

pa

September -
October 2006

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COMBATING
HOMOPHOBIA
WORLDWIDE

WORKING FOR CHANGE

THE FIGHT
TO RAISE THE
MINIMUM
WAGE



HOW CUBA
SURVIVED

WHAT'S
WRONG WITH
GLOBALIZATION?

SAVE
AFFIRMATIVE
ACTION IN
MICHIGAN

\$4.95



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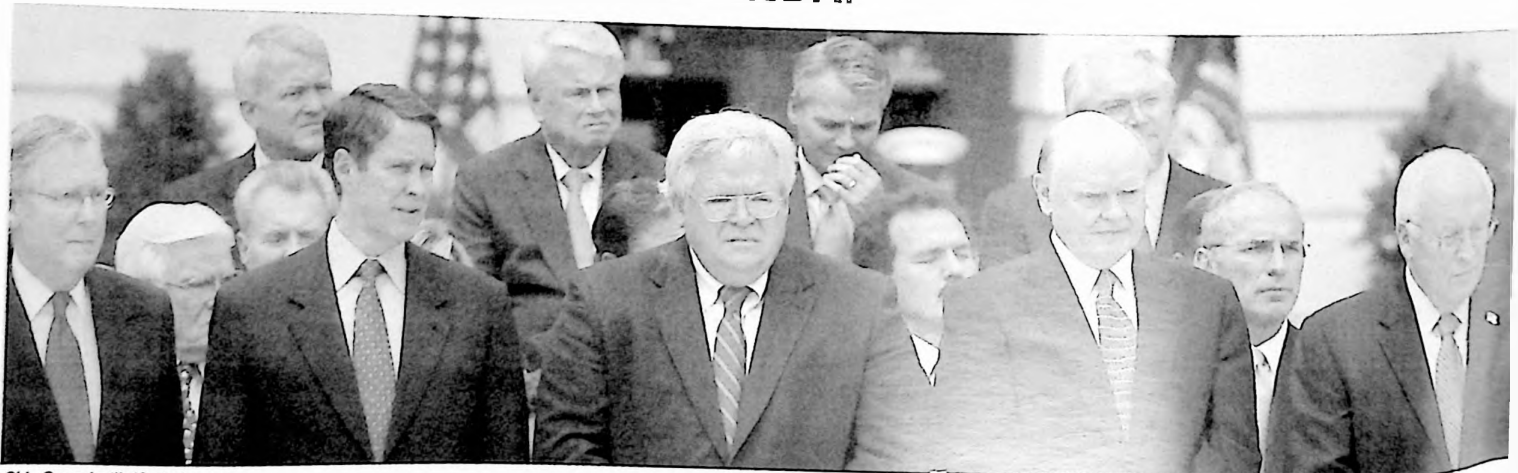
Illustration by Sam Helmer

Nineteen states are fighting to raise their minimum wage this year. Tony Pecinovsky tells us why a raise is so important and how the fight against the Republicans to win it in November is being carried out in Missouri. Highlighting the decision to keep its socialist orientation, Rémy Herrera traces economic developments in Cuba since the collapse of the Soviet Union. San Francisco poet laureate Jack Hirschman discusses taking on the Bush administration and the role of poetry in social change. Joel Wendland examines the rise of global homophobia and keys on the defeat of the Republicans as a stepping stone in turning the tide. Youth activist Juan Rodriguez looks at the contributions of immigrant workers in US society, poet Luis Tijerina discusses poetry in a time of war, and prison activist Anthony Papa looks at the failure of the "war on drugs" of harsh drug laws to provide proper care for victims of drug addiction. In addition, please find book reviews, commentary, poetry and more inside.

PA editors

VOTE THE REPUBLICANS OUT!

**NOVEMBER 7TH: USE THE POWER OF
YOUR VOTE TO STOP THE BUSH AGENDA.**



Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images



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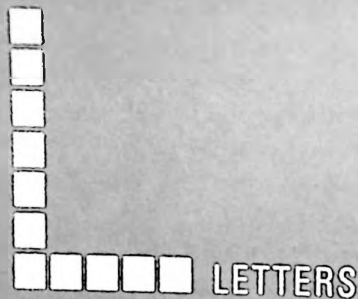
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Please send your letters to

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Political Affairs, 235 W. 23rd St., NY, NY 10011.

Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

Not so Simple

Pittsburg, PA

While I appreciate the "Made In China" article (June 2006) I want to comment on the author's characterization of the insurgency in Kashmir. India has played a leading role in the international movement to oppose US hegemony but its ruling class's nationality policies have led to insurgencies not just in the state of Jammu and Kashmir but also Punjab (mostly Sikhs), Assam (mostly Hindus), Nagaland (mostly Christians), and others. It's too convenient to blame the problem on externally-supported reactionaries. In Jammu and Kashmir one of the dominant and oldest organizations is the JKLF (Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front), a secular, progressive liberation movement that is home-grown. It could be self-defeating to dismiss these forces as reactionary so quickly when the ultra-right wants to portray all politicized Muslims as destructive.

Asad A.

Fond Memories

Chicago, IL

A smile came to my face as I was reading Owen Williamson's article "An Open Letter to Left Academics" (June 2006). It was brought by his observation that "... a long, hot summer earning the minimum-wage as a roofer or fry-cook normally does far more to radicalize a student than any number of professors' eloquent expostulations on Lenin or Luxemburg." Some 45 years ago the beginning of my journey in progressive politics began with the one-on-one encounter Owen spoke of. The other one was a man named Jim Bourne.

Jim came from Seattle where he did his early organizing. He spent some time in the Soviet Union where he attended the Lenin School in Moscow. He was a volunteer and member of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. He would refer many times to an old saw that was used back in the 30's and 40's. "There's more Marxism," Jim would say, "at the end of a policeman's nightstick than there is in all this talking and reading."

Thanks for the memory Owen.

Bill Appelhans

Thoughts on Brokeback Mountain

New York, NY

Karin S. Coddon's commentary, "The Broken Back of Counterfeit Liberalism" is mostly on target, but, I believe chose the wrong target of rage. Attacking Don Cheadle's *Crash* is off target. This was an exceptional film. Quoting the *LA Times* review that Cheadle's film was a "feel-good movie" is a shame.

Placing these two movies against each other is a mistake. Both *Brokeback Mountain* and *Crash* were exceptional. I think the Larry McMurtry and the crew of *Brokeback* and Cheadle with his crew of *Crash* would be disappointed at that juxtaposition. That aside, the rest of the commentary is great, and, I look forward to more contributions.

Eric Green

Brooklyn, NY

I want to thank you for your fantastic article "The Broken Back of Counterfeit Liberalism," (June 2006). I agree. I'm still fuming and pissed off about the academy backlash against *Brokeback Mountain*. But you nailed it. Ignorance and fear is a dangerous combination. And it's alive and thriving in Hollywood - what a surprise.

Doni Miller

Via e-mail

I appreciated very much your article entitled "The Broken Back of Counterfeit Liberalism." You echoed my sentiments precisely. I thank you.

Thomas Pe

Response

Regardless of the disingenuous "all the nominees are winners" trope conventionally invoked to placate the losers, Eric Green perhaps rightly chides me for succumbing to this formula in pitting *Brokeback* against *Crash*.

What may distinguish the pointed snub of *Brokeback Mountain* from other instances in which mediocrity has triumphed is the likeli-

hood that prejudice played a key role in the Oscar balloting. In political as well as popular culture, homophobia remains one of the last explicitly bigoted discourses freely voiced in the so-called mainstream. Where for the most part only avowed white supremacists claim outright that Blacks, Jews and other non-Anglo-Saxon groups are inferior, much less evil, politicians, clergy, comedians and many ordinary straight Americans feel licensed to heap scorn upon homosexuals, especially gay men. Aside from debating the artistic merits of *Crash*, which received mostly fair-to-poor reviews, it seems obvious to me that *Brokeback Mountain* stood about as much a chance to take home the top Oscar as it did to be named movie of the month by the Family Research Council. It took no particular courage for Hollywood to award a film with an antiracist theme certain to offend no one outside of the Aryan Nations loop. But it may have required an excess of courage for Hollywood's straight white liberal males even to watch *Brokeback Mountain*.

Karin Coddon

Ideology is Practical Indianapolis, Indiana

In 2000 I fell victim to identity theft. Result: lost my credit. The thief even took my address book. I keep myself busy promoting working-class causes where I live. Right now I am trying to teach my fellow residents to be mindful of the folks who work in the kitchen and dining room. How do I do it?

I teach young people how to leave their dining areas in a way that makes it easier for the clean-up crew to clean the tables after we eat. The workers appreciate my efforts and repeatedly thank me for my efforts. I try to respond with words about the need for workers to practice solidarity in the workplace.

One of these days, I will explain where and how I learned my "ways" beginning with a speech by Eugene Dennis in Carnegie Hall in 1956. He spoke of the correctness of scientific Marxism.

Charles Darby

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1. Lenin defined the term "imperialism" as a new system in which:

- a. industrialized nations seek greater access to raw materials and captive markets in a merging of industry and banking, with banking having the upper hand.
- b. industrialized nations seek to export capital to acquire cheap labor, changing the focus to investment and imports from restricted trade and exports under earlier commercial capitalism.
- c. new empires would produce greater instability in the form of imperialist wars and revolutions, thus bringing on capitalism's demise.
- d. all of the above.

