No luck either in New York and London, even with the help of Dwight MacDonald and George Orwell. And although the posthumously published *Tulayev* and *Memoirs* eventually did achieve the status of 'classics' (albeit 'neglected classics'), for a variety of reasons, Serge has remained marginalized.

Even today, Serge's socialist politics continue to disturb the consensus. Unlike the conservative Alexander Solzhenitszyn, who in the 1970s and '80s became the poster-boy of a whole generation of right-wing Johnny-come-lately anti-Communist 'New' Philosophers, Serge criticized Communism *from the left* and re-

mained unfashionable during the 'greed-is-good' era. Peter Sedgwick, the British translator of Serge's *Memoirs* and *Year One of the Russian Revolution*, showed in a truly seminal 1963 essay how Serge was a red *before* it became fashionable in the Thirties and remained one *after* they had abandoned a cause which 'they had only embraced in its addled flesh.'¹⁸²

Meanwhile Serge's prestige as a revolutionary participant-witness, oft-quoted by historians and political scientists, has tended to obscure his status as a literary artist. For example, political scientist Susan Weissman's recent book on Serge takes the position that 'writing, for Serge, was something to do only when one was unable to fight.'¹⁸³ At the same time, the sorry example of the wooden, propagandistic literature produced by Communists under the ideological banner of 'Socialist Realism' (which Serge polemicized against) has given revolutionary writing a bad name. This prejudice tends to combine with the traditional prejudices of 'art for art's sake' to reinforce a false dichotomy between art and politics in which Marxist-inspired literature is *ipso facto* dismissed as propaganda. Meanwhile, the very 'Marxist' literary critics that apparently used to avoid Serge because of his embarrassingly anti-Stalinist themes now agree with the postmodernists that 'authors' no longer exist (only '*textes*'), that 'authenticity' is an illusion, and that the idea of a 'message' in literature should be consigned to the dustbin of 'grand narratives.' However, what's wonderful about Serge is that his politics appear in his novels not as propaganda, but as organic ground and underlying vision, as intuition of the world's myriad inter-relations. His uniqueness and perhaps his greatness as a novelist was to have brought to bear his authentic insider's experience and Marxist consciousness on one of the central themes of modern literature: the tragedy of revolutions gone awry. Yet despite the 'organic' nature of the politics in Serge's fiction, his reputation as a

¹⁸² Peter Sedgwick, "Victor Serge and Socialism," *International Socialism* (1st series), No.14, Autumn 1963, pp.17-23.

¹⁸³ Susan Weissman, *The Course Is Set on Hope* (Verso 2002) p. 67. The book's main argument (previously advanced in Weissman's Glasgow PhD. and in several articles) is that 'Serge's critique of Stalinism was the core of his life and work' (p.6), and she gives short shift to his anarchist years, his poetry and fiction, and, curiously enough, to manuscript material in the Serge Archive at Yale (which her bibliography doesn't cite).

novelist may have suffered from an unthinking critical assumption that there is a necessary contradiction between a committed Marxist revolutionary *and* an imaginative creator — a contradiction about which Serge had this to say:

Poets and novelists are not political beings because they are not essentially rational. Political intelligence, based though it is in the revolutionary's case upon a deep idealism, demands a scientific and pragmatic armor, and subordinates itself to the pursuit of strictly defined social ends. The artist, on the contrary, is always delving for his material in the subconscious, in the pre-conscious, in intuition, in a lyrical inner life which is rather hard to define; he does not know with any certainty either where he is going or what he is creating. If the novelist's characters are truly alive, they function by themselves, to a point at which they eventually take their author by surprise; and sometimes he is quite perplexed if he is called upon to classify them in terms of morality or social utility. Doestoevsky, Gorky, and Balzac brought to life, all lovingly, criminals whom the Political Man would shoot most unlovingly.

As far as academia is concerned, Serge seems to have been abandoned to the 'no-man's-land between politics and literature departments', where he as yet remains an un-person. Another reason for academic neglect of Serge as a novelist may be his nationality — or rather his lack thereof. As a (stateless) Soviet Russian who wrote in French and died in Mexico, Serge also falls through the cracks between departments traditionally organized along the lines of 'national' literatures. As a result, there are as yet no PhDs on Serge in any French university,¹⁸⁴ nor will you find 'Serge, Victor' listed in French biographical dictionaries and literary manuals. Yet, Serge is arguably as important a novelist in the political *genre* as Malraux, Orwell, Silone, and Koestler who

¹⁸⁴ Serge the novelist is better known in U.S. and British French departments, with two PhD. theses: my own (Columbia 1968) and Bill Marshall's (Oxford) later published as *Victor Serge: The Uses of Dissent* (Berg, NY/Oxford, 1992)

have been largely studied to death. More bad luck for the writer whom Régis Debray sees as a ‘magnificent loser.’¹⁸⁵

Of course, to be properly understood, Serge is best situated in the Russian *intelligentsia* tradition of his expatriate parents. He inherited his father’s scientific culture (physics, geology, sociology) while his literary culture (he was raised on Shakespeare, Hugo, Doestoyevsky, and Korolenko) came from his mother, whose family was apparently connected with Maxim Gorky.¹⁸⁶ By his concept of the writer’s mission, Serge saw himself ‘in the line of the Russian writers’ [*dans la ligne des écrivains russes*]. And although he borrowed freely from cosmopolitan influences like Joyce, Dos Passos, and the French Unanimists, Serge developed as a writer within the Soviet literary ‘renaissance’ of the relatively liberal NEP (New Economy Policy) period. Indeed, during the 1920s, Serge was the principle transmission belt between the literary worlds of Soviet Russia and France. Via his translations and regular articles on Soviet culture in Henri Barbusse’s *Clarté* he introduced French readers to the post-revolutionary poetry of Alexander Blok, Andrei Bely, Sergei Yesenin, Osip Mandelstam, Boris Pasternak and Vladimir Mayakovsky as well as to fiction writers like Alexis Tolstoy, Babel, Zamiatine, Lebedinsky, Gladkov, Ivanov, Fedin, and Boris Pilnyak — his colleagues in the Soviet Writers Union. (I have often wondered why few if any of the Western academics involved in the once-fashionable ‘Marxist literary criticism’ project have paid attention to Serge’s theories and practical Marxist criticism. Today, 367 pages of Serge’s *Collected Writings on Literature and Revolution* are available in English translation thanks to that curmudgeonly British Marxist, the late Al Richardson.¹⁸⁷

By the mid-1930’s, all of Serge’s colleagues (with the exception of Pasternak) had been reduced to silence (suicide, censorship, the camps). ‘No Pen-club’ wrote Serge in exile, ‘even those that held banquets for them, asked the least question about their

¹⁸⁵ “L’échec, c’est ce qu’il y a de plus difficile à réussir. “ *Préface aux Carnets* » de Serge (Actes Sud, Arles, 1985).

¹⁸⁶ Serge went to see Gorky as soon as he arrived in Russia in 1919, but declined an offer to join the staff of Gorky’s newspaper. During the Civil War, Serge depended on Gorky’s relationship with Lenin to intercede to save anarchist comrades from being shot by the *Cheka*.

¹⁸⁷ Francis Boutle, London 2004.

cases. No literary review, to my knowledge, commented on their mysterious end.’ Only Serge — because he wrote in French and was saved from the Gulag by his reputation in France — managed to survive. Only Serge had the freedom to further develop the revolutionary innovations of Soviet literature and to submit the world of Stalinism to the critical lens of fiction in novels like *Midnight in the Century*, *The Case of Comrade Tulayev* and *Unforgiving Years*. As one Russian scholar put it in 1983: ‘Although written in French, Serge’s novels are perhaps the nearest we have to what Soviet literature of the ‘30s might have been...’¹⁸⁸

Victor Serge and Me

Although I was a French major at Yale College (and later a grad student in French at Columbia and the Sorbonne), I first heard about Serge in the U.S. socialist movement. *The Case of Comrade Tulayev* was on a recommended reading list I got from the Young Peoples’ Socialist League.¹⁸⁹ I read down the list as far as Orwell’s *Homage to Catalonia*, Malraux’s *Man’s Fate*, and Hemingway’s *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, but lost it before I got to *Tulayev*. Curiously, no one ever mentioned Serge to me as a lit student in France, where his books were out of print in the Fifties, although certainly everyone in the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* crowd had read them.

So it was back in the States in 1962 that I ‘discovered’ Serge in the shipping room of a used book store in New York, where I was waiting to be paid for copies of Raya Dunayevskaya pamphlets I had left on consignment. My eyes fell upon a pile of French paperbacks about to be shipped to I.F. Stone, whose *Weekly* I had read since boyhood and who had become almost a family connection through my future wife, Julie Gilbert. Curious, I browsed the pile. They were all by the same author: Victor Serge. When I sensed the bookseller returning from his inner sanctum, I impulsively pocketed the first book in the pile — rationalizing ‘Izzy won’t have time to read all these.’ At home that night, I opened the book, and I’ve been hooked on Serge ever since.

¹⁸⁸ Neil Cornwell, *Irish Slavonic Studies* 4, 1983.

¹⁸⁹ The list was probably prepared by Irving Howe of *Dissent*, who had written a marvellously insightful chapter about *Tulayev* in his *Politics and the Novel*.

In 1963, I got a French government grant to Paris to do research on Stendhal (still my favorite novelist) a project I soon abandoned for Serge after another wonderful bit of luck. During a weekend in Paris, my older brother, a highly successful Madison Avenue advertising executive, picked up a Serge novel for 5 francs (a buck) at a bookstand on *quais* and handed it to me in a *café*. “Where did you find this?” Peter waved vaguely towards the Seine, but the next day I scoured the bookstalls and discovered the *bouquiniste* Teulé, who had a great stock of pre-WWII Serge paperbacks in mint condition. Teulé recalled hearing Serge speak before the War at the *Musée du Soir*, a center for proletarian culture created by Serge’s friend Henry Poulaille. During the Occupation, when Serge’s books were banned, Teulé had hidden a stock in his cellar. I told Teulé of my enthusiasm for Serge, and he asked me if I would like to meet Victor’s artist son, who was also spending the year in Paris on a grant. Vlady and I hit it off like brothers from the very first moment. We communicated instantaneously thanks to a shared socialist culture and a Russian-Jewish heritage of self-ironic idealism.

Vlady Kibalchich was a man of vast reading and culture, having been ‘home-schooled’ through various exiles by his father, a polymatch who had benefited from a similar non-academic education. Only later, when I saw Vlady’s murals in Mexico, did I realize what a stupendous painter he was. Please give yourself a treat and visit his monumental Mexican murals (and erotic engravings) at www.vlady.org. Vlady loved to talk about Victor, who had been a patient and supportive single parent through the most difficult trials and whose work and ethos he admired.

Vlady was delighted when I told him I wanted to translate Serge’s novels into English. I was also encouraged by Peter Sedgwick, the British socialist and contributor to *International Socialism*, who was translating Serge’s *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* for Oxford Press.¹⁹⁰ Back in the States, I got in touch with Eugene Eoyeng, a young editor at Doubleday, whose list already included *The Case of Comrade Tulayev*. In our enthusiasm, we concocted a plan to get Doubleday to publish not one, but a trilogy of Serge

¹⁹⁰ Peter’s splendid translation of Serge’s *Memoirs*, was truncated by one fifth by Oxford University Press, busy cost-cutting as far back as 1963. The first complete English translation, with the cuts restored by George Paizis and notes by Jean Rièrè, will be published by NYRB in 2011.

novels. To tempt the higher-ups into investing their good money in an obscure out-of-fashion foreign author of indeterminate nationality and non-conformist politics, I hit on the idea of asking the serious Serge fans I knew to write me endorsements (which could later be used as blurbs) promoting my translation project.

Dwight Macdonald, who with his wife Nancy¹⁹¹ had worked tirelessly to rescue Serge from Vichy France, replied: 'I can't think of anyone else who has written about the revolutionary movement in this century with Serge's combination of moral insight and intellectual richness.' Irving Howe, whose YPSL reading list first pointed me to Serge replied: 'To me he has seemed a model of the independent intellectual in Europe between the wars: leftist but not dogmatic, political yet deeply involved with issues of cultural life, and a novelist of very considerable powers.' The urbane Henri Peyre, my old French professor from Yale, replied offhandedly: 'Victor Serge is as worthy of a study by a scholar interested in ideas as is Proudhon, Georges Sorel or Charles Péguy. And he certainly counts also as a novelist - to me, far more than most of the 18th century novel which has been ridiculously overrated lately, and more than Robbe-Grillet and his vapid, skilled fiction and, may I confess, more than Beckett.'

Erich Fromm, who had known Serge in the Forties through psychoanalytical circles in Mexico (and whom our student socialist club had to Yale in 1961) replied: 'I believe indeed that to rescue the humanist tradition of the last decades is of the utmost importance, and that Victor Serge is one of the outstanding personalities representing the socialist aspect of humanism.' The journalist I.F. Stone from whom I had 'borrowed' my first Serge book wrote: 'Victor Serge died in exile and obscurity, apparently no more than a splinter of a splinter in the Marxist movement. But with the passage of the years, he looms up as one of the great moral figures of our time, an artist of such integrity and a revolutionary of such purity as to overshadow those who achieved fame and power. His failure was his success. I know of no participant in Russia's revolution and Spain's agonies who more deserves the attention of our concerned youth.' Bertram D. Wolf, whose *Three Who Made a Revolution* had inspired me as a teenager, wrote

¹⁹¹ Nancy Macdonald was business manager of *Partisan Review* and founder of Spanish Refugee Aid Committee.

‘Serge’s writing was simple, vivid, strong, written with an insiders’ knowledge, the insights of a passionate yet detached observer and participant, and the skill of a poet and novelist.’ For Trotsky biographer Isaac Deutcher: ‘*The Case of Comrade Tu-layev* is by far the best novel about the period of the purges — far richer artistically and more truthful historically than Koestler’s famous book.’

These endorsements, which date from 1964, confirmed my judgement that Serge was indeed a major figure in both literature and socialist thought. The Doubleday project was successful, and my 1960s translations of *Men in Prison*, *Birth of Our Power* and *Conquered City* were reprinted in Britain by Gollanz and then Penguin in Britain. In the Eighties, the Writers & Readers Publishing Coop in London bought the rights to the trilogy and commissioned me to English a forth Serge novel, *Midnight in the Century*.¹⁹² My latest Serge translation, the posthumous novel *Unforgiving Years*, came out in 2008.