2. In its analysis of the present crisis in the US and the dangers represented by the Bush administration, the Communist Party USA believes that:

- a. it doesn't matter who is president and who controls Congress because both parties represent the capitalist class.
- b. Bush's policies are undermining capitalism more rapidly than the Democrats would so the left should do nothing to oppose his government.
- c. although both parties represent capitalism, doing everything possible to defeat the right-wing dominated Republican Party and removing the Bush administration from office are necessary steps if the US working class is to win back what it has lost, make new gains and reverse policies that lead directly to military intervention and war.
- d. the Democratic Party should be supported as a party that can eventually lead the US toward socialism.

3. If they were alive today and listening to the arguments that the collapse of the USSR meant the "end of communism," Marx and Engels might say:

- a. they heard the same thing after the defeat of the revolutions of 1848.
- b. they heard it after the destruction of the Paris Commune in 1871.
- c. the rise in global poverty and super-exploitation of resources for the benefit of the industrialized countries has made capitalism more not less likely to experience revolutionary upheavals, regardless of the fate of the Soviet Union.
- d. all of the above.

4. Marx and Engels contended that:

- a. socialism could be established without abolishing the existing capitalist institutions and social relations.
- b. all that mattered was that a government called itself socialist and said it was representing the working class.
- c. socialism could be established in many places by voluntary cooperatives without the state playing a significant role.
- d. socialist society would organize production around the principles of establishing full employment and producing goods and services for the maintenance and development of the working class as a whole, that is housing, education, health care, recreation and family protection.

5. Which one of the following important reforms was not influenced by Communist-led campaigns?

- a. the creation of unemployment benefits such as unemployment insurance.
- b. the passage of the National Labor Relations Act (1935).
- c. provisions of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, giving the federal government the power to prosecute people who would not be prosecuted in local courts for civil rights violations.
- d. the Bush administration's "no child left behind" education legislation.

How to score yourself:

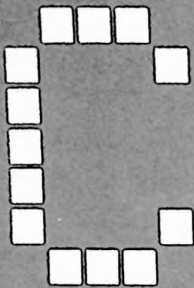
0-3 correct answers: Read *The Communist Manifesto* and *The Road to Socialism USA: Unity for Peace, Democracy, Jobs and Equality* (the program of the Communist Party USA).
4-5 correct answers: You are awarded the fabulous Lenin Prize for Ideology and Superior Thinking.

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IMMIGRANT RIGHTS, NOT IMMIGRATION REFORM



Roberto Schmidt/AFP/Getty Images

▲ Rolando Redondo (R), an immigrant worker who came to the US from Mexico, joins thousands of protesters as they march in downtown Orlando, Florida.

By David Howard

One thing everyone agrees on regarding immigration is that the current system demands our attention. The critical question is, what kind of attention? Compassionate, inclusive and sustainable? Or just a quick and dirty political fix euphemistically called "comprehensive reform"?

Will we enact draconian remedies that turn 10 million hardworking human beings into instant felons, that erect the longest ghetto wall in history, that supply wage-and-benefit slashing labor to potentially unscrupulous employers? Or will we go beyond tinkering, bungling and punishing to forge a new immigrant rights vision?

The immigrant rights agenda is not the Congressional immigration reform agenda. Solutions to the challenges we face are unlikely to be drafted by legislators beholden to special interests and prone to pandering to the xenophobic right. Instead, the immigrant rights vision is being articulated by community organizations of working families.

These grassroots groups are calling for equal rights for all undocumented immigrants now in the US and a long-term partnership with Mexico to eventually allow the free flow of human beings, not just commodities, across our common border.

The immigrant rights movement is coalescing around four important ideas:

1) Undocumented immigrants from devel-

oping countries are, almost invariably, economic refugees. They are not "illegals" and they are not "aliens." Rejecting the pejorative label is not merely a matter of cleaning up dehumanizing language. It also implies a genuine recognition of the plight of impoverished immigrant families.

Immigrants get swept up in the maelstrom of globalization. Some are pushed across the border because Nafta permitted US taxpayer-subsidized corn to wipe out their livelihood, because drug lords in business to satisfy suburban US demand for psychotropic drugs terrorize their barrios, because pollution created by our country – the world leader in greenhouse gas emissions – makes their air unbreathable, because global warming from our Hummer culture of extravagant waste is turning their lettuce patches into deserts. Such families are no less worthy of refugee status than those fleeing despots, civil war or religious persecution.

2) Immigrant labor is an indispensable component of our economy. There is an immense number of entry-level jobs in agriculture and service industries that only immigrants on the lowest rungs of the economic ladder are ready, willing and able to take. Let's be grateful.

3) Deportation or forced repatriation is wrong. Such measures should be limited exclusively to convicted and unreformed criminals. Repatriation disrupts and often destroys families. Currently, we have a large population of children who live under imminent threat of detention and deportation.

Inspired by the wisdom of leaders like Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, César Chávez and Dolores Huerta, we must keep our eye on the prize of a world without borders.

Summarily returning them to their country of origin is a form of child abuse we cannot countenance. Not if we still want to honor the words we have inscribed on the Statue of Liberty; not if we still want to pride ourselves on the blood, sweat and tears of the immigrants, slaves, indentured servants and dispossessed natives who built our country. Just as the presumption of innocence is a

Fund Drive 2006

right granted to criminal defendants, the presumption for undocumented immigrants should be that they merit the opportunity to contribute productively to our society.

4) We need to fund the immigrant rights vision. Unlike the Iraq war we squander our wealth on, an investment in a partnership with Mexico's working families is honorable and worthwhile. When Europe decided to open its borders, it quickly overcame centuries of ethnocentrism and xenophobia. The richer northern nations invested in fortifying the developing economies of the south. We too can overcome.

Inspired by the wisdom of leaders like Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, César Chávez and Dolores Huerta, we must keep our eye on the prize of a world without borders, while respecting and expanding immigrant rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. We must learn to view immigration not as a health hazard to control, contain or eradicate, but rather as a precious asset – the living, breathing humanity that brings out the best in us. □

\$40K

Dear PA Reader:

I hope this note finds you well and enjoying the final days of summer. With the heightened violence in the Middle East, Bush's ongoing occupation of Iraq and the upcoming decisive elections, this season of struggle may prove to be as crucial as any in human history – without exaggeration. ...And PA is as much a part of that struggle as ever.

This note concerns the PA fund drive. As we have stated before, this year we have had to increase our call for financial support from our allies and readers to help cover the skyrocketing costs of production. At this point last year we raised \$20,000. This year, we are at the \$21,000 mark. This small improvement doesn't give us enough momentum to reach our goal of \$40,000, unless you are willing to give again.

Let's face it, in order to give our movement a voice, PA has to continue to grow. Growing costs money. Maintaining a quality product and being able to reach out to new readers through mailings and newsstands costs thousands each month. In this period of struggle, failure is not an option.

Right now the main goal is to get to the \$40,000 finish line so that we can devote ourselves to putting out a quality working-class Marxist-Leninist magazine. Will you help us claim this victory today by giving \$100 today?

In struggle,

Joe Sims

\$21K

\$0K

Send your contribution to
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NO HUMAN BEING IS

ILLEGAL

By Juan Rodriguez

Most readers of *Political Affairs* understand that most undocumented workers in the US are driven from their home countries because of severe economic crisis and sometimes because of political violence. When they arrive here, corporations use their status to pay them as little as possible and to prevent them from joining or organizing labor unions to improve their working conditions. More than being exploited on the job, however, undocumented immigrants contribute billions to the US economy that goes unrecognized.

According to the *New York Times*, "the estimated seven million or so illegal immigrant workers in the United States are now providing the Social Security system with a subsidy of as much as \$7 billion a year." Almost \$2 billion is paid into Medicare as well. An uncle of mine, who arrived here four years ago from Peru, is one of those who subsidize US public programs. He is a full time custodian and has been paying taxes without the possibility of getting anything in return. He is also ripped off by companies like First Data Group, the parent of Western Union, because he sends almost half his earnings to his wife and kids in Peru through that company. Customers like him pay \$6-18 dollars per \$100 sent for a service that costs the company only 67 cents per transaction and in some countries is even less than that. Last year over \$60 billion was sent to Latin America and the Caribbean, creating a windfall for wire companies. Undocumented workers spend billions of dollars in the economy in the private sector and into government programs.

It is almost impossible to pinpoint how much undocumented workers spend annually in the economy, but some interesting statistics show that it is enormous. The



▲ Jorge Mendez chants with other protesters, "Si Se Puede" or "Yes, you can" during a march calling for immigrants' rights.

University of Georgia's Selig Center for Economic Growth projects that Hispanics' spending power and personal income after taxes will rise from \$490 billion in 2000 to \$1 trillion in 2010. An article in *USA Today* in May states that at least 200 US financial firms and other businesses accept identification cards called *matricula consular*, which is issued to Mexican nationals and other foreign born customers by their country's consulate. Wells Fargo has opened 525,000 *matricula* accounts, which represent six percent of the bank's total assets. In a study for the National Association of Hispanic Real Estate Professionals, Rob Paral, a demographics researcher in Chicago, estimates that 231,000 undocumented immigrants can afford to buy homes, potentially a \$44 billion chunk of the real estate. Bank of America is stepping its game up in the immigrant market, claiming that 48 percent of US Hispanic

households use at least one Bank of America financial product from checking accounts to mortgages.

Health insurer Blue Cross, owned by WellPoint, estimates that 6.4 million people in California are uninsured, nearly 60 percent of them are Hispanic. Health care benefits are complex even for US citizens, so Blue Cross is putting out more than 300 educational programs for California's Spanish-speaking communities annually. Blue Cross enrolls undocumented workers if they have a *matricula consular* card and proof of residency. A University of California study estimates about 289,000 undocumented children do not qualify for Healthy Families and Medi-Cal insurance programs. The alternative will be to have co-payment plans and many public and private insurers are rubbing their hands like flies on food over this issue. Clearly, banks, insurance companies, retail-

ers and real estate companies are among the corporate winners when it comes to the dollar value of the immigrant community.

In recent years, however, the ultra-right has created misleading and even racist images of immigrant workers to foster an atmosphere of hostility towards them. As a result more immigrants than ever before are detained by the police. The federal government has authorized the construction of multimillion dollar immigration-detention centers, including a questionable \$385 million contract to a Houston-based construction firm with ties to the White House. The contract calls for KBR, a subsidiary of the oil, engineering and construction giant Halliburton, to build temporary detention facilities in the event of an "immigration emergency," according to US officials. So, no matter how the national debate on immigration plays out in Congress,

the corporations that have moved into the business of building and operating detention centers are likely to see a steady stream of revenue for years to come. By having private detentions many families will most likely find it difficult to have proper representation because the best legal aid will not be there for these families.

The ultra-right also uses racism to provoke hostility between African American workers and immigrant workers. Right-wing propaganda says that immigrants are the cause of low wages and are stealing jobs from African American workers. But the truth is that immigrant workers have never created nor contributed to the impoverishment of African American brothers and sisters in the US, who along with indigenous communities have received the worst of what this system produces. It has been the corporate out-

sourcing of US jobs in the quest of more profits and racial discrimination that are to blame for this problem. It is in the best interest of all workers and the majority of people to demand rights for immigrants and all workers, because we all gain from policies, such as the right to join or organize labor unions without fear or abuse, that guarantee living wages to all workers. The central point for such an alliance should be a diverse, but united people's fight for economic justice with a strong focus on immigrants' rights.

We are all immigrants or descendants of immigrants. Immigrant rights is not a minority issue but a majority issue that impacts us all around this country. □

NOBODY ASKED ME, BUT...

By Don Sloan



❑ The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is taking a hit from the Bush budget. Released numbers show that warning letters to drug companies for questioned drugs and devices have dropped in half in the past five years. The seizure of mislabeled drugs fell off by 44 percent.

❑ Global warming is starting to melt Siberia faster than predicted. Ancient roots and bones are starting to show as the ice thaws.

❑ Afghanistan provides over one-third of the world's heroin.

❑ Bush et al: definition of pro-life: valuing human life until birth.

❑ GOP definition of free market: Halliburton no-bid contracts.

❑ For adult education, nothing beats children.

❑ The 191 UN member nations' 2004 straw vote of Bush v. Kerry has now been finalized. Just about everyone went for Kerry sometimes by as much as 10 to 1. The only exceptions were Nigeria, Poland and the Philippines.

❑ A Florida company is planning to market implantable skin chips for placement so that can people become trackable.

❑ Any plan that cannot be changed is a bad one.

❑ Although of draftable status at various times, for openers, Newt Gingrich, Ronald Reagan, Phil Gramm, John

Ashcroft, Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle, Eliot Abrams, Trent Lott, Rick Santorum, Jeb Bush, Karl Rove, Jack Kemp, George Pataki, Sean Hannity, Rush Limbaugh, Bill O'Reilly Rudy Guiliani, Dan Quayle, George Will, Pat Buchanan, Ken Starr, Antonin Scalia, Clarence Thomas, Ralph Reed, Dick Cheney, Dennis Hastert and Bill Frist never served in the US armed forces.

❑ In a Texas A&M study, a survey of those Texas high school students enrolled in an abstinence practice program revealed a higher rate of sexual activity than the general school population.

❑ Kurt Vonnegut: "So the America I loved still exists, if not in the White House or the Supreme Court or the Senate or the House of Representatives or the media. The America I love still exists at the front desks of our public libraries." □

NO WALK IN THE BALL PARK FOR DWIGHT GOODEN



△ Enacted 30 years ago, the New York state Rockefeller laws established mandatory prison sentences for the unlawful possession and sale of controlled substances. The laws have been used to target and imprison mainly people of color.

By Anthony Papa

Watching the Mets/Red Sox series this week I noticed they replayed clips of Dwight Gooden in his golden years as a star pitcher. I could not help think about how his life has now turned toward tragedy when he was sentenced to jail this April. I was very sad. Not because of what he did, but instead, because of what the system of justice has done to him. Gooden has a medical problem, a very bad addiction to an illegal drug. His struggles with drugs and alcohol have been well-documented. But the obvious misfortune is that instead of being treated as someone with a medical condition, he is being treated like a criminal. This is where the problem lies.

Gooden is serving a 366-day sentence for violating his probation by using cocaine. This is the bottom line.

Americans across the country in some

way partake in the ritual of escaping reality daily by getting high. Whether or not it be of legal or illegal means, this is a reality we must face. Addiction is a serious problem. But to treat it strictly punitively is not the answer to alleviate its root causes.

What moved me in an unbelievable way was the fact that Dwight Gooden chose to give up his life as a free man. Faced with a system of justice that has little remorse for drug users, Gooden's back was against the wall when he made his decision to opt for the 366-day sentence. Either that or face probation with the stipulation that any type of violation could lead to a five-year sentence.

After just 10 days in a cell at a reception center in Lake Butler, Florida, he professed in an interview he'd rather be shot than jailed again. The prison experience had gotten to him. Non-fans of Gooden might say that the institutionalization of addicts like Dwight is a sure cure to the drug problem. We might want to get a second opinion though. Maybe

we can ask a few prime suspects of drug addiction like Rush Limbaugh or maybe Patrick Kennedy who both recently had their own eye opening experiences with addiction.

The question we should now be asking is when will we as a society appropriately respond to individuals with addictions? Instead of giving draconian sentences for snorting powder or popping pills we should be thinking about alternative solutions to those with drug problems.

Now Dwight is sitting in his cell reliving his crime, thinking about the family and life he has left behind. I know the regrets that Gooden is going through in making his decision to voluntarily put himself in hell.

In 1985, I too had an addiction. In order to support my cocaine habit I agreed to deliver an envelope of four ounces of cocaine for \$500. I was caught and was offered a plea deal that would carry a sentence of three years. Unlike Gooden, I was afraid of going to jail and leaving behind my wife and young daughter. Instead, I made the choice of going to trial and was slapped with a 15-years-to-life sentence under New York's ultra-harsh Rockefeller drug laws.

I remember watching Dwight pitching from my jail cell in Sing Sing prison. Every pitch he made was on the money, leading the Mets to

I made the choice of going to trial and was slapped with a 15-years-to-life sentence under New York's ultra-harsh Rockefeller drug laws.

a world championship in 1986. He was a hero to the majority of Blacks and Latinos that were sitting around the television, cheering him on. Most of them were sitting in prison, serving draconian sentences under the drug laws. None of them possessed the fastball this superstar had, but the majority shared the same life-defeating addiction.

The war on drugs has fueled the debate on addiction. But along with it, comes the label of demonization that allows drug users to join the ranks of criminals that fill our prisons. Gooden, like myself and others with substance abuse problems, is a human being. We do make mistakes. But, when society attempts to block our way out of the problem of addiction, everyone loses. □

THE TERRORISM THAT TERRORISM PRODUCES

By Chris Stevenson

Some time ago, President George W. Bush told his top officials to "stop the leaks" to the media or else. Back then he was responding to the feuding and dismay within his administration, and the growing resistance to his policies in Iraq. It was really Condoleezza Rice's job to tell him, "don't start none, won't be none," but instead we get the famous report: "news of Bush's

While we go about working, playing, dating, watching *American Idol*, our government initiates some pretty jacked-up policies towards countries like Iraq.

order leaked almost immediately." The killings in the small town in western Iraq known as Haditha actually took place last November, some pesky reporters from *Time* magazine investigated it, and leaked it to their journal who ran it in March. Just how long can our hero keep taking these leaks? There are in fact some leaks that W likes, this latest hit on Abu Musab al-Zarqawi is welcome news to the White House, but don't assume there won't be hell to pay for someone. He was al Qaeda's 3rd most wanted terrorist, and he didn't die alone. Sheik Abd al-Rahman, two other men, a woman, and a child were blasted by the two laser guided 500-pound bombs.

My immediate question was, since it's been proven that Iraq had no link to the attacks of 9/11, what is a leader of al Qaeda doing in Iraq in the first place? The answer lies



Wissam Al-Okaili/AFP/Getty Images

△ An Iraqi family mourns the death of a relative outside the morgue of a hospital in Baghdad.

within events started by US propaganda and policies decades ago. Author William Blum in his latest book *Rogue State: A guide to the world's only superpower* does a history on terrorism, theirs and ours:

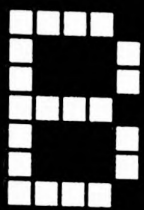
After the cold war, Washington spinmeisters could no longer cry "The Russians are coming, and they're 10 feet tall!" as a pretext to intervention, so they had to regularly come up with new enemies. America cherishes its enemies. Without enemies it appears to be a nation without moral purpose and direction.

According to *The Economist*, Zarqawi moved to Iraq two years before the first invasion, after catching only the tail end of Afghanistan's ouster of the Soviet Union, but he learned enough from Osama bin Laden and his ilk to begin teaching his own art of warfare. It didn't matter to the US anyway, since they were battling the Soviets, they were "freedom fighters" back then. Unlike bin Laden, Zarqawi did not come from royalty: a dirt-poor Jordanian, he was more of a hands-on participant than bin Laden, and perhaps more elusive.