My friendship with Vlady flourished for 40 years (he died in 2005) through long letters which Vlady scrawled on the margins of proofs of engravings he was pulling in his studio. We often talked about finding a home for the archive of Serge’s manuscripts and letters, which disorderly Vlady had done his best to preserve in Mexico City for forty years. They were refused by both Harvard and Stanford, where we hoped they could reside next to Trotsky’s. Finally, in 1995, the Beinecke Rare Book Library at Yale University (my *alma mater*) made a generous offer for the papers. Vlady and his sister Jeannine Kibalchich generously donated Victor’s money to preserving and disseminating their father’s works and ideas through an International Victor Serge Foundation. I was to be the Secretary, so I bought a *How To* book and registered the VSF as a US non-profit 501 (c) (3) Corporation.¹⁹³

¹⁹² Writers & Readers Coop, while it lasted, was the originator of the *Marx for Beginners* comics series and other wonderful books. It was founded by Glenn Thompson, a black American living in London, his wife Sian from Wales, Richard, and Lise Appignanesi from Canada, and the English novelist art critic John Berger. NYRB Classics will be reprinting *Midnight* in the near future.

¹⁹³ Checks made out to ‘The Victor Serge Foundation’ should be mailed to 16 rue de la Teinturerie, Montpellier France, 34000.

The Foundation invested these funds in new Serge translations, research and in other ‘Sergian’ projects. In Moscow, our never-ending quest for Serge’s lost novels — illegally seized by the GPU when he left Russia in 1936 despite the *Glavlit* exit permit¹⁹⁴ — attracted an enthusiastic group of scholars and activists, which led to the creation of the Victor Serge Public Library and the Praxis Center in Moscow, discussed below. As trustee of the international copyright to Serge’s works, I have been active in getting Serge’s major books (almost all out of print in 1997) re-published in France and in promoting translations in various languages, including Russian, Greek, Spanish, Portuguese, Slavonian and English. Serge’s modest royalties (and a few donations, mainly from me) enable new projects. For example, the Foundation spent the advance from the 2004 NYRB edition of *The Case of Comrade Tulayev* on an Arabic translation of *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* and on publishing Julia Guseva’s Russian translation of *Unforgiving Years* published by Praxis in Moscow. The quest for Serge’s lost novels also led us to the city of Orenburg on the Ural where Serge and Vlady had been held in exile in 1933-36 and where local officials, heady with Russia’s new freedom to look at the past, were eager to learn more about their illustrious exile and make a place for him in the Municipal Museum next to Kravchenko, the Ukrainian national poet, who had been exiled to Orenburg by the Tzar during the 19th Century, and Pushkin. Alas, at this writing, Russia has again slid backwards into state terrorism, and the future of Praxis and the Victor Serge Library seem threatened.

¹⁹⁴ For details, please see my “The Victor Serge Affair and the French Literary Left” (*Revolutionary History*, London, Vol. 5, No 3).

Opposition Within the Opposition: Victor Serge and Leon Trotsky, Relations 1936-1940¹⁹⁵



Victor Serge (1890-1947) the Franco-Russian writer and revolutionist, was an active member of the Communist Left Opposition and close collaborator of its outstanding leader, Leon Trotsky — first in Russia and then in exile. A sympathizer since 1923, Serge officially joined the Leningrad Left Opposition in 1925, took part in local inner-Party struggles and served as *rapporteur* on international questions for the Opposition's general council. He was expelled from the Communist Party in 1928, but continued clandestine oppositional activity in Leningrad, and, after his arrest in 1933, as a deportee in Orenburg on the Ural. Released from Russia in 1936, Serge immediately resumed his collaboration with Trotsky in exile. They had a sometimes stormy relationship that continued until the year of Trotsky's assassination (1940) and beyond — for Serge co-authored with Trotsky's widow, Natalia Sedova, the first authorized biography, *Life and Death of Leon Trotsky* (1947).

The story of their relations, fascinating in itself, also raises important questions about freedom within the revolution and about the Marxist heritage that still remain relevant for radical intellectuals and activists today. From the historian's point of view, their dialogue points to discontinuities between the historical Russian Left Opposition (commonly referred to as 'Trotskyists') on the one hand, and the IVth International, founded by Trotsky in exile, on the other.

¹⁹⁵ An early version of this study was published in Spanish in Octavio Paz's Mexican review *VUELTA*: "Victor Serge y Leon Trotski" in Vol. 6, No. 63, 19 de fev. 1982. The present version is published in Russian in Praxis' anthology of papers on 'Socialist Resistance to Totalitarianism' (Praxis 2008 International Seminar, Moscow).

Victor Serge and the Left Opposition

The biography of Trotsky (1879-1940) is well known. Serge (1890-1947) was younger by one 'revolutionary generation.' Neither was an 'old Bolshevik.' Prior to 1917, Trotsky was an independent Social-Democrat sharply critical of Lenin's vanguardism. Serge, a transfuge from anarchism, joined the Party in 1919 during the siege of Petrograd — relieved by Trotsky's arrival with a trainload of agitators and fresh troops. For Serge, Trotsky was and remained an authentic hero, a revolutionary leader of enormous energy and a principled intellectual of strict probity who had had the courage first to make a revolution and then to denounce its degeneration.



Serge's own heritage was more cosmopolitan, with his double 'nationality' as a stateless francophone Russian and his youth spent as a European anarchist militant. Born in 1890 to a couple of penniless students, radical anti-Czarist exiles, Serge had grown up in the slums of Belgium, agitated in the ranks of the anarchists in Brussels, Paris and Barcelona, and spent six years in French prisons and camps before entering the Russian Revolution in January 1919, at the darkest moment of the Civil War. Like other anarchists (e.g., Bill Chatov), Serge decided to join the Bolsheviks. He participated in the defense of Red Petrograd, worked under Zinoviev as a publicist for the Communist International, whose publication services and first world conferences he helped organize. At the same time, he retained fraternal contact with anarchists and other dissidents, whom he did his best to protect through his daily contacts with the Bolshevik leaders, including members of the *Cheka* (ancestor of the GPU).

In 1921, Serge was outraged by the brutal repression of the rebellious Kronstadt sailors; but he decided to accept a Comintern assignment in Berlin in the hope that revolution in Germany would end Russia's isolation and lead to a relaxation of the repression.¹⁹⁶ In 1923, when the hoped-for German revolution

¹⁹⁶ Serge's eyewitness reports from Germany, published under the pseudonym 'R. Albert' have recently been collected and published in French as *Notes d'Allemagne* (1923) Preface by Pierre Broué (Paris, La Brèche, 1990) and in

ended in a *fiasco*, Serge fled to Austria, where he was joined by other Communist exiles like Lukacs and Gramsci. Increasingly worried by the bureaucratization of the Comintern, Serge made the quixotic decision to request a transfer of his national Communist Party membership from France back to Russia in late 1925 in order to take part in the inner-Party struggle as a member of the Russian Left Opposition in Leningrad. At that time, Trotsky was holding back ('on the expective') and Serge traveled to Moscow to meet him and discuss strategy. According to Marcel Body, in whose Moscow apartment Serge was staying, when Serge said something to the effect that "we must get rid of this bureaucracy," Trotsky replied, "On the contrary, we must take it over."¹⁹⁷

Serge's *Memoirs* describe his participation during 1926-28 in the final battles between the United Opposition and the Stalinist apparatus — his meetings with Trotsky in humble worker's apartments, the 'silent demonstration' of disgraced Old Bolsheviks in Red Square, his attempts to speak out in his local Communist cell; then the defeat, the expulsions, the suicides, and Trotsky's departure for exile (to which Serge was an eyewitness). The occasion of Serge's own expulsion was the publication, in Paris during 1927-1928, of his analysis of the Chinese Revolution — castigating Stalin's bloody blunders in Shanghai and Hong Kong.¹⁹⁸ Arrested and interrogated for several weeks in the infamous Lubyanka prison in Moscow, Serge was released after his arrest provoked inquiries among writers and militants in France, where he had established a reputation as a Communist writer reporting on Soviet cultural and political life for such publications as *Clarté*.

Released from the Lubyanka in 1928, Serge suffered a near fatal intestinal occlusion and vowed that, if he recovered, he

English as *Witness to the German Revolution*, translated by Ian Birchall (London, Redwords, 2002).

¹⁹⁷ Personal conversation with M. Body, Paris Aug. 1983. Body was an eyewitness to the 1917 Russian Revolution as a member of the French Military Mission in Moscow. He went over to the Bolsheviks while retaining, even more than Serge, his anarchist loyalties, and left the USSR in 1927.

¹⁹⁸ Now collected as *La révolution chinoise (1927-1929)*, Introduction by Pierre Naville (Paris, Savelli, 1977). As Opposition *rapporteur* on international questions, Serge doubtless had access to inner-Party documents which he quoted in his articles on China, in which he analyses, summarizes and quotes at length from a report by "a Communist student named Mao tse-tung" (apparently the first mention of his name in a Western publication).

would devote the time he had left at liberty to preserving the truth about the revolutionary upheavals he had experienced in the form of an epic series of ‘witness-novels’ — more lasting and superior, he thought, for the “formation of consciousness” of new revolutionary generations. Given the political impasse of Stalinism usurping the banner of socialism and his own precarious situation as a semi-prisoner in a police state, it was a reasonable political choice to devote his energy to the long-term hope for socialism.¹⁹⁹ Between 1928 and 1933, Serge was able to complete and publish in Paris three novels — *Men in Prison*, *Birth of Our Power* and *Conquered City* (about the siege of Petrograd). He also published two books of non-fiction: *Year One of the Russian Revolution*, the first comprehensive, documented history of the great events of 1917-1918 to appear in the West (preceding Trotsky’s *History* by two years) and *Literature and Revolution*, a critique of both ‘socialist realism’ and vapid bourgeois literature. Meanwhile, Serge eked out a precarious living for his family translating into French (anonymously) volumes of Lenin’s *Works* as well as novels by Gladkov, Chaguinian and Sholokov.

Arrested again in 1933, Serge was interrogated at the Lubyanka, this time for three grueling months, confined in a solitary cell, with sleep deprivation, time-disorientation and nothing to read or write with. According to his *Memoirs*, Serge refused to sign any type of confession, maintaining that he considered himself a loyal citizen and Communist in open disagreement with the general line of the Party. This has recently been confirmed by newly available GPU archives.²⁰⁰ These GPU reports also indicated that, when pressed for the identities of his Left Opposition contacts as a test of loyalty, Serge gave the names of a dozen or so publicly known Trotskyists in Russia and France who were beyond harm. Eventually he was sentenced, without trial, to administrative exile in Orenburg on the Ural, where he joined the small colony of other irreducible Oppositionists. His liberation

¹⁹⁹ Cf. Serge’s letter to Marcel Martinet Dec. 25, 1936 which dispels the Philistine myth that Serge, the consummate literary artist, had become a writer as it were accidentally as a ‘substitute political action’ — a legend propagated, most recently, by political scientist Susan Weissman in her *Victor Serge: the Course is Set on Hope*.

²⁰⁰ Many thanks to Julia Guseva and Alexei Gusev of the Praxis Research and Education Center for their persistent archival researches.

after three years was the result of an international protest campaign, including French trade-unionists, radical militants and eventually fellow-traveling writers like André Gide and Romain Rolland, who spoke to Stalin about the embarrassment Serge's case was causing the reputation of the USSR abroad.

Serge and Trotsky in Exile



Serge was allowed to leave the USSR in April 1936. Behind him were the hundreds of less fortunate comrades in Stalin's prisons and isolators whom he had come to know during his thirteen years of Oppositional activity. As soon as Serge arrived in Belgium (the only Western country willing to grant him asylum), he renewed his ties with Leon Trotsky, who had been banished from the Soviet Union in 1929 (six years ahead of Serge) and had recently won a precarious asylum in Norway from whence he was attempting to forge a new Marxist IVth International to challenge the betrayals of the Social-Democratic and Stalinist leaders around the world.

The two exiles were drawn together by their mutual attachment to the ideals of the Soviet Revolution, their common struggle against Stalin's perversion of these ideals, their commitment to the perspective of revolutionary internationalism, and their solidarity with and anguish over the fate of their persecuted comrades in the USSR. To find each other again, alive and free, after a decade of unprecedented persecutions, was a kind of miracle. As survivors of a doomed cohort of outstanding revolutionaries, they were all but unique. If Trotsky was the great organizer of the Revolution — the leader of the October insurrection and the creator of the Red Army — Serge was its best-known witness, the writer who chronicled its triumphs and tragedies with compassion and clear-sighted honesty.

Although Serge and Trotsky were never to meet again face to face (an assassin's icepick put an end to Trotsky's life in Mexico City in 1940, a year before Serge arrived there as a refugee from Vichy France), the private letters and public exchanges between the two men during 1936-1940 provide a unique insight into the workings of the revolutionary mentality formed by the heroic

period of Bolshevism. This mentality was severely put to the test in the late 1930s, and their relationship as well as the whole heritage of Bolshevik methodology was called into question. Elsewhere,²⁰¹ I have dealt in some detail with their epistolary relations, a subject complex and fascinating both as a political-ideological debate and human drama. Here I will confine myself to exploring their public debates — over the 1921 Kronstadt revolt and the issue of freedom and repression in the revolution — and to placing them within the context of the historic Left Opposition with which Trotsky is generally identified.

The first period of their correspondence (April-August 1936) is marked by personal warmth, close collaboration and fraternal discussion of differences of appreciation. After some preliminary exchanges about family and mutual friends, Serge reported to Trotsky on the situation of the persecuted Russian Left Opposition and the theoretical discussions among them in the camps, isolators and places of exile. The increased level of Stalinist persecution shocked Trotsky, who had been cut off from his followers in Russia since 1929. Serge also described the theoretical discussions among the deported Oppositionists.

We are divided into two more or less equal groups. There are those who think that we must rethink everything and that grave errors were committed from the beginning of the October revolution. Then there are others convinced that the Bolshevism of the first years should remain beyond all criticism. The first are inclined to think that you were right against Lenin on the organizational question (when you agreed with Rosa Luxembourg). At the same time, we are also divided into two camps on the issue of democracy and the Bolshevik dictatorship. The first group militate for a broader democracy in the framework of the dictatorship [of the proletariat]. In my opinion, this group is the stronger of the two.²⁰²

As we shall see, these differences within the historic Russian Left Opposition would ultimately divide Serge and Trotsky in ex-

²⁰¹ "Victor Serge y Leon Trotsky" in *Vuelta*, Mexico, Vol. 6, No. 63, 19 de feb. 1982.

²⁰² *Bulletin of the Opposition*, [Paris] mid-1936. Reprinted in *Cahiers Léon Trotsky*.

ile. While Serge will continue to operate according to his principle of ‘double duty’ — to defend the revolution against both its external and its internal enemies (e.g. authoritarian methods, dogmatism), Trotsky will refuse to recognize this fraternal ‘opposition within the Opposition’ and stigmatize Serge as a renegade from Marxism. This calumny has been perpetuated to this day in certain Trotskyist circles. But back in the Spring of 1936, the two veteran Oppositionists were happy to find themselves in general agreement on the major events of the day — including the need to collaborate fraternally with the Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution/Civil War.