People of the US today are just beginning to understand that the violence towards them and US targets has nothing to do with any envy towards our freedom or democracy as the Bush administration has been selling us since 9/11. The fact remains that while we go about day-by-day working, playing, dating, watching *American Idol*, eating pizza, and drinking beer, our government initiates

some pretty ruthless and jacked-up policies towards countries like Iraq. The most graphic example is reported by investigative journalist Greg Palast (his latest book *Armed Madhouse* was released on June 6, 2006). According to Palast, after the three-month blitz of Iraq in April 2003, the US assigned General Jay Garner to "keep the peace and bring democracy." Evidently this was the order President Bush gave him, but Garner must not have noticed W profusely winking as he was slipping a 101 page plan outlining just how to bring about this "peace and democracy."

What he was really expected to do was sell off all of Iraq's assets, their banks, their oil fields, their oil and supporting industries, and changing of their copyright and tax codes. And last but not least, no elections. That's right, Bush wanted Garner to IMF them. Those dirty MFers. Garner took the democracy pitch at face value. Palast quotes him uttering the most un-American slogan of all time: "It's their country ...their oil." He actually wanted to quickly get on with the elections so they could have a government that really represents the will of a recently freed people. He was soon fired and replaced by Paul Bremer, who cancelled the elections, handpicked his own Iraqi government, and sparked the sectarian violence and acts done by people like Zarqawi. These are the little manipulations done beneath the headlines, and suicide bombings we hear so much about. There is no "Axis of Evil," Don't start none, won't be none. □



Terrorist.

John Updike, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006.

Reviewed by Jane M. McCabe

Even though John Updike is one of our finest writers, when I started reading his latest novel, *Terrorist*, I feared that he was being presumptuous – how could he presume to know the mind of an Islamic terrorist, even an American one? Having finished the book, I cannot say that he succeeded; however, I can say that he *has* rendered a persuasive argument against the violence perpetrated by terrorists.

For a novel to succeed it is incumbent that the reader cares about its characters and resonates with the story being told. A “good story” should contain some suspense, just to keep the reader turning pages.

Has Updike succeeded in these areas? At first I didn’t particularly care about the assortment of characters he had created, but by the end, I cared a great deal and was turning the pages with a knot in my stomach.

Admad Ashwawy Mulloy is an 18-year-old American of Egyptian and Irish descent. His father disappeared shortly after his birth, and his mother, Theresa Mulloy, is a rather free-spirited Irish-American lady who works as a nurse’s aide at a nursing home, paints in her free time and takes occasional lovers.

New Prospect, New Jersey, may be Updike’s version of Paterson, New Jersey, a town that grew and became prosperous from the silk and dye factories that were built during the late 19th century, which in turn absorbed many Arab immigrants as workers during the 20th century.

In John Updike’s works places can be as much characters as people, but the largest portrait that he paints is of America herself. He painted a portrait of us in his Rabbit series. So saying, *Terrorist* is about America since 9/11. Though Updike is a patriot, he is also critical of the United States for having made materialism its God and for the insane commercialism that governs us.

When Ahmad was but 13 years old, he began studying Islam at his local mosque, where he came under the influence of its imam, Shaikh Rashid, who is the book’s most sinister character. Without his being aware of it the sheik and others are grooming Ahmad to become a jihadist martyr.

Admad’s religious enthusiasm is such that he feels that his God is as close to him as his jugular vein. His esthetic religiosity seems to have replaced a sexual libido, yet he does bear some affection for his Black classmate, Joryleen. (Is Updike making sport of the names Black people choose for their children? Her boyfriend’s name is Tylenol.) One of the most amusing descriptions in the book is of Admad attending a service at Joryleen’s church.

Does Updike succeed in convincing us that he understands the mind of a terrorist?

Jack Levy, a guidance counselor at New Prospect High School, a 63-year-old, weary Jew, who has lost faith working for a system he no longer believes in, takes an interest in Admad and also provides the story with its unlikely hero. When he drops off some college bulletins at his home, he is drawn to Admad’s feisty mother. His marriage is not loveless but stale, and so he indulges in an affair with Theresa. She tells him that she fears her son might be easily led by others.

I believe I understand what prompted Updike to write this novel – the desire to understand and communicate with the “other,” for considerable research informs this work. In a way it is a polemic, the attempt to argue with an adversary who doesn’t seem interested in our views, a perennial problem in the so-called conflict between East and West.

His characters often utter things that seem unlikely for them to say, things too articulate for their level of education and understanding. For example, toward the end of the story, Admad says to Levy, “Have you ever in your studies read the Egyptian poet and political philosopher Sayyid Qutub? He came to the United States fifty years ago and was stuck by the racial discrimination and open wantonness between the sexes. He concluded that no people is more distant than the American people from God and piety.”

What makes this rather sophisticated speech even more unlikely is that it is said while Ahmad is driving a truck loaded with explosives through the Lincoln Tunnel with the intention, once it reaches the most vulnerable point in the tunnel, of detonating it and blowing himself, Levy, the truck, all the surrounding vehicles, and people to Kingdom Come and crippling a main artery into New York City.

How is it that dear Levy has come to be riding in this truck with Ahmad? Does Admad push the red button before Jack can convince him not to? Does Updike succeed in convincing us that he understands the mind of a terrorist? I wouldn’t want to ruin the story by giving away its ending and thus depriving readers from finding out the answers to these questions themselves. □

Clemente: The Passion and Grace of Baseball's Last Hero.

David Maraniss, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006.

Reviewed by Eric Green

In *Clemente*, David Maraniss sets out to show that the Black, Puerto Rican-born baseball superstar was more than just a Hall of Fame athlete. Maraniss documents Roberto Clemente's life in this educational, entertaining and politically important book. The book was published with great fanfare and received widespread reviews. Unfortunately, almost every review centered on the terrible conditions of Clemente's airplanes. The sports writers who editors gave the job for reviewing were and are either unable or unwilling to see the extremely important labor and political role that Clemente played.

To quote Maraniss:

When [Martin Luther] King was assassinated in April 1968, Clemente led the way in insisting that the Pirates and Astros delay opening the season in Houston until after the slain civil rights leader's funeral. The schedule called for games in Houston on April 8 and 9. King was buried on April 9. The Pirates and Astros, at the players' insistence, held off playing until April 10.

He quotes Clemente:

When Martin Luther King started doing what he did, he changed the whole system of the American style. He put the people, the ghetto people, the people who didn't have nothing to say in those days, they started saying what they would have liked to say for many years that nobody listened to.

This distinctive humanitarian theme reoccurred in other parts of Clemente's life, especially in regard to his devotion to his family, his friends and neighbors and to Puerto Rico.

After achieving baseball fame, Clemente never lost his identification with working people. "The only thing I worry about is being happy," Clemente said. "If I can live. If I can for example have my health I can work. I don't care if I'm a janitor. I don't care if I drive a cab. As long as I have a decent job, I will work.... I live the life of a common fellow. I am not a big shot."

Maraniss also details the crucial 1969 players' union negotiations with the owners and the fight against the employer's infamous "reserve clause." Freeing players from owners' control took its first major steps here. In those negotiations, the 15-year veteran Clemente represented the Pittsburgh Pirates. Though Clemente was among the best paid players, he had total solidarity with younger less well-paid players. Maraniss makes it clear that Clemente was fiercely pro-union.

He also stood for public financing of sports. He was particularly angry about phony drug control methods: "They spend millions of dollars for dope control in Puerto Rico. But they attack the problem after the problem is there. Why don't they attack it before it start?... [G]et

■ Clemente was fiercely pro-union.

them interested in sports and give them somewhere to learn to play them." He continued, "If I were President of the United States I would build a sports city and take in kids of all ways of life."

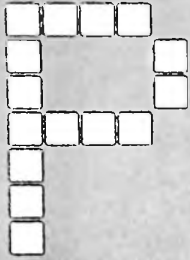
Maraniss also gives an account of Clemente's role in providing aid to victims of the horrible 1972 earthquake that rocked the country of Nicaragua. The earthquake brought a tremendous response from other Caribbean countries and the US, which as Maraniss points out, backed the repressive, anti-Communist government headed by the Somoza family. "By December 27," Maraniss writes, "on the fifth day of the earthquake, the greed of Somoza and his cronies was becoming apparent." Clemente was determined that his own efforts would not fall victim to corruption. He had just returned from Managua and had made many trips to that country during his winter league barnstorming days in baseball. In those days, winter ball was essential to Puerto Rican and other Caribbean nationals. Clemente died in an airplane crash carrying materials to Managua. This took place New Year's Eve of 1972. His body was never found.

For baseball buffs, especially those interested in reliving the Pittsburgh victory over the New York Yankees in the 1960 World Series, a loss which Yankee fans are still cringing over, the Maraniss treatment is exhilarating and educational.

But, even with all of the above, this book's most important contribution to the literature is Maraniss's toward understanding the insight into Puerto Rican life on the US and in Puerto Rico. "*Land, blood, name and race*" according to Maraniss was and remains a frame of reference for Puerto Rican pride. Clemente universally invoked that phrase to make it clear that is where he stood. He and his family never resided anywhere else.

To allow readers to see Clemente as more than a baseball star, Maraniss leaves his lifetime baseball statistics for the end of the book: 12 times Clemente batted over .300, most over .330. In 1968, suffering from a bout of malaria contracted from his previous winter ball work, he batted .291, a number 90 percent of ball players would have died for. He was the National League batting champion four times; National League MVP in 1966; World Series MVP in 1971; Gold Glove winner each year from 1961 to 1972. He was on the National League All Star team 1960 to 1967 and 1969 to 1971.