Trotsky was also eager to make use of Serge’s talents as a French translator for his *Revolution Betrayed* and urged Serge to join his newly formed IVth International. For his part, Serge was shocked that Trotsky had broken off relations with old friends like Boris Souvarine, Maurice and Magdeleine Paz, Andrès Nin, Marcel Martinet and Alfred Rosmer — people whom he had come to know as Trotsky’s staunchest defenders in the 1920s and who had labored mightily in the cause of his own liberation. At the same time, he was dismayed by the sectarianism of Trotsky’s French followers.

However, despite these misgivings, Serge agreed to be ‘co-opted’ (invited) into the leadership (*bureau*) of the IVth International. At the same time, however, Serge expressed to Trotsky his criticism and suggestions for improving the work of the organization. For Serge, the problem was symbolized by the disease of sectarianism, which infested the whole European Trotskyist movement and made it ineffective. “How vexatious, how disgusting,” wrote Serge, “to see so much paper blackened over the personal squabbles of Molinier [the leader of one of the rival French Trotskyist groups] when they haven’t found a way to publish a single pamphlet about our comrades in Stalin’s jails!”

Serge’s solutions: end the personal and sectarian quarrels, institute collective leadership, bring in elders with moral authority like Rosmer, attract a broad periphery by changing the jargon-ridden tone of the publications, banishing insult, writing decent French, and opening columns to non-members. He envisioned the bringing together of the dispersed forces of the anti-Stalinist Left in a broad party, “firm in ideology and discipline but neither sectarian nor personalist in its leadership, truly democratic and

fraternal in its manners, in which people will be allowed to err and to think and speak freely.²⁰³ The formula was a good one and might be applied with profit by many radical organizations today. Trotsky agreed to some of these criticisms, but concluded that Serge was looking at the problem “as an artist, a psychologist, and not as a politico.”²⁰⁴

Unfortunately, this period of fraternal discussion and collaboration was brutally ended in late August 1936, when the Norwegian authorities interned Trotsky to keep him from commenting on the Moscow Trials. Their correspondence only resumed four months later, following Trotsky’s arrival in Mexico. Serge had joined the IVth International, despite his misgivings, mainly out of respect for Trotsky. In his absence, he was left to deal with Trotsky’s ‘epigones’ (imitators). In January 1937, he attended the International Conference of the IVth International in Amsterdam, where his motion of solidarity with the Spanish POUM (Workers’ Party of Marxist Unification) was rejected. The POUM was a mass workers’ party with its own militias (in which George Orwell was enrolled) fighting Franco at the front; the POUM also participated in the Popular Front government of Catalonia, where it had a mass base. Its founders, Andres Nin and Joaquin Maurin, were Serge’s old friends from the Comintern in Moscow, whom Serge had initiated into the Left Opposition.

However, contrary to Trotskyist legend, Serge actually did not agree with the policies of the POUM. True to his revolutionary ethic of ‘double duty,’ Serge unhesitatingly expressed public solidarity with Nin’s embattled party, which in 1936 was caught in between the fascists in the front and the Stalinists in the rear. At the same time, Serge, like Trotsky but more diplomatically, also publicly criticized the centrist policies of the POUM, for example, joining the Popular Front government of Catalonia instead of following Lenin’s example and leading the armed workers and peasants of Spain who were already taking over the means of production.²⁰⁵

Serge concluded that the IVth International’s policy toward

²⁰³ Serge to Trotsky, August 10, 1936

²⁰⁴ Trotsky to Serge, July 30, 1936

²⁰⁵ Serge, Open Letter to A. Nin, published in *La Batalla*, organ of the Central Committee of the POUM, 2nd year, No. 25, 30 August 1936.

the POUM was one of rule or ruin, and he left the conference in “despair.” “They imagine they have been appointed to lead the revolution in another country, handing down orders from the heights of their greatness, and for them the only possible path is to form a Comintern-style faction and provoke a split.”²⁰⁶ His impression of European Trotskyism was that of “a sectarian movement controlled by maneuvers from above, afflicted with all the mental depravations we had fought in Russia: authoritarianism, factionalism, intrigues, maneuvers, narrow-mindedness, intolerance.”²⁰⁷ Such intolerance was in stark contrast with the paradoxical freedom of discussion enjoyed by the deported Russian Oppositionists in the camps and isolators. “What diversity of opinion is expressed here!” reported Anton Ciliga, the other veteran Oppositionist who was released in 1936. “What passion and sincerity in the analysis of abstract theoretical concepts and especially in the examination of practical problems of the present.”²⁰⁸ A few days later Serge wrote on the same subject to Trotsky’s son, Leon Sedov, in Paris:

In its present form, the International Secretariat is good for nothing actually hurts the cause. All of this takes away my desire to be involved in these problems. It is much better for each of us to go forward according to his own possibilities, with less dogmatism but in a living manner and with others.²⁰⁹

This was the program Serge followed after his brief interlude as a member of the IVth International continuing to serve Trotsky as a translator, as a publicist and (to the general public) as “the leading Trotskyist writer in France.”²¹⁰ Despite this positive attitude, Serge was soon to be subjected to the bitterest attacks.

²⁰⁶ Serge to Léon Sedov, Jan. 21, 1937 reproduced in Dreyfus, Ed, p. 157.

²⁰⁷ *Carnets*, p.45

²⁰⁸ Cited by Alexei Gusev in “L’Opposition de gauche du parti communiste soviétique dans la première moitié des années 30” *Cahiers Leon Trotsky*, No 72., pp. 93-99.

²⁰⁹ Serge to Sedov, Jan. 21, 1937

²¹⁰ Serge, *Carnets*, p.47.

The Kronstadt Controversy

Isaac Deutscher writes (somewhat erroneously): “During the winter of 1937-38 [...] Serge [...] and others raised the question of Trotsky’s responsibility for the suppression of the Kronstadt revolt in 1921.”²¹¹ The fact is that it was Trotsky himself, in the course of his defense against GPU accusations of treason at the Moscow trials before the Dewey Commission in 1937, who took the initiative in making a public issue of Kronstadt.²¹² Moreover, the question of Trotsky’s personal responsibility in the repression was tangential and only came up a year after the Dewey Commission, at which time Serge defended Trotsky against his critics.²¹³

Trotsky’s statement on the sailors’ rebellion was a blanket justification of the repression. The movement had had a counter-revolutionary character, he declared. The sailors were no longer the revolutionary elite of 1917, but rather a demoralized petty-bourgeois mass demanding “privileges.” Their victory could only have ushered in the counter-revolution, whatever the ideas of the rebels — and their ideas were reactionary anyway. They had taken over an armed fortress. The Whites supported them. There was nothing to do but “crush them by the force of arms.”²¹⁴

Trotsky may have thought he had said the last word on Kronstadt when he presented his position to the Dewey commission in 1937. For Serge, however, he was merely opening the discussion. Serge had lived through the Kronstadt crisis as a rank-and-file Petersburg Communist, and the conflict between the rebellious sailors and the Bolshevik government had shaken him deeply. He was particularly well informed on the issue. Working at Smolny Institute and living at the hotel Astoria (the “First House of the Soviets”) he had had daily contact with the top Party leaders and those of the *Cheka* or political police. At the same time, he had retained his ties with the anarchists and participated in the attempt by the American anarchists Emma Goldman and Alexander

²¹¹ Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast* (N.Y. and London, 1963) p.436

²¹² Trotsky in *Opposition Bulletin* (Russian) N° 55-56, July 1937. Also, *La Lutte Ouvrière*, N° 55, Sept. 10, 1937.

²¹³ Serge, « Défense de Trotski », *La Révolution prolétarienne* N° 281, Oct. 25, 1938.

²¹⁴ *Opposition Bulletin* (Russian) N° 55-56, July 1937. Also, *La Lutte Ouvrière*, N° 55, Sept. 10, 1937.

Berkman to mediate the dispute. For Serge, the incident had brought the crisis of Bolshevism into sharp relief and posed basic problems whose gravity only increased with the revolution's subsequent degeneration.

Serge did not disagree with Trotsky on the danger of the revolt. "Its victory would have inevitably brought on the counter-revolution,"²¹⁵ but he disagreed on the character of the rebellion and on the manner in which it was handled. The sailors were not demanding economic privileges, he declared, but calling for an end to government blockades that prevented the starving urban population from getting supplies from the country. Far from being anti-proletarian, the revolt had broken out in sympathy with workers' strikes in Petrograd which had raised the same demand. Trotsky himself had put a similar proposal before the Central Committee a year earlier when he perceived that the system of rationing and requisitions later known as "War Communism" seemed to be heading the country toward economic disaster.



According to Serge, such timely action might have prevented the Kronstadt revolt and similar outbreaks elsewhere. But Lenin and the Central Committee had been adamant. Yet they implicitly admitted their error by adopting the New Economic Policy (NEP) later in 1921 — a program that would have satisfied the sailors' economic demands — at the very moment when the last rebels were being shot. Serge thought the massacre — in which hundreds of local Communists and Soviet sailors perished in a ghastly battle over the melting ice surrounding the fortress — could have been avoided. But the Party never negotiated seriously with the rebels, and it refused the opportunity for mediation proposed by Goldman and Berkman. Moreover, the authorities (Zinoviev in particular) had lied by claiming that Kronstadt had been taken over by a White general named Kozlovski. The spectacle of the Communist newspaper lying to the Party and to

²¹⁵ Serge, "Kronstadt," *La Revolution Proletarienne* N° 254, Sept. 10, 1937.

the masses had been profoundly demoralizing. Finally, the massacre of rebel prisoners, which continued for months after the fortress had fallen, was a useless abomination.

In general, Serge concluded, the Party had abused military and administrative methods in its dealings with revolutionary dissidents and with the justifiable discontent of the famished masses. These authoritarian methods soon opened the way to bureaucratic dictatorship. However, at the time, and “*despite its abuses and faults,*” the Bolshevik Party was, for Serge, the great strength, the “armature” of the revolution, in which confidence must be placed, “*despite everything.*” (Emphasis in original.) The rebels’ demand for “freely elected Soviets”, although “sincerely revolutionary,” was “extremely dangerous” because the revolution was exhausted and incapable of renewing itself. Their hoped-for post-Bolshevik “third revolution” would have opened the gates to the peasant counter-revolution and eventually to that of the Whites. This, Serge, declared, was what he and other rank-and-file Communists thought at the time.

Trotsky’s 1937 Dewey Commission testimony on Kronstadt had provoked hostile reactions from many sources, and Serge had taken pains to distinguish his basically loyal opposition to Trotsky’s position from the ‘I-told-you-so’ attacks of the anarchist, Menshevik, and liberal enemies of the proletarian dictatorship. Trotsky, replying in “Hue and Cry over Kronstadt,”²¹⁶ made no such fine distinctions. His critics, he declared, formed a sort of “popular front” of accusers whose common goal was to discredit Bolshevism, revolutionary Marxism, and the IVth International in order to hide their own shortcomings. Trotsky thus closed the door to any further serious discussion of the question within the ranks of his followers.

Thereafter, “Kronstadt” became equated with “counter-revolution” in the Trotskyist orbit, and merely pronouncing the taboo word was anathema. To this I can testify from my own experience in the U.S. during the Sixties, when my youthful, innocent questions about the Kronstadt episode were met with sharp hostility by Max Shachtman and Raya Dunayevskaya who still respected the taboo — even though they both had broken with Trot-

²¹⁶ Trotsky, “The Hue and Cry Over Kronstadt” dated Jan, 15; 1938. B.O. N° 66-67.

sky twenty years earlier over the latter's defense of Stalin's Russia as 'a workers' state' (albeit a 'degenerated' or 'bureaucratically degenerated' one). This reaction was grounded in their own unconscious fear, I imagine, of having to rethink the Bolsheviks' responsibility for repressive policies implemented *before* Stalin's rise. Indeed, even among the deported members.

Commenting on Serge's argument about the NEP, Trotsky admitted that its early introduction would have prevented the revolt, but claimed this had no bearing on the issue. The rebels had "no conscious program" and therefore could not have been satisfied. He devoted several pages of argument to "prove" that their stated aims (published in the Kronstadt *Pravda*) were irrelevant, since it was their petty bourgeois class origins that determined the real counter-revolutionary character of their actions. In any case, "excesses" flow from the very nature of revolution. If Serge wanted to reject revolution on that score, he, Trotsky, would not.²¹⁷ Serge's reply was moderate, but firm:

Let us beware of amalgams and mechanical arguments. They have been much abused in the Russian revolution and we see where this leads [...] Bourgeois liberals, Mensheviks, anarchists, and revolutionary Marxists consider the drama of Kronstadt from different standpoints and for different reasons, which it is well and necessary to bear in mind instead of lumping all the critical minds under a single heading and imputing to all of them the same hostility towards Bolshevism.²¹⁸

Serge, for his part, concluded that the policy of the Central Committee of Lenin and Trotsky at that time was "correct" on the great historic scale but "tragically and dangerously false, erroneous, in various specific circumstances. That is what it would be courageous and useful to recognize today instead of affirming the infallibility of the general line of 1917-23." The real question, for Serge, was when and how did Bolshevism begin to degenerate? The first symptoms, he answered, went way back, to the outlawing of the Mensheviks and the destruction in 1920 of the treaty

²¹⁷ Trotsky, "Again on the Repression of Kronstadt", written July 6, 1938. BO. N° 70, Oct. 1938. Also, *Quatrième Internationale* N° 11.

²¹⁸ Serge, 'Once More Kronstadt', *New International*, July 1938.

with the Ukrainian partisans led by Makhno and the anarchists. Even further:

Has not the moment come to declare that the day of the glorious year of 1918 when the Central Committee of the party decided to permit the Extraordinary Commissions (the *Cheka*) to apply the death penalty *on the basis of secret procedure, without hearing the accused who could not defend themselves*, is a black day! That day the Central Committee was in a position to restore or not to restore an Inquisitional procedure forgotten by European civilization. It did not necessarily behoove a victorious socialist party to commit that mistake. The revolution could have defended itself better without that.²¹⁹

In a subsequent text, Trotsky dismissed Serge's account of the unnecessary massacres of sailors after the suppression of the rebellion as "third hand." He, personally, had no direct knowledge of the matter, he admitted, but he trusted the word of Djerjinski, the head of the *Cheka*, who had mentioned no massacres. Far from being 'third hand,' Serge's information about the massacres of 1919 came straight from his comrades among the local Petrograd *Chekists*, as well as from anarchist prisoners confined in quarters near those of the rebels. Djerjinski's information, Serge asserted, came through a highly unreliable chain of command. It was well known, according to Serge, that the local *Chekas* were out of control and acted on their own initiative, often secretly. Trotsky and the Central Committee should have made it their business to find this out.

True to his conception of double duty, Serge took up Trotsky's defense a few weeks later on the question of his personal responsibility for the repression of Kronstadt.²²⁰ This did not prevent the editors of the *Opposition Bulletin*, in a note published two months later, from declaring him "adversary of the IVth International and accusing him of intrigues" with its "worst enemies."²²¹ Serge chose not to reply publicly to this note, which he

²¹⁹ *Loc. Cit.*

²²⁰ Serge, "Défense de Trotski," *La Révolution prolétarienne* N° 281, Oct. 25, 1938.

²²¹ Trotsky, "Victor Serge et la IVe Internationale," B.C. N°73, Jan. 1939.

felt was “too inaccurate, too unjust and too offensive” (Serge to Trotsky, March 18, 1939). He did, however, write a private protest to Gérard Rosenthal, Trotsky’s lawyer, and his friend Pierre Naville, one of the influential leaders of the French Trotskyist movement. (Serge had known both men since 1927, when he had first introduced them to Trotsky in Moscow.) He apparently got satisfaction from neither.

The Break

In the summer of 1938, Serge published an essay in the *Partisan Review* entitled “Marxism in Our Time.”²²² He might as well have called it “In Defense of Marxism,” for it is one of the best-argued and succinct answers to Marxism’s critics ever penned. After outlining the powerful achievements of Marxist thought, crowned by the “prodigious success of the Bolshevik Party in 1917 (Lenin-Trotsky),” Serge points out that even in defeat Marxism alone finds nourishment and provides explanation:

Marxism showed itself impotent in Germany before the Nazi counter-revolution; but it is the only theory that explains this victory of a party of the declassed, paid for and supported during an insoluble economic crisis by the chiefs of the big bourgeoisie...It is the same with the terrible degeneration of the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia. There, too, the punishment of the old Bolsheviks, exterminated by the regime that they have created, is no more than a phenomenon of the class struggle. The proletariat, deposed from power by a caste of parvenus entrenched in the new State, can account for the basic reasons for its defeat and can prepare itself for the struggles of tomorrow only by means of the Marxist analysis.

So far Serge stood on common ground with Trotsky. Where he differed was in fixing the date when the degeneration of the revolution was first a visible threat. Citing Rosa Luxemburg’s early critique of Bolshevik authoritarianism, Serge showed how,

²²² *Partisan Review*, Vol. 5, N° 3, Aug-Sept. 1938, pp.26-32 (Original French title: “Puissance et limites du Marxisme”).

after a brief libertarian period, the Bolsheviks systematically built up a strong state machine beginning in 1918. This policy might be justified by the mortal dangers of the Civil War, but it later led to the defeat of the workers at the hands of the bureaucracy.

After victory had been won in the Civil War, the Socialist solution of the problems of the new society should have been sought in workers' democracy, the stimulation of initiative, freedom of thought, freedom for working-class groups — and not, as it was, in centralization of power, repression of heresies, the monolithic single school of thought...By the time Lenin and Trotsky realized the danger and wished to retrace their steps — timidly enough, at first: the greatest reach of boldness of the Left Opposition in the Bolshevik Party was to demand the restoration of inner-Party democracy, and it never dared dispute the theory of a single-party government — by this time, it was too late.

For Serge, the decline in the prestige of Marxist thought was a direct result of its degeneration in Russia. Naturally, the “confused and bloody Marxism of the gunmen of Moscow is not Marxism,” but Stalin had succeeded in usurping its banner and it would be more time before the workers would be able to recover a genuine Marxist consciousness. The lesson in all of this was that Socialism is essentially democratic. For Marxism to regain its prestige, revitalize itself, it must return to the spirit of liberty, “as necessary to Marxism as oxygen to living beings.” After completing his panorama of nearly one hundred years of Marxism's political and intellectual fortunes, Serge concluded by affirming:

Scientific thought cannot regress below the Marxist level, nor can the working class do without this intellectual weapon...The European working class is still recuperating its strength, sapped by the bloodletting of the [First] World War. A new proletariat is arising in Russia, its industrial base greatly extended. The class struggle goes on. For all the dictators' replastering, we hear the framework of the old social edifice cracking. Marxism will go through many vicissitudes of fortune, per-

haps even eclipses. Its power, conditioned by the course of history, nonetheless appears to be inexhaustible. For its base is knowledge integrated with the necessity for revolution.

Serge's essay was a classic reformulation of the essential Marxist perspective aimed at reaffirming its power in the face of defeat, deformation, doubt, and declining prestige. We can only imagine its author's shock and surprise when, a few months after its publication, Trotsky singled him out for vituperation in a blast entitled "Ex-revolutionary Intellectuals and World Reaction" (subtitle: "The Crisis of Bolshevism's Disappointed Fellow-Travelers Is Not the Crisis of Marxism").²²³ In it, Trotsky asserted that Serge was proclaiming "the crisis of Marxism" and had joined the ranks of the disenchanting who, in abandoning Stalinism were also abandoning a Marxism which they had "never known."

Trotsky explained: "A gunner may miss his target; this does not invalidate ballistics, that is the science of artillery. If the army of the proletariat suffers a defeat, this does not invalidate Marxism, which is the science of revolution." This, minus the obtrusive military metaphors, was exactly Serge's point, but Trotsky's next sentence added: "That Victor Serge himself is going through "a crisis," that his ideas are desperately confused is clear. But the crisis of Victor Serge is not the crisis of Marxism." Serge immediately penned a reply to the Belgian Trotskyist review which had printed Trotsky's attack, but the editors did not publish his letter. Meanwhile, other Trotskyist publications took up the charges. Serge's reply, finally published on April 21, 1939, pointed out that Trotsky had evidently not bothered to read his *Partisan Review* essay before attacking it:

This is deplorable. As it was so often done to Trotsky in Russia in the days when I was defending him to my utmost, he imputes to me ideas which I have not expressed and don't hold while at the same time ignoring those I do express. A senseless method of discussion which belongs to the

²²³ Trotsky's text, dated Feb. 7, 1939, appeared in the Belgian Trotskyist review, *La Lutte Ouvrière*, for March 11, 1939, in B.O. 74, and in *Quatrième Internationale* N° 16, April 1939.

Bolshevism of decadence and to all sectarianisms: for the essence of sectarianisms is to blind. And it is easier to excommunicate without trying to understand than to argue in a fraternal fashion.²²⁴

Comparing passages of Trotsky's text to his own, Serge showed that they were in complete agreement — indeed almost identical in their formulations — on the question of Marxism. Where they differed, Serge noted, was on the historical problem of when and how Bolshevism had begun to degenerate — the problem of freedom in the revolution. He repeated his earlier argument on the error of instituting the *Cheka*, which Trotsky had failed to answer, and added:

I want to underscore only one point: that is that a large number of the last fighters of the Left Opposition of the Communist Party of the USSR (later known as Trotskyists) — if they still survive in Stalin's jails — agree with me on these essential questions; and that from this I have the inner certainty of remaining in complete unity of ideas with them, faithful to the liberating goals of the 1923 Opposition which certainly was not fighting to replace the strangle-hold of the bureaucracy with a stifling sectarianism.

Serge didn't know how right he was. Alexei Gusev, who has studied the heretofore-unknown history of the Opposition thanks to newly accessible archive in the GPU archives in Moscow, concludes that

By the mid-1930s the Communist Opposition in the USSR had *de facto* ceased to be 'Trotskyist.' Its questioning of [Trotsky's] theses on the [nature of] the Soviet state and its criticisms of Leninism had become unacceptable to Trotsky. Without the least hesitation, Trotsky broke off all connection with those [imprisoned Left Oppositionists] who dared to disagree with his key concepts. It is thus

²²⁴ "Lettre de Victor Serge à Masses," published in *Juin* 36 (organ of the Parti socialiste ouvrier et paysan) on April 21, 1939. Reprinted in *Dreyfus*, op. cit., p. 230.

hardly astonishing that [Anton] Ciliga and Serge — the first important members of the Opposition to have succeeded in leaving the country during the 1930s — should have become ideological “enemies” of the international Trotskyist movement.²²⁵

Let us note that here, as elsewhere in his quarrels with Trotsky, Serge’s orientation flows from his identification with currents in the Russian Left Opposition. Quite to the contrary, Michel Dreyfus, in a lengthy introduction to his edition of the Serge-Trotsky papers, tries to explain their differences by alluding to Serge’s “isolation” from the Left Opposition during his years of deportation. M. Dreyfus apparently confuses the inner squabbles of the various European and American sects formed around Trotsky in the 1930s with the historical Left Opposition, which was Soviet Russian and largely made up of workers and seasoned revolutionary fighters and leaders — the founding fathers (and mothers) of the Soviet Revolution. In fact, it was Trotsky who was ‘isolated’ both by the conditions of his exile and by his deliberate break with the Oppositional comrades in Stalin’s jails who disagreed with him.

Dreyfus’ Introduction attempts to place Serge’s differences with Trotsky in the context of a European independent socialist tendency somewhat to the left of the Socialists, but critical of Stalinism, referred to, somewhat derisively, as “The Second-and-a-half-International.” This explanation is also inaccurate. Firstly, Serge was somewhat hostile to this tendency, as evidenced by his letter to Angelica Balabanova dated Oct. 23, 1941 although he did work with some of its representatives in order to expose the Stalinists machinations of ‘Moscow Trials,’ organized behind the Republican lines during the Spanish Civil War. These efforts actually succeeded in saving the lives of the surviving POUM leaders, whom the GPU falsely accused of ‘Trotskyism’ and of collaboration with the Fascists under Trotsky’s orders.

Serge, in his struggle to expose Stalinism (which, through the Popular Fronts, had a death-grip on the mainstream European Left) and to save his surviving Marxist comrades in the Stalinist

²²⁵ Alexei Gusev, “L’Opposition de gauche du parti communiste soviétique dans la première moitié des années 30” « Cahiers Leon Trotsky », No 72., pp. 93-99.

prisons of Russia and Republican Spain, sought to mobilize a broad front, not only of Independent Socialists, but also surrealists like André Breton. Trotsky and his followers, having adopted an orthodox Bolshevik-Leninist posture of ‘he who is not with us is against us’ seem to have felt no such urgent sense of socialist solidarity, which may help explain why the IVth International’s efforts to aid imprisoned anti-Stalinist revolutionaries in Russia and Spain were so ineffective. In any case, the divergences between Serge and Trotsky are far better understood as an expression of antagonistic tendencies within the Soviet Left Opposition than by reference to centrist currents in the European Left.

Despite Trotsky’s attack, Serge retained his deep respect for the man and tried to avoid a rift. A few days after writing his formal reply to Trotsky’s blast, Serge penned a warm personal letter to his old comrade in an attempt to clarify their political relations. He began “Dear and most esteemed Lev Davidovitch” and closed “I send you and Natalia Ivanova my most cordial greetings and beg you to remember that I will always be useful to you.” In the letter, Serge explained that he had refrained from replying to the offensive note on him that had appeared in the *Opposition Bulletin* and that he had no desire to engage in polemics with him saying, “your activity is much too precious to me, despite these divergences.” Far from “intriguing” against the IVth International, Serge explained that he had done his best to patch over the many splits and quarrels that divided the movement.

I don’t know how and by whom you are informed, but alas there are hotbeds of intrigue everywhere here (which played their role in the death of Leon Lvovitch [Trotsky’s son], before that in the murder of [the Comintern secret agent Ignace] Reiss and in the failure of the French section of the IVth International as well), and my departure from the “IVth” is in part explained by my inability to live among intrigues.²²⁶

Nonetheless, their differences were real. Why not just recognize them rather than stooping to insult? Serge reviewed his previous criticisms of Trotsky’s organization and his own conception

²²⁶ Serge to Trotsky, 18 mars 1939 (Dreyfus p. 235).

of a broader, democratic grouping within which he was sure that Trotsky's "Bolshevik-Leninists" would exercise a far greater influence than through their tiny "International."

During this same period of misunderstanding and controversy, Serge had been translating Trotsky's latest work, *Their Morals and Ours*, the controversial pamphlet in which the leader of the October Revolution defended the historical principles of revolutionary action against those who would condemn them in the name of a timeless abstract morality. In it, Trotsky defended the idea that the end justifies the means, but maintained that certain means were incompatible with the Socialist goal of human liberation. Serge's translation of *Their Morals and Ours* as published in Paris in March 1939 by *Les Editions du Sagittaire* was accompanied by a "prospectus" or publisher's blurb which Trotsky found extremely offensive. This blurb was a vulgarly sensationalistic résumé of Trotsky's subtle and complex argument and contained such gems as the following: "Shooting hostages takes on different meanings depending on whether the order is given by Stalin or by Trotsky or by the bourgeoisie."²²⁷

Without bothering to check with the publisher, Trotsky jumped to the conclusion that the blurb had been written by Serge or under his inspiration and assumed that Serge was out to sabotage his book. Summoning up all his trenchant wit and vituperative verve as a polemicist, Trotsky penned a furious protest under the title "Moralists and Sycophants Against Marxism" (subtitle: "Peddlers of Indulgences and their Socialist Allies, or the Cuckoo in a Strange Nest").²²⁸ Resorting once again to the technique of amalgamation, Trotsky lumped Serge with the hypocritical philistines (including Catholic apologists for Franco) who had attacked his book in the press. He then advanced the supposition that Serge, his "severest critic," had assumed the deceitful guise of a "friend of the author" and smuggled his attack into the book's prospectus, like a cuckoo that deposits its eggs in other birds' nests. This, Trotsky claimed, was because Serge had "no considered point of view" and was incapable of arguing openly.

²²⁷ The text is available in English as "Appendix C" in Trotsky, *Their Morals and Ours*, Merit Publishers (N.Y. 1969) and in French in *Dreyfus*, Ed. (Op. Cit.) pp. 240-1

²²⁸ Included in the Merit edition of *Their Morals and Ours* and in *Dreyfus* [Ed.] *loc. cit.*

Ignoring Serge's three decades of revolutionary activity and all of the books and articles in which Serge had defended Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks, Trotsky caricatured Serge as a "disillusioned petty-bourgeois intellectual," a dilettante who "plays with the concept of revolution, writes poems about it, but is incapable of understanding it as it is." He went on to create a straw man out of what he supposed were Serge's "moralistic" opinions and then proceeded to flail this dummy in a half-dozen pages of bitter polemic.