For these amazing accomplishments and his heroic efforts on behalf of the Nicaraguan people, Roberto Clemente was voted into the Baseball Hall of Fame within one year after his death. The five-year requirement was waived.□



POETRY

THE BLACK DOG

Is composed of shadows on the cave wall;
Has agate colored eyes without pupils.
Though the doggy door is small for him,
He shoulders in, splintering the frame.
Does not like formulated, healthy, dry food
Lunges directly for your genitalia;
Shakes the manuscript-in-progress by the neck,
As he would a rattlesnake or Norway rat:
Knocks over the easel and takes a long and leisurely
Piss on the canvas, until the colors run;
Bounds up on the piano bench, shits
On the keyboard; rakes the composition to the floor.
Paws and muzzle to the window pane
Signal a Swat Team across the street
There is no escaping, boots already on the stairs -
Another citizen found making art.

Bill Witherup
Reprinted with author's permission from
Secular Humanist Press, 2003

WE THE PEOPLE

We the people
Here to make our plea
Some may accept us
Some may disagree

We are all concerned
For
The future of our families

That's why we long as
Your forefathers have longed
To journey to this great country

Torn by laws
Regarding Immigration
Drastic measures
For this desperate situation
And with this frustration
Causes mental segregation

Misunderstandings breed
Supporters and protestors
Who are very demanding

Hopeful faces
Reside on
Pick-it lines

American Citizens with economical pressures
Working so hard
That they don't have time

Self improvement
Are all of our plans
We have empathy
For your concerns
We truly understand

Can we talk?
Can we come up
with a resolution?

Together we can compromise
And figure out
The best solution

Kristel Irby

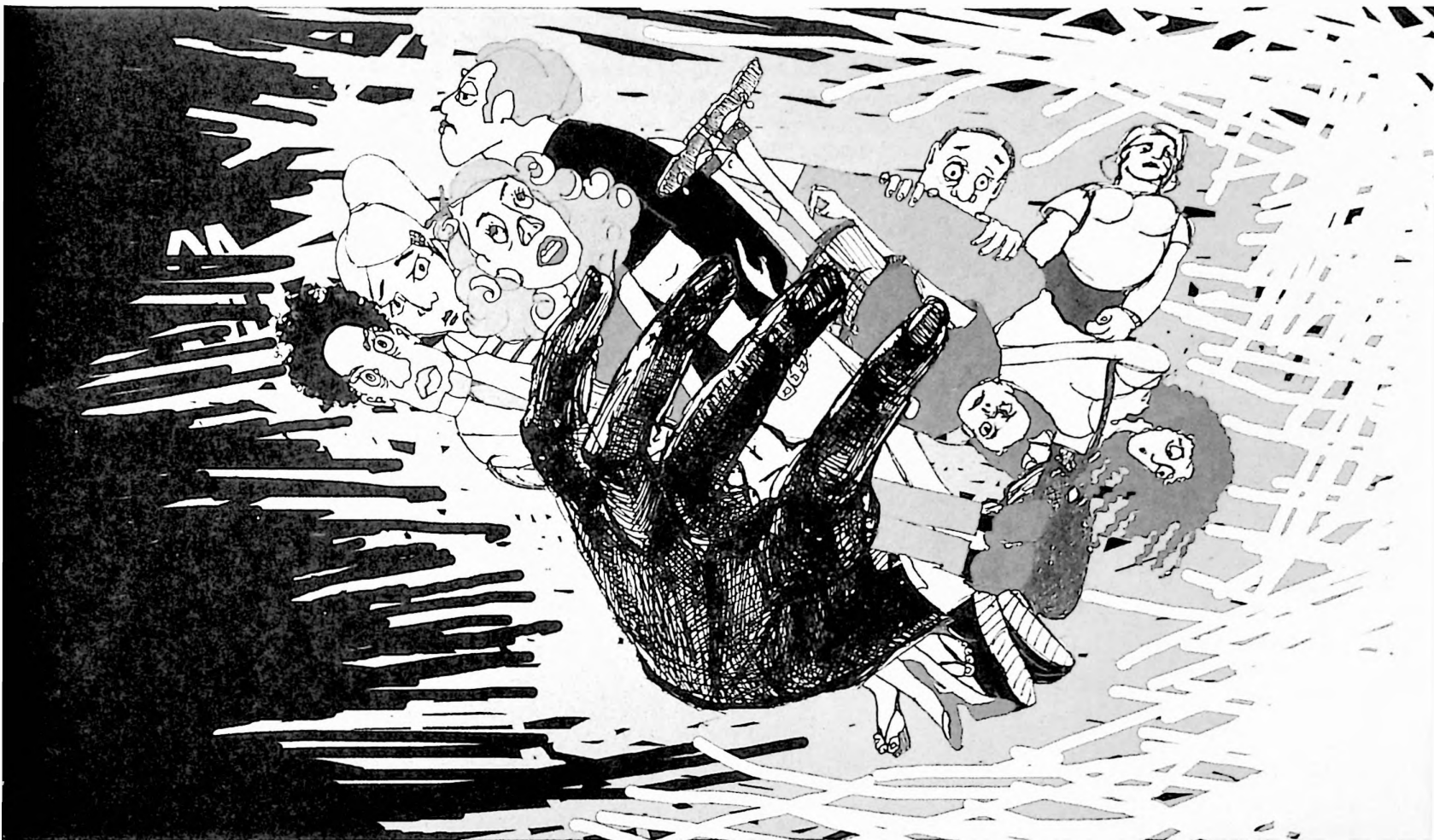


Illustration by Jennie Santos

Don't Forget Who Owns You

Money gnaws at our sleep
its yellow teeth like tiny daggers
a mouse creeping on the pillow
waking you as it crosses your face.
Money breeds envy sure and spoiling
as mold on bread, as the fruit flies
who drown themselves in your
wine, so you spill it in the sink.
We may pretend we don't care
the way an aging beauty apes
indifference when men no longer
pay attention when she speaks.

Money knows better. I am your mama,
I'm your daddy. I'm your fate.
I determine whether you survive
after your heart explodes in your chest:
I choose if you live on top of a dump
leaching poison into your water
or high on a mountain with pure
glacial melt sparkling in your glass.
I give you beauty or a smoking slum.
I give you sex, face lifts, cocaine,
a summer house with cathedral ceiling
or a packing box under a bridge.
While money rules, religion is fake
as a banker's smile; ethics runs
like hot wax; you have a price
and money owns you like a dog.

Marge Piercy
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www.partisanpress.org

POETRY IN A TIME OF WAR

By Luis Lázaro Tijerina

I do not write war poetry because I am fascinated or intrigued by man's endurance in combat. I agree with the great modern Italian poet Quasimodo that when one returns from war, he "no longer finds measures of certainty in an inner modus of life, a modus he has forgotten or treated ironically during his trials with death." In his famous essay, "Discourse on Poetry," Quasimodo speaks about poets in countries engaged in resistance against an invader but fails to address how poets deal with the fact that their own countries are the invaders.

I am a citizen of a country that, since its founding, has systematically invaded other countries. Not since the ancient period of the so-called "Peloponnesian War" – also known at the "Athenian War" – has one country caused so much misery and grief throughout the world. The war in Iraq is an undeclared war that has spread beyond the Iraqi borders, and will be remembered as a war unlike any other.

We do not have great war poets such as Wilfred Owen and Robert Graves of England, nor have we produced internationally known war poets or correspondents like Ilya Ehrenburg or Konstantin Simonov, who wrote about the Great Patriotic War for the Soviet peoples. The majority of our writers in wartime, it seems, are more interested in producing novels or poetry that either idealizes or rationalizes our participation in predatory wars. Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* is an exception.

Pasternak writes that although poets are few in number, they should be "true and great, expressing supremely and inimitably the life of the age." Surely poets express themselves most sincerely during a time of violence and tragedy where physical and emotional violence rips into the being of their intellectual and spiritual life.

Stephen Crane articulated the difference between cowardice and courage on the battlefield, similar to what the French Resistance poets Eluard and Aragon wrote under Nazi

occupation. In Italy, under a fascist dictatorship, it was the poet Quasimodo who brought to national attention the plight of the poetry that emerged from Arcadia and the violation perpetrated on the Italian consciousness. With an undertone of militant eloquence, this Sicilian-born poet wrote sublime war poems describing death on desolate fields and Italian urban landscapes. The great poet, Eugenio Montale, also spoke in the most sublime way about his experiences in war, brilliantly articulating his hatred for Italian Fascism in his time. Among these urban and rural 'landscapes' that the poet defends to his last dying breath is "the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophical – in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out," as Marx wrote in the *Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. In short, poetry is only one, albeit profound, aspect, in that fight.

Following the Vietnam War, published poetry within the United States has suffered from the direct and indirect collaboration among a majority of academic institutions and corporate media. What has emerged is what one might call "middle-class" poetry, full of whining self-absorption and narcissistic meanderings. Those few poets who, like Pasternak, attempt to describe "the sublimity of life and the unfathomable values of human existence" are ostracized and distanced from the very fabric of their nation's life. Pablo Neruda, perhaps the greatest poet of the 20th century, experienced such ostra-

This war has profoundly altered my sense of history and culture, and affected my entire psychological, emotional and spiritual life.

cizing for his volume of poems *Heart of Spain*, written during his tenure as diplomat for Chile at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War.

In times of national catastrophe, we poets have a responsibility to step up to the task of expressing in poetic language those expressions that give meaning, not just to our own personal lives but to our countrymen as a whole, even if our efforts and accomplishments will not be recognized or acknowledged during our lifetimes.