It is the nature of repeated insult and false argumentation to sully the best-earned reputations, as Trotsky must have known from bitter personal experience. Serge wrote out an indignant refutation, and then, not wishing to engage in further mud slinging with a man he still deeply respected, decided to refrain from public protest. '*Ma réponse à Trotsky*,' Serge's self-censored refutation was discovered by Peter Sedgwick among Serge's posthumous papers and published, in Sedgwick's English translation, under the title "Secrecy and Revolution — A reply to Trotsky."²²⁹ The text exists in the form of corrected galley-proofs whose format is identical to the typography of *La Révolution prolétarienne* where Serge regularly published. As Serge explained in a 1941 letter to Angelica Balabanova,²³⁰ "throughout the painful argument with the Old Man I retained so much esteem and affection for him that, when, in a long polemic, he imputed to me an article which wasn't mine and ideas which have never been mine, I sent a strong reply to the print-shop of *La Révolution Prolétarienne* (Paris) and then took it back, preferring to allow myself to be unjustly attacked in silence. And I maintain that I did the right thing: the truth will make its way by other means than offensive polemics."

Serge did, however, write privately to Trotsky (on August 9, 1939) denying any connection with the offensive blurb and protesting Trotsky's slanderous and unjust imputations. Trotsky's only reaction was to publish a short note to the effect that he had voiced only the "supposition" not the "assertion" that Serge was

²²⁹ *Peace News*, London, Dec. 27, 1963.

²³⁰ Serge to Balabanova, Oct. 23, 1941 (Serge Archive, Beinecke Rare Book Library, Yale University).

responsible for the “cuckoo’s egg.”²³¹ Trotsky “willingly” accepted Serge’s declaration of innocence, but, in the same breath, he dismissed Serge’s protest that “The entire argumentation that you thus attribute to me sharply diverges from everything I have written on the Civil War and on Socialist ethics in a whole series of books and articles.”²³²

Trotsky’s acknowledgement has not prevented an entire generation of commentators from attributing to Serge both the authorship of the prospectus and the ideas Trotsky had put in his mouth during the polemic. Thus Michel Dreyfus, editor of the 1977 French collection of exchanges between Serge and Trotsky, lists Serge as the author of the prospectus in his “Table of Contents” and as its “probable” author in a footnote. He makes no reference either to Serge’s refutation or to Trotsky’s acknowledgement. This collection, replete with 46 pages of scholarly introduction and endless footnotes appears to be “scientific” and exhaustive, yet it leaves the reader with a totally erroneous impression.²³³

Likewise Isaac Deutscher substitutes Trotsky’s straw man for the real Serge, depicts Serge “blaming” Trotsky for the shooting of hostages by the Bolsheviks during the Civil War, and wonders why Serge did not “see the moral and political difference between Trotsky’s use of violence in civil war and Stalin’s present terror.”²³⁴ Irving Howe, in his *Leon Trotsky*, follows suit.²³⁵ The French Trotskyist, Pierre Frank, in his *Introduction* to the 2nd (1966) French edition of *Their Morals and Ours* asserts that the prospectus was “probably drawn up by Victor Serge,” whom he accuses of “making Siamese twins of Stalin and Trotsky at a time when Stalin was hunting Trotsky down.” Susan Weissman comments, “Frank not only repeated that Serge wrote the prospectus, he groups Serge with Max Eastman and Sidney Hook, two former

²³¹ Trotsky, ‘Another Refutation’ (cited above).

²³² Serge to Trotsky, Aug. 9, 1939, Serge Archive, Yale.

²³³ Dreyfus, *Op. cit.* M. Dreyfus’ errors and omissions are all the more blameworthy in that he rebuffed the offers of M. Jean Rièrè, at the time the French representative of the Serge estate, to check his edition and to supply additional texts where necessary.

²³⁴ Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed*, *loc. cit.*

²³⁵ Howe, *Leon Trotsky*, N.Y. 1978. The late Mr. Howe expressed to me his desire to change this section in subsequent editions.

Marxist turned Cold Warriors. [...] It appears that Pierre Frank held Serge in particular contempt and had considerable influence of official Trotskyist thought about Serge.” Weissman continues: “In 1974 leading members of the British section of the IVth International told me that Serge was a ‘centrist’, implying that he was not worth reading.”²³⁶ She adds that Ernest Mandel failed to deliver on his promise to clear this question during his intervention at the March 1991 Serge Centennial Colloquium in Brussels. To their credit, the U.S. Trotskyists of the Socialist Workers’ Party did include a fragment of Serge’s “Denial and Protest” as an appendix to their 1969 Merit Publishers edition of *Their Morals and Ours*.

Just as the Stalinists invented a caricature of Trotsky (‘British agent’) and his views (‘revolutionary adventurism’) official Trotskyism had created a totally false picture of Serge as a dilettante at best, and a dishonest sneak and a hypocritical moralist at worst. This impression is all the more unjust considering Serge’s gallant decision to suppress his own refutation out of respect for his adversary. Nonetheless, Serge’s reputation, particularly in circles influenced by Trotskyism, never quite recovered — as I can attest from numerous conversations with French militants who have never read Serge’s books but ‘know’ there is something unsavory about him.

Even such a fine intelligence as the editor and literary critic Maurice Nadeau was sucked into adopting this scornful attitude toward Serge, as he recalled to me with tears in his eyes during a conversation around 1998. Nadeau had met Serge only once, around 1939, at the café Danton at Place de l’Odéon on the fashionable Left Bank — hardly one of Serge’s haunts. The 27-year old surrealist and Trotskyist militant had arranged the meeting there to deliver some books to Serge, and I hope Nadeau paid for the coffee as the penniless exiled writer was eking out a living as a proofreader for Pop Front newspapers that wouldn’t print his well-documented articles exposing the Moscow Trials. Nadeau arrived (he must have been late) to find Serge seated in the back, nervously keeping his eye on the doors



²³⁶ Weissman, *op. cit.* page 228.

and the mirrors. The young Parisian ‘Bolshevik-Leninist’ and Parisian *litterateur* — secure in the ‘knowledge’ that this veteran of three doomed revolutions and ten years in various camps’ prisons was a ‘dilettante’ — interpreted this attitude as a pose. Apparently it was only in retelling this incident to me a half-century later, that Nadeau realized the opportunity he had missed — a consequence, he told me, of the scornful attitude prevalent in the French Trotskyist milieu.

Returning to the issue posed in *Their Morals and Ours*, the crux of Trotsky’s argument against Serge’s alleged moralism was this:

Victor Serge publicly became a member of the POUM, a Catalan party that had its own militia at the front during the Civil War. At the front, as is well known, people shoot and kill. It may therefore be said: “For Victor Serge, killings assume an entirely different meaning depending on whether the order is issued by General Franco or by the leaders of Victor Serge’s own party.”

To be sure, Trotsky’s logic was sound. The class struggle and its supreme expression, civil war, is of necessity brutal and destructive. The only relevant moral question is “which side are you on?” — that of the reactionaries and exploiters fighting to preserve their privileges or that of the revolutionary workers struggling to bring forth a new society? To try to adopt a middle course, to criticize the actions of the revolutionaries from the point of view of abstract morality (“killing is wrong”) is absurd. Each side uses all means at its disposal to win. Those who wander between the two camps preaching morality will only succeed in imposing the ruling class morality on the oppressed — a morality designed to keep them passive and patient in their sufferings. Such moralizing, argued Trotsky, on the part of “Centrists,” “ex-revolutionaries,” and “petty-bourgeois intellectuals” is a “bridge to reaction.”

Serge would certainly have agreed. The real quarrel between Serge and Trotsky was not over the hackneyed moral question of whether, in revolution, the ends justify the means, but over which means are conducive to the ends of revolution and which are de-

structive of them. Serge argued that the repressive and authoritarian decisions of the Bolsheviks, like the institution of the *Cheka* in 1918, were anti-socialist and anti working-class. They had prepared an institutional framework on the basis of which Stalin was able to establish his counter-revolutionary dictatorship. This was a political and historical question, not, strictly speaking, a moral one, but Trotsky avoided its implications by reducing it to just that:

Public trials are possible only in conditions of a stable regime. Civil war is a condition of the extreme instability of society and the state. Just as it is impossible to publish in newspapers the plans of the general staff, so it is impossible to reveal in public trials the conditions and circumstances of conspiracies, for the latter are intimately linked with the course of the civil war. Secret trials, beyond a doubt, greatly increase the possibility of mistakes. This merely signifies, and we concede it readily, that the circumstances of civil war are hardly favorable for the exercise of impartial justice. And what more than that?²³⁷

Trotsky went on to propose sarcastically that Serge be appointed as chairman of a commission to draft a moral code for civil warfare in which the use of weapons would be forbidden as detrimental to democracy. For Serge, the errors of the *Cheka* were by no means unavoidable excesses that could be blamed on civil war conditions. Only a small number of the cases it dealt with had to do with conspiracies, and regular courts, sitting in camera where necessary, could have handled even these. The majority of the cases which swamped the *Cheka* were mundane offenses of speculation and indiscipline among the population, and here the *Cheka* had greatly abused the death penalty, applying it *on a mass scale* to accused who had no right to defend themselves or even to be seen or heard. These conditions were favorable to the manufacture of imaginary conspiracies and to the persecution of “troublesome critics” as “reactionary plotters and

²³⁷ Moralists...etc. in Trotsky, *Their Morals and Ours* (Merit Publishers, N.Y. 1969) p. 44.

spies” — the very techniques later used to destroy the Opposition. The consequences of the *Cheka's* secret police methods hurt the revolution and workers' democracy more than it did the counter-revolution. “Would not the revolution have enhanced its own popularity by unmasking its true enemies for all to see?” asked Serge. “And correspondingly, the abuses which arose inevitably from the darkness would have been avoided.”²³⁸

Trotsky, on the other hand, contended that such ‘democratism’ is dangerous because the masses’ moods vary: “If the dictatorship of the proletariat means anything at all (Trotsky asserted), then it means that the vanguard of the class is armed with the resources of the state in order to repel the dangers, including those emanating from the backward layers of the proletariat itself.”²³⁹ Serge had a ready answer: if the masses vary, so does their vanguard. The Party of 1921 was no longer that of 1917. But Trotsky had touched at the crux of the problem — the relationship of party (the vanguard) to masses in the process of revolution. Unfortunately, he failed to develop the argument, retreating into dogma (“All this is elementary”) and arguments *ad hominum* (“the masses have nothing to do with it” — all Serge really wants “is freedom for himself... freedom from all control, all discipline, even, if possible, from all criticism”).

Nonetheless, the problem of the vanguard remains, and it is central to the whole ‘Bolshevik-Leninist’ concept of revolution — a concept that continues to guide (more or less openly) many sectarian ‘Marxist’ organizations to this day. Ironically, it was Trotsky who wrote (around 1914): “Bolshevism may very well be an excellent instrument for the conquest of power, but after that it will reveal its counter-revolutionary aspects” — as Serge reminded him during one of their disputes. This is not to dismiss the idea of a ‘vanguard,’ if by this we mean the more class conscious, organized, active elements among the oppressed who may act as revolutionary ‘leaven’ during moments of mass unrest, bringing to spontaneous movements organizational skills and the memory of past struggles. On the other hand, once a self-desig-

²³⁸ Serge, “Secrecy and Revolution — a Reply to Trotsky,” *loc. cit.* Serge’s arguments in favor of open trials has apparently failed to convince Susan Weissman: “Serge never satisfactorily resolved the problem of repression... *op. cit.*, p.38.

²³⁹ Trotsky, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

nated ‘vanguard’ claims to have a monopoly on the truth, the whole authoritarian panoply of stifling orthodoxy inevitably takes over, with its expulsions, splits, character assassinations (and physical assassinations) of those who dare disagree. “In the hearts of the persecuted I encountered the same attitudes as in their persecutors,” noted Serge. Thus ‘revolutionary’ vanguardism — the cult of the party-to-lead — ultimately blocks the road to democratic debate, socialist renewal and mass revolution itself. Looking back on his quarrels with Trotsky, Serge recalled:

I came to the conclusion that our Opposition had simultaneously contained two opposing lines of significance. For the great majority of its members it had meant resistance to totalitarianism in the name of the democratic ideals expressed at the beginning of the Revolution; for a number of our Old Bolshevik leaders it meant, on the contrary, the defense of doctrinally orthodox which, while not excluding a certain tendency toward democracy, was authoritarian through and through. These two mingled strains had, between 1923 and 1928, surrounded Trotsky’s vigorous personality with a tremendous aura. If, in his exile from the U.S.S.R., he had made himself the ideologist of a renewed Socialism, critical in outlook and fearing diversity less than dogmatism, perhaps he would have attained a new greatness. But he was the prisoner of his own orthodoxy, the more so since his lapses into unorthodoxy were being denounced as treason.²⁴⁰

Nonetheless, Serge’s admiration for Trotsky the revolutionary outlived their disputes, indeed outlived Trotsky himself, and took the form of Serge’s collaboration with Natalia Trotsky on *Life and Death of Leon Trotsky*, which Praxis published for the first time in Russian translation in 2009.

²⁴⁰ Serge, *Memoirs*, Peter Sedgwick Tr. (Oxford), p. 350.

The Death of Communism and the New World Order [1992]

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the ideologues of the Right have been congratulating themselves on the death of so-called Communism and proclaiming the everlasting triumph of neo-liberal free-market capitalism as the happy End of History. However, the collapse of the Evil Empire came as a total surprise to these very Cold Warriors, who insisted on seeing Gorbachev's radical and irreversible moves as mere feints designed to throw the West off guard. For example, George Will was still writing 'Liberalization is a ploy' on the very day the Berlin Wall came down! As a result, the U.S. security establishment blew the chance to ally with Gorbachev when he still controlled the Soviet Union and could have prevented the proliferation of unstable new nuclear states (certainly one of the greatest diplomatic blunders in modern history). Today, the same ideologues and 'intelligence' experts are trumpeting the death of Marxism and the millennial triumph of a new capitalist World Order. However, the nature of what died in the East and what is struggling to be born is far from clear, and their new prognostications may prove just as illusory.

Western experts and Sovietologists had long been unanimous that Russia's closed totalitarian system was impervious to change from within, and could only be contained from without by military means. On the other hand, serious independent Marxists like Leon Trotsky and Victor Serge, who understood the inner weakness of the Stalinist bureaucratic regime and the deep resistance of the workers, prefigured today's transformations a half century ago. As early as 1936, they foresaw the trend toward privatization, and Serge spoke specifically about the dangers of revived

nationalism and Islamic fundamentalism.²⁴¹ So much for the idea that the collapse of Stalinism has ‘disproved’ the validity of Marxism! As Serge wrote just before his death in 1947: ‘A poor excuse for logic, pointing an accusing finger at the dark spectacle of Stalinist Russia, asserts the failure of bolshevism, and therefore of Marxism and even socialism... A facile attempt to conjure away the many problems gripping the world and which won’t go away in the foreseeable future. Aren’t you forgetting other failures? What was Christianity doing during the [recent] social catastrophes? What happened to liberalism? What was the end result of conservatism, whether reactionary or enlightened? Did it not give us Mussolini, Hitler, Salazar and Franco? If it were a question of honestly weighing the many failures of different ideologies, we would have our work cut out for us for a long time. And nothing is over yet.’ Serge died believing that it was reasonable to hope that the Russian people would eventually overthrow totalitarian Communism and move in the direction of democracy and a humanistic form of socialism.

However, the Revolutions of 1989, while they did revive the democratic and socialist hopes of the East European anti-Communist revolts of 1953, 1956, 1968 and 1981, did not fulfill them. These early, ill-fated freedom struggles all bore the same revolutionary stamp of mass self-activity — from the 1953 Berlin workers’ uprising, following the death of Stalin, through the 1956 Hungarian Revolution with its Workers’ Councils, to the ‘socialism with a human face’ of the Prague Spring of 1968, and the original Polish Solidarity movement of 1981. Their more-or-less explicit aim was democratic workers’ control of society, that is to say, socialism. Yet when the incubus of totalitarian Communism was finally lifted, what happened? Far from fulfilling the early expectations of freedom, democracy, revival and reform, the Revolutions of 1989 ushered in a dismal period of passivity, demoralization, political stagnation, economic chaos, hardships, shortages, and unemployment; of narrow nationalism, internecine warfare, and authoritarian rule. Indeed, as East Europe and the ex-Soviet lands slide deeper into this morass, the only ‘light’ at the end of the tunnel is apparently the dim possibility of the restora-

²⁴¹ See Trotsky’s *Revolution Betrayed*, and Serge’s *Russia Twenty Years After*, especially his new 1947 Preface, ‘Russia Thirty Years After.’

tion of capitalism! And what kind of capitalism? Not the growth of small business, but an IMF-dictated bitter pill of austerity that can only lead to Latin-American-style dictatorship, debt and dependency! In fact, the fresh-minted 'democrats' around Yeltsin openly declare that a 'Pinochet-type solution' might be desirable if the masses, whose sufferings get worse daily, fail to support what are euphemistically called 'reforms.'

How do we account for this horrible retrogression on the day after a victorious movement for liberation? Is it possible to find any rational hope for a socialist-humanist reorganization of society in the wake of the collapse of 'Communism?' To answer these questions we must begin by stating that the 'Communism' which collapsed in Russia and East Europe bore as much relationship to the liberating ideas of Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto* as the Spanish Inquisition did to the ideals of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. It was not communism, the theory and practice of human self-liberation, that collapsed in 1989, but Stalinism, a totalitarian system of bureaucratic class rule based on anti-working class terror and forced labor in the interest of the Party-State apparatus: the dominant *privilegensia* or *nomenklatura*.

It is history's bitterest irony that this bureaucratic totalitarian system first took root on the ruins of a genuine popular revolution, the Soviet Revolution of October 1917. The Russian Revolution turned sour when the expected world revolution failed to rescue the Soviets from poverty, isolation, backwardness, and continuous capitalist attacks. Eventually it degenerated into Stalin's bureaucratic tyranny. Yet the fact that its new rulers, while constructing a system resembling fascism, derived their privileges and power from state, not private property, and continued to pay lip-service to a bastardized form of Marxism, has led to endless ideological confusion. However, the proof that the Stalinist bureaucracy's takeover was an anti-socialist counter-revolution has been obvious since the 1930s, when Stalin literally exterminated all the Marxists and revolutionaries in Russia, including every member of Lenin's 1917 Central Committee but himself!

The Stalinist bureaucracy's cynicism and brutality were as ferocious as its legitimacy was flimsy. It murdered millions. Yet Stalinist economic planning, however crude and coercive, succeeded in turning a backward Soviet Union into the world's

second industrial power with such speed that by 1945 Red Army tanks were able to overwhelm the industrial juggernaut of Nazi Germany, and Russia went on to compete head to head with the wealthy United States in a forty-year arms race. Today it is fashionable to dismiss Russia's state-capitalist command economy (and hence all forms of socialism and economic planning) as inherently inefficient. So let us recall that Communist Russia was able to industrialize during the Great Depression, when Western economies were stagnating, and that as late as the 1960s Khrushchev's threat to 'bury' the West economically was considered credible. On the other hand, as Victor Serge predicted, the absence in Russia of the essential socialist elements of democratic participation and intellectual freedom in the long run undermined the advantages of economic planning. Under Breshnev and his successors, efficiency declined to the point where Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika* reforms became necessities for the economic survival of the system.

What Marxists like Serge had anticipated — and what Western experts could not understand — was that Stalin's eventual heir (in the event Mikhail Gorbachev) would be obliged to initiate a profound revolution from above in order to solve two major sets of problems for the privileged bureaucracy he headed. The first was to end the economic and technological stagnation gripping the economy, raise productivity, and eliminate the system of police terror to the extent of making scientific progress and cultural life possible for the educated elites. The second was to somehow legitimize the scandalous illegal privileges of the bureaucracy whose rule was based on the fiction of administering socialized wealth in the interests of the 'true owners,' the working masses, who might one day wake up and demand an accounting. In retrospect, Gorbachev's reforms, although apparently slow and hesitant, were astoundingly radical, as was already clear to us in 1988.²⁴² Gorbachev realized that in order to revive the Russian economy, he would have to call off the ruinous arms race, which was eating up a huge percentage of the gross national product, and create the conditions for normal trade and exchange with the capitalist West. This entailed sacrificing the East European em-

²⁴² See above '20 Years After: 1968 in Historical Perspective' which appeared in *New Politics* in 1988 under the title, 'Reflections on 1968 and Beyond.'

pire Stalin had established as a buffer-zone at the end of WWII while convincing his own military-industrial complex and his security apparatus to go along with him. To understand how radical Gorbachev was, try to imagine a U.S. President in 1985 convincing the Joint Chiefs, the FBI and the CIA to end the Cold War in a similar manner (and survive assassination)!

Moreover, Gorbachev understood that in the computer age, progress is dependent on the free flow of information, hence of ideas, and he began to take the clamps off of free expression through *glaznost*, much to the dismay of the Party ideologues and conservative KGB types. As a counterweight to the die-hard Stalinists and Cold Warriors on his right, Gorbachev opened up some space for democratic forces; but he understood that if democracy went too far he might very well need his old colleagues in the Party and the KGB, and he did not want to alienate them. This led to his constant vacillation. This hesitancy was most evident where his last reform, the famous *perestroika*, or economic restructuring, was concerned. Although Gorbachev's advisors had their 600-day plans (and Yeltsin's their 500-days), little was known about them and even less done. Why? For the simple reason that the bureaucracy was not then, and is still not, ready to take on the masses of working people in an open and decisive contest over who will ultimately own and profit from the economy, that is to say who will inherit the social wealth built up at great suffering by the Soviet people over generations during which these same bureaucrats (or their predecessors) told the workers to sacrifice in order to 'build socialism' for their children. Hence, today's slow process of stagnation and decay, insecurity and price rises, all designed to demoralize the workers to the point that they will accept anything — even the IMF-Pinochet solution — in the name of reform, just to get things working again. Hence, the encouragement of nationalism, even anti-Semitism, in order to divert attention from a potentially decisive class confrontation.

For what independent Marxists like Trotsky and Serge understood about the dynamics of the Stalinist system a half-century ago is still valid today. They believed that the ruling bureaucracy would be overthrown by the workers themselves within a generation or so, if there were no second (or third?) World War. In this, they were overly optimistic. On the other hand, these Marxists

foresaw that if the Stalinist system survived, the bureaucrats would inevitably attempt to integrate themselves into the world capitalist system and to turn their illegal privileges (ostensibly rewards for leading the workers to the promised land of socialism) into some kind of legal property. Trotsky saw this in terms of direct capitalist restoration; Serge through a process of joint-capital exploitation involving the West. Both were right. For the creation of this kind of Market Stalinism is, in essence, the program of the ex-Stalinist bureaucrats; freshly reborn as 'democrats,' 'nationalists,' and 'free-marketeers,' who have seized power in the ex-Soviet Union.

The process has been nicknamed '*nomenklatura* privatization' and it may be conceived as a kind of revolution-in-place. In this game, the ex-Communist bosses simply change hats, while remaining at their desks and in possession of the state-owned cars they drive, the state-owned mansions they live in, and the state-owned enterprises they manage. Only now, the bureaucrats will be owners, not just 'servants' of the 'true owners,' the socialist workers. Thus commissars would become capitalists, 'Comrade Managers' would become 'Chief Executive Officers,' and the old Soviet *privilgensia* would become the principal stock-holders and directors of the social capital they formerly administered. And since the 'public sector' represents the whole national capital, even the U.S. multi-billion-dollar S&L and banking swindles pale in comparison with this massive theft of social wealth by a gang of inside traders. However, the would-be bourgeois have still problems. The first is the fear the workers won't let them get away with plundering the country. The bureaucrats have not forgotten the massive miners' strikes of 1989 and the amazing speed and boldness with which local, regional and national strike committees were formed; these Marxists foresaw committees which moved immediately from pure economic demands to political demands. So while the self-proclaimed democrats in power pal around with Chicago-school economists and talk endlessly of 'reforms,' they haven't yet dared implement their full program of austerity and privatization out of fear of a massive reaction from below. Their low intensity attack on the rights and living standards of working people is demoralizing enough. Planned massive price rises have reduced everyone but the privileged to desperation. Salaries are next to worthless. Pensions are simply not paid

on the grounds of a manufactured 'shortage' of money, while 'before our eyes, our systems of free medical care and free universal education are being dismantled without our permission, with no legal basis.'²⁴³ IMF-imposed conditions for loans may give the bureaucracy a cover for attacks on the living standards of the people, but they also expose the fact that the bureaucrats want to sell the Soviet Union out to foreigners. (Thus there is an economic, as well as a demagogic basis, for the alliance of right-wing nationalists and Stalinist dinosaurs in opposition to 'reforms.')

Parenthetically, let no one imagine that what the Yeltsin gang calls 'free markets' has anything to do with the creation of small businesses and the development of capital through individual or cooperative labor. The principal successful examples of this type of capital formation are in the illegal private sector: an alarming growth of criminal mafias, swindlers and black marketeers. Bureaucratic restrictions, galloping inflation, and exorbitant new taxes continue to inhibit the actual creation of legitimate capitalist enterprises, so that even private farming, now technically legal, cannot take root — despite the ready market for produce. The 'market Stalinists,' who now hold power, are incapable of creating new private wealth and have only one plan: to expropriate the existing public wealth through '*nomenklatura* privatizations' and sell-offs of natural resources similar to those of the Reagan-Bush looting decade. For example, the Mayor of Moscow recently transferred the assets of a large municipal enterprise to a new private company in which he is the principal stockholder.

So it is that the ex-Soviet Union is going to hell in a handcart and no one — East or West — is doing anything about it. Although the violent 'ethnic' quarrels in the Caucasus, the Crimea and the Baltics have not yet reached the stage of ex-Yugoslavia, all the elements are present plus an additional wild-card — nuclear weapons. Let us note that two significant factors in all this 'ethnic' violence have nothing to do with ethnicity. First, most of these conflicts are engineered by ex-Communist bureaucrats whipping up nationalist fervor in order to retain or expand their dictatorial power (and to make people forget their 'internationalist' Stalinist pasts). Second, the exacerbation of national quarrels

²⁴³ Nikolai Preobrazhensky of the Petersburg Party of Labor, quoted in *Bulletin*, U.S. Soviet Workers Information Committee, Vol. 1 No. 2, Nov. 1992, p. 36.

serves as a diversion from the need to solve social problems, raise living standards, and establish practical democracy. As with the black on black 'tribal' violence in South Africa, much of the 'ethnic' violence in the ex-Soviet Union is provoked by the secret police in order to preserve minority rule — here that of the *nomenklatura* — and to prevent the working people from discovering and uniting around their common interests. Meanwhile, on the economic front, all over the ex-Soviet Union, farms stagnate and factories cease production for lack of parts, yet Yeltsin's advisors, like Gorbachev's before him, have no practical plans for reviving the resource-rich Russian economy nor any intention of encouraging initiatives from below, be they collective or actual free enterprise. Of course, the privileged and powerful are not hurting like the common people who have seen the buying power of their salaries and pensions decline at a vertiginous rate. The *nomenklatura* are quietly looting retail while waiting until the day when they can loot wholesale. Perhaps they feel that shortages and nationalist squabbles will create enough demoralizing diversions that the long suffering Soviet peoples will eventually despair and willingly swallow the bitter pills of mass unemployment, homelessness, and the loss of healthcare and the social safety net in the name of 'austerity.'

On the other hand, the Soviet masses have suffered and labored, often heroically, for generations under totalitarian Communist bureaucrats who forced them to sacrifice in the name of 'socialism.' It is hardly reasonable to expect these same masses to sacrifice for another generation in order to enrich a few capitalists (in most cases the same bureaucrats) so that eventually the new wealth will 'trickle down' to them. Yet this is precisely the 'reform' Yeltsin's advisors are telling them they must accept! Hence, for the moment, we have *stasis* (which the Greeks understood as a violent and degenerative paralysis of a polity in the middle of an unfinished class war). This *stasis* is aggravated by unresolved antagonisms among sections of the *nomenklatura* itself, for the prospective bureaucratic bourgeois have already split into factions in anticipation of a division of the expected spoils.²⁴⁴ The

²⁴⁴ This split within the Stalinist ruling order was analyzed thirty years ago by two young Polish Marxists, Jacek Kuron and Karol Modzelewski, in an 'Open Letter' to the Polish Workers (Communist) Party that landed them in jail. Their brilliant analysis of the bureaucratic ruling class and the antagonism

historic August 16, 1991 'attempted right-wing coup,' was little more than such a faction-fight played out in the streets, according to Boris Kagarlitsky, a leading spokesperson for the new Party of Labor and a socialist member of the Moscow City Council.²⁴⁵ Kagarlitsky describes the 'coup' as an elaborate charade, staged with unarmed tanks and unloaded rifles, during which the Yeltsin people double-crossed the coup-makers and used the media to outfox the Gorbachev crowd in the generalized scramble for power. As a result of this spectacular political maneuver, the Soviet Union, Gorby's stronghold, was dissolved to the advantage of Yeltsin's Russia. At the same time, the big provincial Party *apparatchiks* like Ukraine's Kravchuk, originally sent by all-powerful Moscow to be dictators over captive 'Republics,' suddenly converted to 'nationalism' in order to hold onto their local fiefdoms.