Poetry, in a time of strife along the path of war should not limit itself to philosophical mannerisms but create the type of written art that Hegel longed to see in his lifetime, voices as disparate as Bertolt Brecht and Cesar Vallejo that we read today. Neither predictability nor conditioning failed to quell the message of universality pouring forth from these two very different writers, nor did critical deconstruction alter the content or quench the poetic fire that burned within

them. The bourgeois routinely dismiss the words and struggles of such poets but that won't stop the need or silence the demand, during a time of political danger, national confusion and a country's decline, for artistic

"violence, a hidden order in the thought of man, a greater grasp of the truth [where] the occasions of reality inscribe themselves in its history." I have attempted with my poetry to chronicle the tragic, current predatory war

matically change the culture into which I was born, I do not know. I do know, however, that this war, unlike any other that I have studied or experienced in my lifetime, has profoundly altered my sense of history and culture,

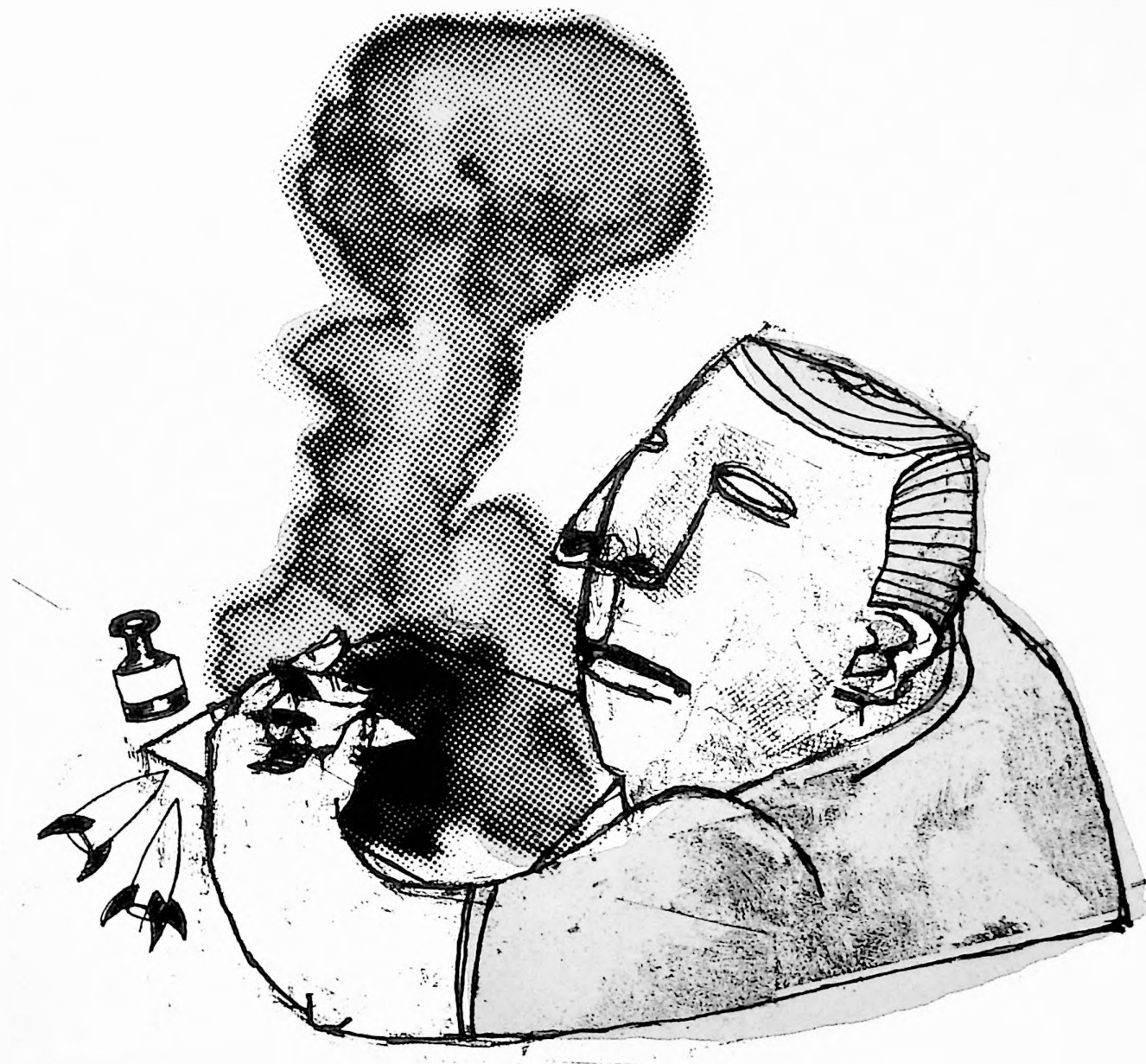


Illustration by James Helmer

expressions that define one's culture. Poetry must be more than mere technical performance or lyrical imitation. It can be both simple and profound and still convey the idea that, even in death, we are immortal.

As a historian, who also happens to be a poet, I – like any other serious American poet – am faced with the dilemma of having to compromise, to hide what Quasimodo termed a

against the people of Iraq, as well as past wars. I feel that I have failed, as a hermetic poet, but regardless of the categorization current American literary movements might ascribe to such efforts, one must attempt to be involved in the heroic effort to participate in creating the memory of what has been witnessed in his or her lifetime.

Whether the outcome of this war will dra-

and affected my entire psychological, emotional and spiritual life. There is no escape from it. I endure by being intellectually honest and truthful about what I have seen and lived through in this time of war. □

POETIC JUSTICE

An Interview with JACK HIRSCHMAN

Editor's Note: Jack Hirschman was recently appointed poet laureate of San Francisco. He published over 100 books of poetry, the latest of which is *Front Lines* (City Lights), and translations of books from nine languages into English. This interview was conducted by Michael Shepler on the steps of the St. Francis Catholic Church in the North Beach neighborhood of San Francisco.

JH: First, I was urged to apply by people who I greatly respect. Lawrence Ferlinghetti was one of them. The previous poet laureate, Devorah Major, was another. Alejandro Murguía, with whom I've worked on many activities with *Brigada Cultural de Roque Dalton*, has been a comrade of mine for many years. Matt Gonzalez who ran for mayor on the Green Party ticket and others as well.

About the mayor's appointment, I have to take him at his word when he said that he was pleased that someone would be controversial. Part of it is that he tries not to be controversial, although he supported the same-sex marriage law. Also, he took the side of striking hotel workers. I think bringing in a lit-



△ Protesters display signs before marching to mark the third anniversary of the war in Iraq.

PA: Were you as surprised to hear that you had been chosen poet laureate of San Francisco? The idea that the mayor would appoint an outspoken radical to this position seemed amazing and very positive.

tle class struggle makes the mayor look good.

I am a poet who writes to issues. I don't have negative feelings about propaganda. I have written to the occasion. Since I also bring a translatability in nine languages, many people felt I had already been the poet laureate.

In fact my relations to this city goes back to when I was on the stoops of New York in the Bronx. When I thought of San Francisco, the image I had was of Harry Bridges. His name was known as someone who was a good man who was helping workers, and that was my image of San Francisco.

If anything, with all the books I've pub-

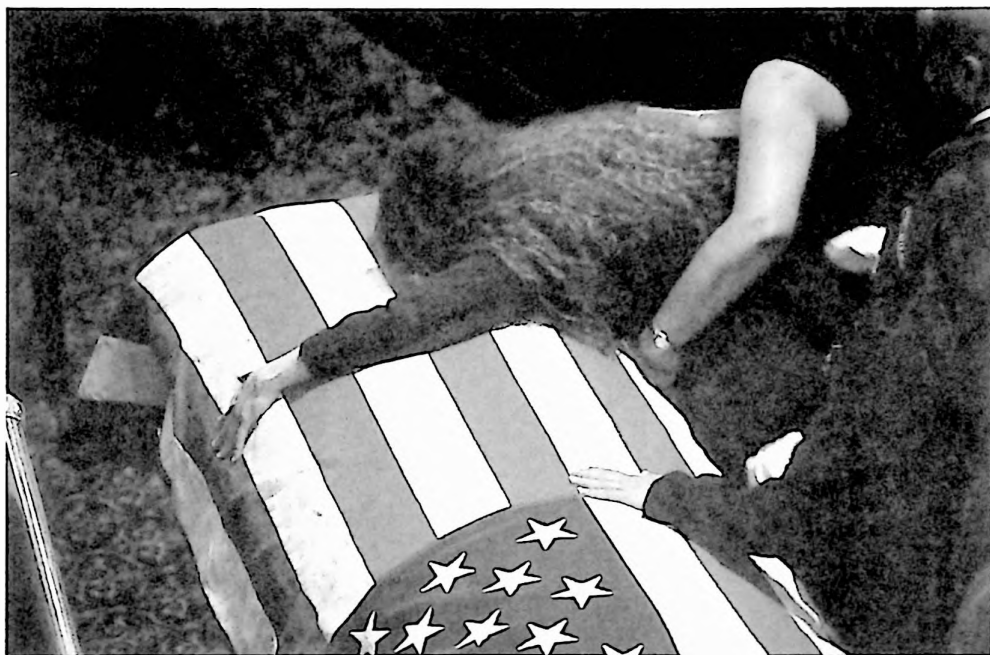
Many of the parties, party organs, non-party organs, revolutionary and progressive, have not been able to find the language that will be able to spur into rapid mobilization.

lished and translations I've made. I simply wanted to serve as an example. Because ever since I joined the Communist Labor Party, which, alas, doesn't exist anymore, I in effect put myself in the service of the working class, or as one would say these days, not merely the poor workers, but the new class of people is forced to defend itself. So, writing on issues is not very foreign to me.