Within Russia, in the wake of the failed August coup, there was a great scramble to jump to the winning side. Every ex-Party boss, from the Communist reformers around Gorbachev through Yeltsin's 'democrats' to various groups including neo-Stalinist and anti-Semitic nationalists (not excluding some of the coup-makers themselves), was born again as a free-marketeer. Yet within a year, this unity of opportunists had fallen apart, as the representatives of the interests of the new entrepreneurs and those of the existing factory managers came to parliamentary blows over which privileged group should benefit most from privatization. In this struggle for spoils, the factory managers have the advantage of being able to mobilize 'their' workers against 'outside' exploiters by manipulating the existing unions and work collectives. Naturally, independent organizations of working people are anathema to both power-groups. Yet Kagarlitsky is certainly right that, if there was a coup, it was Yeltsin who pulled it off. For 'Czar Boris' immediately used the victory of 'democracy' to vastly reinforce his own executive power to the detriment of actual democratic formations. Although Yeltsin called on the workers to strike and support him during the August charade

within it between the 'central political bureaucracy' and the managers in the field was prophetic, even if Kuron's subsequent political incarnation as an austerity Labor Minister provides an ironic commentary on the prophetic ideas of his heroic youth.

²⁴⁵ See *New Politics* Vol. III, No. IV (New Series): 'Yeltsin's Successful Coup' by Boris Kagarlitsky.

and pledged that he would 'lie on the railroad tracks' if his reforms were accompanied by price increases, he has in fact attacked workers' living standards while clamping down on the unions, both old and new. Among Yeltsin's first decrees was the banning of employee organization at the workplace (under the pretext of banning the Communist Party). The 'democrats' in power are also clamping down on grass-roots organizations and parties like Kagarlitsky's Party of Labor, but the popularity of these new groupings, although limited, seems to be growing. What are the perspectives for a socialist revival in the ex-Soviet lands?

Fifty years ago, Leon Trotsky died believing that despite Stalin's perversion of socialism, the basis of collective property and collective labor had been so firmly established in the Soviet Union that a 'political revolution,' merely by sweeping away Stalin and his cronies, would be sufficient to restore socialism. Whether his analysis was correct at the time is moot, for the political revolution has arrived, a half-century too late, and it is now obvious that it will take acrimonious class struggle, perhaps a civil war, before the working people of the ex-Union can expropriate their bureaucratic-bourgeois oppressors. Moreover, such is the popular revulsion against the official Communism that justified so much suffering for so long, that, as Victor Serge predicted in 1947, it may be a long while before the mass of workers will be willing to listen to Marxist or socialist ideas. At the same time, the peoples of the ex-Soviet Union have so little experience with actually existing capitalism and have so many illusions about the consumer societies they imagine exist in the West, that they have no idea that their capitalist future will look more like Peru than like Switzerland. Although this would be tragic, some observers believe that the Soviet people will have to go through the actual experience of private capitalist exploitation before they are ready to overthrow it.

I, for one, am less pessimistic and, I hope, for sound historical reasons. Let us return again to our original question: Why did the Revolutions of 1989, instead of marking a new beginning for humanity and fulfilling the libertarian socialist aspirations of earlier anti-Communist revolts, open the road to the most serious retrogression, including economic and political stagnation, a failure to develop the basis of democracy in a renewed civil society, a revival of bloody internecine religious and national struggles, and

the apparent triumph of neo-liberal Reaganomics in the East? We have just explored the inner dynamics of the collapsing Stalinist empire, but, for me, an essential part of the answer lies in examining the unfavorable international environment and historical context. In order to understand the importance of this context of world-wide recession and rampant Reaganism, let us exercise our fancies and imagine it otherwise. Let us imagine, for example, that Russian 'Communism' had collapsed at the time of the world-wide revolutionary upsurges of 1968, rather than stagnating on for another twenty years. Imagine that in 1968 instead of the Russian tanks invading Prague, the spirit of Prague Spring (which did in fact spark sympathy movements in Poland and demonstrations in the Soviet Union) had invaded Russia. Imagine that the masses of students and workers in rebellion in France and Western Europe against both capitalism and 'Obsolete Communism' had poured across the Berlin Wall, not with the 1989 message of consumerism and contempt, but burning with the holy 1968 freedom-fire and bringing with them the kind of practical solidarity that people with mimeograph machines and experience in political parties and trade unions can effectively share with new movements just getting organized. Imagine a United States paralyzed by ghetto riots, anti-war demonstrations, and the collapse of adult authority. And while we're at it, why not imagine a self-organized workers' movement à la 1981 Polish Solidarity linking up with the wild-cat strike movements inflaming France, Italy, Britain and parts of the U.S., while the revolutions in Vietnam, Iran and Nicaragua keep the forces of imperialism off balance?

All of the above events did happen, albeit not simultaneously. However, there is nothing intrinsically impossible about our imaginary scenario, which certainly would logically have led to a genuine new world order based on spontaneous mass democracy and respect for human rights. What happened, in fact, as we argued in our study of the Sixties, is that capitalism, after getting a good scare in 1968, counter-attacked and developed new techniques for suppressing rebellion and raising profits culminating in the recent decade of transnational high-finance looting, reactionary social policy, and militarism. The purpose of our imaginary exercise in the almost possible is not to argue that Communism collapsed 10 or 20 years too late for anyone's good, although that might turn out to be the case. It is rather to remind ourselves that

the Revolutions of 1989 had the misfortune of taking place at the end of a decade of Reagan-Bush-Thatcherite neo-capitalist retrogression, during a period of high unemployment and economic stagnation, and that the political environment was not exactly supportive to socialism and democracy. For example, the unfortunate East German democrats, who toppled the vicious Honecker regime with demonstrations sparked by their little civic clubs, hardly had a chance to breathe before Helmut Kohl came barreling over the Wall with his Deutschmarks and his referenda and his plant-closings and privatizations. Nor did the sick, senile, cynical socialism of Mitterrand provide a shining example of solidarity for France's East European neighbors. Given this context of triumphant neo-liberalism, it was hardly reasonable to expect the poor Russians, dragging themselves out of the radioactive mud of Chernobyl after 70 years of privation and brainwashing, to come up with the clarity of mind to reject consumerism and espouse humanistic socialism without outside support.

However, there is nothing fated about this situation, and it could change quite rapidly. The 'boom' of the Eighties, which was not a boom in terms of working peoples' living standards, now appears to have paved the way for a bust. The false prosperity of U.S. military Keynesianism seems to have reached its limit, and even Japanese capital has contracted dramatically. Despite the help of banking deregulation and massive bailouts, the capitalists can't play poker endlessly on borrowed money — sooner or later the hands will be called, and then it's pay up or fold. The political and social bankruptcy of neo-liberal capitalism is already evident in race riots, unemployment, homelessness, human rights abuses and growing economic inequality. Its financial insolvency can't be concealed indefinitely. Meanwhile, there have been encouraging signs of a revival of worker militancy in Britain and Italy.

To be sure, the death of so-called Communism left one, and only one, super-power, which, following its preordained victory in the Iraqi 'turkey-shoot' proclaimed itself the leader of a New World Order. However, the emptiness of that phrase was quickly revealed. Within a year, it was obvious that under U.S. hegemony, not world order but worldwide violence and disorder still reign — and not only in the former Second and Third worlds, but increasingly in the First. As in the 1930s, the Western democra-

cies are standing aside while genocide is practiced in the heart of Europe (Bosnia). Meanwhile, Kohl's Germany retrogressed to tacitly encouraging neo-Nazi-ism, Mitterrand's France refused to disavow the crimes of Vichy, and, in the U.S., the Los Angeles revolt exposed both the racism of American society and the anger and despair of its underprivileged. New World Order notwithstanding, Bush's tin-horn victories over his former henchmen, General Noriega and Saddam Hussein, solved none of the problems that allegedly provoked those two ghastly U.S. invasions. As Panama sinks deeper into dictatorship, drugs and money-laundering, the intact Hussein dictatorship rearms, renews its armed attacks on the Kurds, Shiites and democrats, and remains a formidable regional power. If anything, Bush's paltry triumphs demonstrate the sickness and ineptitude of the Western policy of selling arms to all comers and of propping up corrupt tyrants with secret supplies of cash and weapons in order to 'tilt' against other perceived enemies.

Thus, Bush was afraid to campaign on his incomplete Gulf 'victory' for fear of watching his fabricated pro-war consensus unravel in a new Iraq-Gate of illegal deals with Saddy-the-Baddy. Indeed, even during the jingoistic media blitz against the mind of the U.S. public, that was arguably Bush's greatest Desert Storm victory, his support was so thin that both of the two anti-Gulfwar demonstrations in Washington attracted more actual participants than Bush's ballyhooed multi-million-dollar Victory Celebration in the Spring. The subsequent electoral defeat of the architect of the 'New World Order' revealed both the superficiality of 'manufactured consent' and the depth of the economic crisis. Meanwhile, right in the U.S.'s back yard, the revolutionary and popular movements in the tiny countries of Nicaragua and El Salvador remain undefeated and have forced the U.S.-backed right-wing governments into uneasy stand-offs. One recalls that the destruction of the revolutionary movements in Nicaragua and El Salvador was at the top of the foreign policy agenda of the Reagan-Bush New Right when it took office in 1980. The survival of these two minuscule nationalist-revolutionary movements after twelve years of massive U.S.-orchestrated repression (and especially after their abandonment by their Russian allies) represents a clear defeat for the New World Order.

In El Salvador, the guerillas of the FMLN succeeded in fight-

ing the right-wing army to a standoff, despite billions of dollars in U.S. military aid. The U.N.-supervised truce can help open some political space for the teachers, trade-unionists, peasants, Catholic human rights workers and left politicians to organize against the Salvadoran death-squad oligarchy.²⁴⁶ At the same time, tiny Nicaragua continues to stand defiant against U.S. imperialism even after the electoral victory of the conservative Violeta Chamorro over the revolutionary Sandinistas. In spite of the painful setbacks in health and education following Violeta's election, her bourgeois government refuses to concede to U.S. pressures on questions of sovereignty, and she maintains the Sandinista Army and Police intact in order to keep the C.I.A.-backed *Contras* at bay and to defend the national interest.²⁴⁷ These are small and ambiguous victories, to be sure. But they are signs that U.S. hegemony is vulnerable to an international revival of social struggles around issues of sovereignty, human rights, land reform, the environment, and decent conditions of life and labor. And the U.S. solidarity movement, as well as the generalized public revulsion against Vietnam-type adventures, deserve part of the credit for the success of this resistance.

Back in Russia, moreover, despite the apparent domination of IMF-Yeltsin 'free market Stalinism,' the ultimate battle between the bureaucrats and the workers for control of the economy has yet to be decided. The 'backward' Soviet people still reject the profit system as immoral, if not illegal, and the true spirit of communism may yet take its revenge on the fat-cat ex-Communist bosses who hypocritically preached it only yesterday. Moreover, there are promising developments like new movements among the Russian trade unions, regional and national strike committees, the potential radicalization of workers' self-management collect-

²⁴⁶ *March 2009 Note.* The FMLN has just been elected by a majority of Salvadorans, ending decades of ARENA party death-squad government.

²⁴⁷ Precisely because Nicaragua has refused to become another Honduras or Guatemala, the Chamorro government is not receiving the promised U.S. aid that may have won her votes. Moreover, by submitting to the (momentary) will of the majority, the Sandinistas have set a unique precedent among vanguard parties and avoided creating yet another bureaucratic tyranny to besmirch the name of socialism. If the Sandinistas are able to deepen their links with the masses and hold onto their arms during this period of retreat into legal opposition, they may yet teach the world a new lesson, if and when conditions become more favorable for revolutionary resurgence.

ives in the old state enterprises, and the recent foundation of the Party of Labor, based on these movements, which may take root if political freedom is maintained.

If ever there was a time to think and act globally, it is now.

The Cold War Bogeyman

Indeed, whatever may have kept the East European revolts of 1953, 1956, and 1968 isolated from each other, today nothing keeps Western movements from uniting with their Eastern comrades except mutual misconceptions. These are many, and representatives of the U.S. labor bureaucracy, the CIA and State Department are busy directing disinformation campaigns at Russian workers to spread illusions. For example, anarcho-syndicalist militants I spoke with in Moscow report that the U.S. economy is being presented as some kind of worker-controlled peoples' capitalism since workers' pension-plans had stock in their companies! However, groups like 'The U.S.-Soviet Workers Information Committee' have taken the initiative to solicit and publish materials on workers' and socialist struggles in Russia, to make materials about conditions and forms of struggle in the U.S. available there, and to organize discussions and exchanges. These efforts must be expanded.²⁴⁸

It is time to extend the kind of solidarity work that has proven both effective and mutually enriching in Latin America to the struggling peoples of Eurasia. Internationalism must be the order of the day, beginning with information exchange, direct contact and material aid to social movements struggling in the ex-Communist lands. Nor should North American wage earners allow phony patriotism, like the Japan-bashing of Lee Iacocca and his labor lieutenants of the United Auto Workers International (sic!), to blind us to the fact that the transnational corporations are playing on national fears to create competition among workers, depress everyone's living standards, and degrade the environment world-wide. An injury to one is quite immediately an injury to all, for the cheapening of labor, whether in Salvador or in Siberia means lower wages in North America, as surely as the radioactive

²⁴⁸ For example in 2009 by the Praxis Research and Education Center in Moscow www.praxiscenter.ru

fallout from Chernobyl affects the milk we drink.

With the end of the Cold War, a global solidarity movement to create a new, truly human world order becomes a practical possibility, and only such a global movement can effectively oppose the destruction of the world by globally-organized capital in its private or state form. One hundred-fifty years ago, when the industrial revolution was new, the rallying cry of the First International was 'Working people of all countries unite, we have a world to win.' Today, the capitalist system has exhausted all its progressive features and has nothing left to offer the world but the consumerist rat-race for the 'lucky' few and the barbarism of endless wars and famines for the vast majority of humankind. As we enter the 21st Century, we not only still have 'a world to win,' we also have a planet to lose.

Russia : The Return of the Revolution

The early 1990's saw the collapse of the totalitarian Stalinist regime in what was still the Soviet Union, but this democratic revolution was unable to overthrow the power of the privileged bureaucrats and security apparatus. It therefore remained stalled — much like the revolutions in the Arab world after the heady days of early 2011, which saw the fall of long-reigning potentates in Tunisia and Egypt but did not uproot their power base. One of the reasons the hopes of the Russian dissidents and democrats of 1991 remained frustrated was the unfavorable international situation. With globalized neo-liberal capitalism riding high and popular movements quiescent in the West, the Russian opposition remained isolated, although our small networks of solidarity in the U.S. and Europe were sometimes able to intervene effectively to protect some of our dissident Russian comrades from repression. In this atmosphere, the Communist ruling class, known as the *nomenklatura*, was able to expropriate and privatize most of the social wealth accumulated by Soviet workers during decades of sacrifice, with the result that the 'democratic' revolutions of 1989-91 created *more*, not *less* inequality for the Russian peoples.

Today, with world capitalism in crisis and 'Occupy Everything' movements spreading around the world from North Africa to North America, the international situation has changed radically, inspiring the rise new popular movements in Russia. On February 5, 2012, we received the following report from Alexei Gusev, a prominent activist during the 1990-1991 democratic upsurge and today Prof. of History at the University of Moscow and President of the Praxis Research and Education Center

at the Victor Serge Library in Moscow, of which I am one of the founders.

Yesterday more than 100,000 people marched on the streets in the centre of Moscow despite severe cold (-20C) demanding free and fair elections and the end of Vladimir Putin's authoritarian rule. Following on the mass demonstrations of December 10th and 24th in Moscow, in which tens of thousands of people took part, this shows clearly that the period of social passivity in Russia is over; the Putin era is nearing its end. The last time such large demonstrations took place in Moscow was in 1990-91 at the height of the democratic wave directed against the domination of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. As a result of these mass actions, the whole party-state system of the USSR began to crumble. Those who participated in those events twenty years ago are feeling the same atmosphere again: revolution is in the air. The rising wave of protest has demystified the key myth of Putinism: the myth of a durable 'consensus' between the people and the authorities in Russia. What was revealed, is that it was not just a few small 'marginal' groups but the mass of ordinary active people who no longer were willing to exchange their civil and political rights for Putin-style 'stability.'

Alexei's article, 'The Return of the Russian Revolution Nature and Perspectives of the Wave of Social Protest in Russia' is a classic Marxist analysis of the class composition of the demonstrators, the foundations of Putinism, the weakness of the regime, the limits of the revolution, the dangers of nationalism and the perspectives for the future. My English translation is published in the Summer 2012 issue of *New Politics* and is available on line in English at the Praxis website: www.praxiscenter.ru/about_us/english. Alexei concludes his article as follows:

The objective task of the democratic revolution in Russia consists in liberating civil society from the authoritarian and bureaucratic yoke, in creating a politic-

al space where all social forces can express their interests. In the long term, this will permit the void on the left wing of the political milieu in Russia to be filled. The absence of an organized left movement (outside of tiny Trotskyist and anarchist groups) cannot continue for a long time, and the different neo-Stalinists and bogus ‘social democrats’ (members of Just Russia party parading as ‘Leftists’) are not up to filling the bill. Today, already, 17% of the protesters identify with the non-Communist Left. Their position is not yet represented politically. But, sooner or later, the consolidation of the democratic left forces that are anti-totalitarian, internationalist and defend human rights and the rights of the workers must begin.

The Praxis Center has been defending this political territory in Moscow for nearly fifteen years, and needs your help now. Praxis has been the home for anti-totalitarian, internationalist socialists, anarchists, ecologists and human rights activists in Moscow since 1997, when the 6000-volume Victor Serge Library of radical books in six languages opened its doors.

Our main problem today is we have run out of money — just as perspectives are opening for the independent Left in Russia! And so we are asking our friends and supporters around the world to help us kindle the flame of truly democratic socialism in Russia as the ongoing revolution advances to an uncertain future. Please send your U.S. tax deductible contributions (in dollars, euros or £) to the Victor Serge Foundation [a 501 (c) (3) non-profit] at 16 Rue de la Teinturerie, 34000 Montpellier France.

Small Miracles Occasionally Do Occur: The Story of *Praxis*

The fifteen-year saga of Praxis and the Victor Serge Library in Moscow is a story of triumph of persistence over apathy and state repression. The idea of creating a library of non-Stalinist radical literature in Russia began with an international working group devoted to searching for the missing manuscripts of the dissident Soviet writer Victor Serge, seized by Stalin’s secret police in 1936. In the U.S., we managed to collect a container-load

of donated 'Books for Struggle' and ship it to Moscow. In the Spring of 1997, after many problems with customs and officialdom, Alexei Gusev and his wife Julia, a professional librarian and translator, announced the good news to comrades in the West. The Victor Serge Public Library in Moscow has been open since that 1st of May. It is the first and only Russian library to take up the task of acquainting the Russian public with scholarly and political literature of a left-wing (anti-capitalist and anti-bureaucratic) orientation. Books are lent out, and there are classes and discussions, most recently on the 1936 Spanish Revolution. The Library Committee appeals to all organizations and individuals that would like to support the spread of left-wing ideas and the development of the workers' movement in Russia to help our work.

With over 6,000 books and periodicals in Russian, English, French, German, Spanish and Italian, the Serge Library brings to the Russian public the radical, alternative traditions of democratic and libertarian socialism that were forbidden in Soviet times and are rarely discussed in Putin's Russia. It is the only center in Russia where readers can access a wealth of works written from critical perspectives on Marxism, anarchism, syndicalism, Trotskyism, feminism, trade unionism, literature, social science, and the history of radical and workers' movements in various countries. The catalogue is computerized and available to other libraries in Russia. The Library is thus a treasure house for Russian students, academics, activists, scholars and youth who are trying to develop a critical view of the world and thinking about how to change it.

Another goal of the project was to create a center around the books where members of the fragmented Russian 'new left' could come together for discussion and reflection around the donated books. The Library was set up by the Praxis Research and Education Center, created on the initiative of representatives of various left-wing currents (from democratic socialists to anarcho-syndicalists), with support from the Victor Serge Foundation and named after Victor Serge, who incarnated the anti-totalitarian resistance to Stalinist Communism and whose ideas englobed Marxism and Anarchism. So indeed does Praxis: among the founders, Alexei Gusev is a classical Marxist, while Julia Guseva is an active anarcho-syndicalist.



PRAXIS Conference on 'The Anti-Authoritarian Left' held in Kiev in July 2005. PRAXIS is also known for its courageous public support of human rights in Chechnya (hence under government pressure). Today more than ever, PRAXIS needs international support.

The activities of the Praxis Research and Education Center also include publications, research and international conferences. To date, it has published Victor Serge's *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, *Midnight in the Century*, *Unforgiving Years* and *Conquered City* in Julia Guseva's Russian translations; also Voline's *The Unknown Revolution, 1917-1921* (an anarchist participant-witness' history of the Makhnovist movement), Maximilien Rubel's *Marx Critic of Marxism* (2006), Pugliese S. Carlo Rosselli: *Liberal Socialism and Anti-Fascist Action* (2007), Raya Dunayevskaya's *Marxism and Freedom* (2011) with *Stop Global Warming Now* by Jonathan Neale scheduled for 2012.

Praxis' annual International Conferences attract both scholars and activists of various anarchist and anti-Stalinist socialist tendencies from throughout the ex-Soviet space (Ukraine, Belarus, Uzbekistan) as well as from France, Belgium, Switzerland, the U.K., Turkey, Iran, Denmark and India. The debates are sometimes riotous. But the scholarship is top-notch, based on serious research in the Soviet Archives, as evidenced by the collected papers Praxis publishes in Russian from year to year. I am happy to report that at our 2008 Moscow conference, participating Marxists and anarchists achieved a remarkable consensus about what went wrong in the Russian Revolution after 1917. After amply toasting this unity among former adversaries with vodka, we agreed to orient our discussions toward how to apply these lessons to contemporary topics and the future. This is of course one

of my major preoccupations in this book (parts of which have appeared in Russian). It is reflected as well in the papers of Praxis Conferences. Published anthologies of Praxis Conference Papers include *Decadence of Capitalism* (2001), an anthology of criticism entitled *Victor Serge: Socialist Humanism against Totalitarianism* (2003), and *Left Communists in Russia, 1918-1930s* (2008).

Praxis' 'Scientific and Programmatic' (Soviet Russian for 'scholarly and practical') conferences have been more or less tolerated for over a decade. The problem is finding a place to meet. The beautiful Andrei Sakharov Center in Moscow (named for the great physicist and human rights hero), one of our former hosts, fell under government and church attack and was forced to close for a while. The pretext stemmed from a 'blasphemous' painting in an experimental art exhibition at the Center. The exhibition (and the Center) were trashed by Russian Orthodox vigilantes, who went un-punished. Indeed, the Center was prosecuted for 'provoking' this breach of public order (!).

In 2008 and 2009, Praxis, in alliance with various Green parties and groups, has been holding its conferences on the subject of Ecology and Socialism in an ecological camp on the shores of the Black Sea in the Crimea. The air in the Ukraine since the Orange Revolution is much freer than in Russia, and international guests are more than welcome. The interaction is intense (so is the partying, Russian-style). See our site for information about upcoming conferences. www.praxiscenter.ru

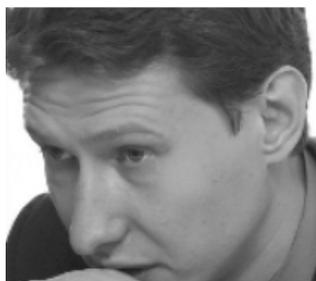
Praxis works closely with the *Memorial* Society, whose offices in Moscow include a meeting hall in the basement. Alas, *Memorial* is facing repairs and dearth of funds to pay the rent. Praxis has often co-sponsored Conferences with *Memorial*, whose volunteer staff of interviewers, archivists and historians has collected thousands of testimonies, not only of Stalinism's victims, but also of the anti-totalitarian socialist resistance during the Terror years. Alas, now *Memorial* may be out of a home. In July 2010, we held a joint conference in Moscow on the top floor of the Plekhanov Foundation with a view of the Kremlin across the Moscow River. So near and yet so far!

Repression and Resistance

Praxis and the Victor Serge Library have survived under the most trying conditions, both political and material. Praxis is known not only for radical ideas but also for its courageous public support of human rights in Chechnya. Our Moscow Library has twice been forced to move under political pressure. The officials simply closed the library (where we also served the neighborhood's needs with ordinary Russian general interest books) for unneeded 'repairs' which could only be done after we left, in which case our precious books would have been confiscated. Our struggle to maintain a space for study and discussion open to ordinary working people, students, activists and scholars as has entailed exasperating skirmishes with Moscow City bureaucrats. Not easy to find a safe haven for a huge collection of over 6,000 documents in five or six languages (all computer catalogued). In February 2009, the Library was once again evicted from a community space which our comrades spent hundreds of hours rehabilitating. Renting commercial space in Moscow is simply out of the question. Fortunately, the Library has found a new home: two rooms in a building owned by a group of trade unions and is back in business. Meanwhile, a second Victor Serge Library has opened its doors in Kiev, Ukraine, with hundreds of donated books and a hall for regular public meetings.

On the other hand, today no printer in Moscow is willing to bring out *Radical Thought*, Praxis' feisty little magazine which satirizes the government and openly opposes the occupation of Chechnya. (Praxis has also been collecting material aid — books, clothes, etc. — for Chechen refugees and works with the Chechen Human Rights movements — a very daring act under Yeltsin's and Putin's murderous regimes). As a result, *Radical Thought* now appears on line at www.praxiscenter.ru where it has many more hits per week than it ever had readers. The Praxis forum on Facebook has been especially active since the democratic upsurge of 2011.

Tragically, on January 19, 2009, the heavy hand of repression fell on one of our comrades; human rights lawyer Stanislav Markelov, and the young anti-fascist journalist Anastasia Baburova were assassinated in the center of Moscow. Stanislav Markelov, 34, defended the interests of victims of Russian government's policy in Chechnya, anti-fascists, activists of independent trade unions and social movements. As a convinced democrat and socialist he participated in various campaigns for justice and freedom in Russia and internationally. The murder of Markelov and Baburova was definitely an act of political terror. Most probably, responsibility for this crime belongs to ultra-right gangsters, whose activity is growing in Russia every day. Attacks on 'non-white' people on the streets of Moscow and other cities became something usual, and several prominent anti-fascists were killed recently. Other victims of political terrorism are oppositional journalists, principled critics of the existing Russian political regime — Anna Politkovskaya, Magomed Evlov, Mikhail Beketov.



HUMAN RIGHTS ATTORNEY STANISLAV MARKELOV

The growth of pro-fascist forces in Russia is objectively encouraged by the whole political atmosphere in the country. While acts of political terrorism mostly go unpunished, the authorities and their mass media are engaged in hysterical propaganda of 'patriotism,' authoritarianism, great-power sentiments, hostility towards external and internal 'enemies'. Under such conditions, criminals against humanity (both of present and past) are painted as 'heroes' and those struggling against them as 'traitors'. The last article by Markelov, 'Patriotism as Diagnosis' (published on Praxis web-site) was devoted precisely to denouncing these awful ideas. And one hour before his assassination, Stanislav spoke at the press-conference protesting against pre-term release from prison of the war criminal Colonel Budanov, who raped and killed a Chechen woman. Stanislav was a legal representative of her relatives; he received many threats from supporters of 'heroic officer' Budanov — and was killed a few days after the latter's release.

The release of Budanov and the murder of Markelov are certainly linked, even if not directly: both characterize the real situ-

ation in Russia today.

So it is that eighty years after Stalin had Victor Serge arrested, forty years after Khrushchev opened the *Gulag*, and twenty years after Gorbachev finally ended the Stalinist Terror, the disciples of Serge are once again the victims of political terror in Moscow. This kind of political assassination may intensify as the Putin regime, based as it is on the old Stalinist security apparatus, becomes more and more desperate in the face of popular discontent. The broad support for anti-Putin demonstrations in 2011-12 has opened up political space in Russia where libertarian socialist ideas can at last be debated openly and where Praxis could become the nucleus around which a new left (independent of the Communist Party of the Stalinist Zuganov, which is the only genuine parliamentary and electoral opposition to Putin) could organize itself. The potential of Praxis to provide a home for the development of a truly democratic, anti-totalitarian socialist Left will doubtless be perceived as a real threat. Lets recall that in 1936 Victor Serge was snatched from the clutches of Stalin's GPU thanks to a campaign carried out by an invisible international of supporters in Europe.

Today more than ever, Praxis needs international support. Please visit our website www.praxiscenter.ru, contact us at praxis2001@mail.ru, and consider attending one of our International Conferences in Moscow or Kiev.

Tax-deductible financial contributions should be made out to the 'Victor Serge Foundation' and mailed to 16, rue de la Teinturerie, 34000 Montpellier, France.