PA: We're both long-time Angelenos, living in Los Angeles. Can you talk a bit about the progressive scene, such as it was, in 1960's Los Angeles? I know that you know a lot of the area's artists like Bruce Connor, and I used to read you a lot in the *Free Press*. Did you know people like Steuart Perkoff and Paul Vangelisti?

JH: I knew Stuart. I was in Northern California then, but when Stuart knew that he was going to die, he wrote me up in the Sierra Nevada. I was living in a tent under a tree for a couple of months. The folks on whose land I was gave me some mail and in one there was a request if I would give a reading with him, his last reading before he died at the old

▽ The wife of Marine Lance Cpl. Nicholas Whyte, killed in Iraq, collapses on his coffin during funeral services for the soldier in Brooklyn, New York.



Spencer Platt/Getty Images

Papa Buck bookstore. When I was a teacher at UCLA, I wanted to bring some of the life in the streets to the university. Stuart, whom I had invited, came into my class, a large class that held about 400 people, and gave a presentation of his works.

In the years 1969 to 1972, when I left LA, I worked with Paul Vangelisti. We became friends and translating brothers for the journal *Invisible City*. He was instrumental in getting a translation of a Haitian poet I did, Rene Depestre, a book called *A Rainbow for the Christian West*, which I translated from French, published by his Grant Hill Press. That book made me a Marxist as a poet. I regard that book as one of the majors. In the other languages apart from American English, in the Americas, I regard three books as three of the bravest books of the Americas in the last generation, and that is one of them. I have had a chance to translate two of them. Another is *Clandestine Poems* by Roque Dalton of El Salvador. And the third one, and I dearly like this book is by Pablo Neruda, translated by another Southern California poet, Stephen Cohen. It was the *Call for the Assassination of Nixon*. I found that book a bravely provocative book at that moment. But it's a moment that given the politics of the United States even after Nixon has an enduring meaning.

PA: I guess San Francisco has been home base for you since the early 1970's. Can you tell us what the scene was like when you first arrived?

JH: In late 1972 through 1975, the war in Vietnam was still on. People were really pretty crazy. At the same time, this was the street for me. I lived then pretty much then the way I live now, in old hotels. What was different on the street is that the street has a way of existing that is full of life. In those years, in this little village of North Beach, there was no less than two and as many as four poetry readings a night in different places. By that time, as you know, with the mixed media, with television and the Vietnam War, and the microphone being given as a big lollipop to suck on and talk to, which was part of the 1960's, there was a lot of poetry around. A lot of it was the post-Beat, and I was part of that. From 1974 to 1975, I had been politically engaged largely as a pacifist and a surrealist. But 1975 through 1976, I started to translate Russian poetry. And 1976, I started to write in Russian, which was for me the greatest



Manpreet Remana/AFP/Getty Images

△ A mother and daughter hold a candle.

One's engagement, is also part of helping to shape human existence, whether you're writing a poem or painting or engaging in more directly social collective activities.

day in my life as a writer, when I could write poems in Russian on the streets of San Francisco, write a love poem or about a tree or a political cause. That helped to concentrate my involvement, actually, palpably, in the movement.

In that particular period, there were

strong national liberation movements in El Salvador and Nicaragua. And very early, I joined the movement to liberate Nicaragua. At the time there was a newspaper, *Gazetta Sandinista*, which was published by progressives in the mission, in which they showed pictures of people the Samoza regime was torturing, mutilating. So I joined the cultural corps that was involved with organizing events and bringing the situation of Nicaragua to the attention of more and more people.

PA: What forms of literary and artistic guerilla activity are going on now? Can radical poets hope to touch the working class and the middle class?

JH: If you're looking for a straight shot working class you're not going to find it. But what

you will find these days, is the introduction of electronics, digitalization, robotization, which dumps jobs. That story is true. There were a thousand workers in a John Deere plant. They transformed it into a robotized plant. They had three workers left. Nine hundred and ninety-seven were out of work. Three workers pressed the robot buttons. That's going on everywhere. It's not a matter of outsourcing to India. The point is that robotization plays a tremendous part in everyone's life, just as our lives are controlled by technology. So we need to think. Here's where communist parties, socialist parties, even the non-party League of Revolutionaries that I belong to, we have not, I believe, found the language. There exists the new class of people, i.e. homeless people at the bottom, people who are working but are scared of losing their job at every turn, then people who are working but working for pittance, people who are working who see the situation and identify with the others. This represents the new

class of people.

Many of the parties, party organs, non-party organs, revolutionary and progressive, have not been able to find the language that will be able to spur into rapid mobilization. Linguistically, there's something that we're still holding onto the past. The only breakthrough that I know is poetry. That is one of the reasons why I have always said that everyone's a poet. And that is why I fight for the revolution, not only to change the material conditions of human beings, but to make that idea understood, because everyone is a poet. I believe that in poetry lies the key linguistically for helping to bring about a greater mobilization against the forces of injustice in the world – economic injustice and social injustice.

PA: What happens if the Bush administration is discredited? Can we expect something positive to follow in its place? How can we work to make certain a less repressive form of Bushism doesn't take its place?

JH: The way the Bush administration doesn't come into power is not to get somebody like whoever the Democrat is on the platform. We need a complete alteration in society. In order to that, we need to begin with an understanding of what this new class of people, not merely here, but all over the world, because that's who is going to change the world. That's the next generation. The next generation, whether conscious or not, belongs to the new class. We who have the education and consciousness of the previous generation can help guide in terms of educating the younger folks today, many of whom are very backward, who've bought the whole fish seller's gambit. We're a nation of fish sellers: sell fish. That's what we do. But it's not the fault of the people who've been brainwashed because of dimensions of ignorance. The idea, for example, that one is an individual when one says I am an individual and I follow individualist logic, rather than understanding that true individuality comes when one engages in collective life. That is true individuality. The other stuff is what the capitalist want you to think is individual. Most everybody and even among revolutionaries

have been forced to buy into that for one or another reason. So we need to work and educate toward the understanding of the dynamic of collective existence, which most people practice in one or another form anyway.

PA: These have been hard years in many ways. Do you feel optimistic about humans achieving the egalitarian society we've been talking about?

JH: Well of course I am an optimist. The best way to answer the question about optimism – when they asked Picasso what was his greatest painting, he said the next one he was going to do. That is an extremely optimistic statement. Let's ask why it's very optimistic. For Picasso and for me with my poetry, the importance is the beginning, the idea of beginning, which I believe is at the center of the truth of what it means to exist, to be. This fills one with an infinite optimism, because one's engagement, being in life, being part of human existence is also part of helping to shape human existence, whether you're writing a poem or painting or engaging in more directly social collective activities. So of course I am optimistic. And there are very good reasons to be. There are many people and a lot of poets...I have a respect for science. I've seen people live much longer in our generation than they lived in my father's generation. And I trust science too. Science is also a part of what we do. Frederick Engels wrote a great book about utopianism or scientific socialism to put into a *scientic* mode, from the word science, *scia* meaning knowing, knowing mode, something as far-reaching as a philosophy of the ability of human beings to change their society is something that's just optimistic to begin with. □

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WORKING FOR CHANGE

By Tony Pecinovsky

Five dollars and fifteen cents, the federal minimum wage (FMW), doesn't buy much these days. With \$5.15 you can almost buy two gallons of gas, almost go to the movies, or almost buy two burgers and a soda – at McDonald's. Yet, millions of Americans live off of \$5.15 an hour.

In real dollars, \$5.15 an hour translates into a little over \$200 a week, around

\$10,700 a year. Forget about health care, vacation time, sick leave, retirement, or job security; minimum wage jobs rarely offer these kinds of benefits. And to make matters worse, according to a 2002 Economic Policy Institute (EPI) report, the federal minimum wage has "lost 10 percent of its buying power" since 1997, the last time it was raised. Undoubtedly, the federal minimum's buying power has decreased even more since 2002.

With the mid-term elections just around the corner, it is more important than ever that working-class families understand the role that the federal minimum wage can play in shifting the political balance of forces away from the ultra-right and their big business partners. Clearly, they still hope to frame the ideological debate, divide the working class and win big this fall. But trade unions, community groups, religious organizations and others are fighting back. They are preempting the ideological debate, forging working-class unity, especially with communities of color, and using the minimum wage as a spring board to mobilize progressive voters this fall.

An estimated 7.3 million workers would receive an increase in their hourly wages if the federal minimum wage was increased to \$7.25 an hour.

The Minimum Wage Debate

The federal minimum wage, established in 1938 during the Roosevelt administration, created what economists call a "wage floor,"

a minimum which wages are not allowed to fall below, and ever since then the FMW has been under attack.

Right-wing organizations, like the Heritage Foundation, claim that increasing the minimum wage will increase unemployment, drive business out of communities and raise prices on service sector goods while decreasing quality. They say minimum wage

According to a survey, 79 percent of respondents were in favor of a minimum wage increase.

increases do nothing to eliminate poverty and actually add to, rather than help fix, the historic wage gaps between people of color, women and white men.

While the Heritage Foundation daydreams about the free market and its invisible hand basking in the ideological light of supply and demand, others offer a more objective analysis and lay often repeated claims to rest. Does increasing the minimum wage increase unemployment, drive business out of communities, or raise prices on service sector goods? Does it address the issues of poverty and race/gender equality?

Increase Unemployment?

According to a 1998 EPI study, "following the most recent increase in the minimum wage 1996-97, the low-wage labor market performed better than it had in decades..." Employers absorbed the increased labor costs through higher productivity, lower recruitment and training costs, decreased absenteeism, and increased morale. According to the report, no "systematic, significant job loss" was found. And in states where the minimum wage has been raised above the federal minimum (17 states and the District of Columbia have higher minimum wages) no significant job loss has been recorded.

Drive Business Out?

Most low-wage jobs are in the service sector: retail, restaurant and custodial, among others. Though many of us secretly (or not-so-secretly) wish that the Gap,

McDonald's and others would be driven out, higher wages aren't a silver bullet. Oregon's \$7.50 minimum wage hasn't driven the Gap or McDonald's away. There are still fast food

states where the minimum wage is at or above \$7.25). Due to the "spillover effects," 8.2 million workers (6.5 percent of the workforce) that earn around a dollar more than the



△ Waitress Danielle Wright (R) picks up a customer's order in a White Castle restaurant during a Valentine's Day dinner.

chains in Vermont, where the minimum is \$7.25. An increase in the minimum wage won't drive service sector business away simply because consumers don't shop for service sector goods in other states. A resident of Illinois (where the minimum wage is \$6.50) isn't going to drive to Missouri (where the minimum wage is \$5.15) for their movies, burgers and clothes. They are not going to save any money. Service sector price differences between Illinois and Missouri have more to do with taxes, geographic location and general education level of the workforce than with minimum wage differences. The same holds true throughout the country.

Increase Poverty?

An estimated 7.3 million workers (5.8 percent of the workforce) would receive an increase in their hourly wages if the federal minimum wage was increased to \$7.25 an hour, which was Senator Ted Kennedy's proposal (these numbers do not reflect those

minimum would also likely benefit from an increase.

According to the Heritage Foundation "only 2 percent of American workers make the minimum wage, but 5 percent of the workforce is unemployed." "Which group needs the most help," they ask? According to this logic – the logic of supply and demand – demand for low-wage workers would increase in proportion to a decrease in the minimum wage i.e., employers are willing to employ more people at lower wages and the unemployment rate would shrink.

However, the Heritage Foundation conveniently ignores a central component of business management. Most service sector jobs, and many others for that matter, only need a specific number of people to do specific types of jobs – and they know what that number is. McDonald's only needs so many people to flip burgers, cook fries or work the counter during the lunch rush. The Gap only needs so many people to sale and stock

clothes during Christmas. Businesses have made this into a science. Starting with Henry Ford and Taylorism, businesses have learned to break job functions down to the lowest

Working-class families making the minimum wage, see an increase as a huge step in the right direction.

denominator and mathematically equate the desired person-power + time for completion. Once a hiring threshold has been met, no more workers no matter how poorly paid are needed.

In reality, the Heritage Foundation's argument is nothing more than a clever divide and

conquer strategy. Pit unemployed workers against low-wage workers and watch both groups fight for the scraps. Minimum wage increases don't increase poverty, they lift millions of people up and enable them to pay rent, buy groceries, and maybe even save a little.

Race/Gender Equality?

Contrary to right-wing myth, people of color and women are the largest group of beneficiaries from a minimum wage increase. Over 60 percent of workers who would benefit from an increase to \$7.25 are women. An estimated 7.3 percent of all working women would benefit directly. African Americans represent over 11 percent of the total workforce, but over 15 percent of African Americans would be affected by an increase. Over 13 percent of the workforce is Hispanic, but over 19 percent of workers affected by an increase would be Hispanic.

Working families in the bottom 20 percent income bracket receive around 5 percent of the national income. Over 38 percent of the benefits of a minimum wage increase would go to these workers. A minimum wage increase would help break down institutionalized racism and help level the playing field for all working-class families.

Today's Fight

In 1938 the FMW was \$.25 per hour, or \$3.55 in 2005 dollars. The FMW had its highest purchasing value in 1968 when it was \$1.60 per hour, or \$9.12 in 2005 dollars. If the FMW had kept pace with inflation it would be \$8.70 today, instead of \$5.15.

Though no one expects the FMW to be increased any time soon (at least not until after the 2008 presidential elections), trade unions, community groups, religious organizations and businesses are fighting for and winning statewide minimum wage increases.



Jose Acel/Aurora/Getty Images

▲ Minimum wage workers support families but do not earn enough to keep above the poverty level.

Missouri is a perfect example of how grassroots organizations are building support for increasing the minimum wage while mobilizing voters to turnout for the mid-term elections.

In Missouri, progressive forces like the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), Acorn, MO-Progressive Vote Coalition, and Jobs with Justice, among others formed the Give Missourians a Raise Coalition, which funded and organized a minimum wage ballot initiative. They hoped to increase MO's minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$6.50 and index it to inflation.

In order to get the minimum wage increase on the November ballot the coalition had to submit 93,000 valid registered voters signatures to the secretary of state by May 9. Not an easy task! And to make things even more difficult, the coalition didn't officially start collecting signatures until April 1. In only five weeks the coalition had to organize and sustain a statewide campaign, hire staff to coordinate, lead teams and walk turf, mobilize hundreds of volunteers, and combat right-wing attempts to confuse and distract voters (potential petition signers) from the real issue.

The coalition also had to connect their campaign to the mid-term elections. Prior to the campaign, the Democratic base had only one motivation for turning out this fall: the US Senate race between Claire McCaskill and Jim Talent. Give Missourians a Raise knew that the minimum wage ballot initiative would give Democratic voters another reason to vote this fall, and that, if they voted, they would likely vote down the Democratic Party line and help McCaskill beat Talent.

According to a survey conducted by Garin-Hart-Yang, 79 percent of respondents were in favor of a minimum wage increase. The survey also found that the initiative appealed most to Democratic subgroups: 93 percent of African Americans; 91 percent of Democrats; 90 percent of McCaskill supporters; 89 percent of non-college-educated women; and 89 percent of union households supported the initiative. The survey also found that the initiative was extremely popular with voters not identified as Democratic: 86 percent of the undecided (Senate race);

80 percent of independents; and 79 percent of rural voters supported the initiative.

Coalition partners found that the minimum wage initiative would help McCaskill improve close to 3 percent on Talent. If working-class voters turned-out for the minimum wage increase they could make the difference between a pro-choice, pro-labor, pro-health care Democrat and an anti-choice, anti-labor, anti-health care Republican.

In five weeks the coalition collected over 210,000 signatures and delivered them to the secretary of state on May 9.

It is estimated that over 42,000 Missourians work for the current minimum wage. According to the coalition, the new minimum wage, if voted in this November, will generate between \$3.3 million and \$4.3 million each year in state revenue and would pump over \$21 million in new spending into the economy.

Conclusion

While we won't know for sure until November, it seems very likely that Missouri's minimum wage workers will get a much needed \$1.35 raise. And, if the minimum wage campaign bumps-up the McCaskill vote 2-3 percent, we will have a center-left Democrat in the Senate instead of an ultra-right Republican.

Statewide minimum wage ballot initiatives are strategically important for another reason as well; besides mobilizing the vote on a statewide level and laying the groundwork for a federal minimum wage increase, minimum wage ballot initiatives also raise the issue of wealth redistribution.

The redistribution of wealth is central to the movement for a more egalitarian, more humane, socialist society. And while some may argue that raising the minimum wage is a small victory, most people, especially working-class families making minimum wage, see an increase in the minimum wage as a huge step in the right direction. Besides, if we can't take small steps together, how are we ever going to take big steps together. □

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Dump Bush movement says 'we can do it' (online edition)

John Kerry and John Edwards left the Democratic National Convention July 29 to barnstorm across the country, buoyed by ringing calls both inside and outside the convention for George W. Bush's defeat as a menace to

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VOTE NO TO SAVE CIVIL RIGHTS IN MICHIGAN

By Clara West

A group of wealthy out-of-state businessmen have financed a ballot initiative to turn back the clock on civil rights in Michigan. They spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to force the people of Michigan to vote on their divisive views this November 7th and misleadingly called their campaign the Michigan Civil Rights Initiative (MCRI). Far from protecting civil rights, this measure would amend the state constitution to ban existing affirmative action protections from racial, ethnic or gender-based discrimination in public education, hiring at state agencies and in the awarding of state contracts. This ballot initiative exposes all Michigan residents to the dangers of a society divided by racial hostility or sexual discrimination.

What do Affirmative Action Policies Do?

Michigan's affirmative action policies address discrimination in jobs, housing and education. These policies require state agencies and institutions to review and remove hidden biases in hiring, promotion and compensation practices. They increase workplace diversity by reducing discrimination against women and underrepresented minorities by allowing race, ethnicity and gender to be among the various factors considered when evaluating qualified candidates. Affirmative action policies require state agencies to reach out to women and underrepresented minorities for employment as well as for receiving state contracts. In education, affirmative action policies allow public universities to use race and gender, among other characteristics, such as whether or not an applicant is the child of an alumnus (a so-

called legacy), to make decisions about accepting qualified candidates for admission. In addition, these policies require the state to establish mentoring and training programs to retain employees from underrepresented groups. Affirmative action is based on the principle that all the people should have equal access to the benefits provided by the state, and the state has the responsibility to take steps to make sure this is a reality.

Several major US Supreme Court decisions over the past 25 years have upheld affirmative action policies. In its 1978 decision in the case of the *Regents of the*

Affirmative action is based on the principle that all people should have equal access to benefits provided by the state, and the state has the responsibility to take steps to make this a reality.

University of California v. Bakke, the court ruled that diversity could be "a compelling governmental interest" that permits race to be considered in the admissions process. The following year, the court ruled in the case



Lara Jo Regan/Liaison

▲ In 1996, California voters approved Proposition 209, a ballot initiative that banned affirmative action at all state institutions. Enrollment of African American, Latino and Native American students plunged at UC Berkeley.

▽ Donna Coakley gathers with several hundred other protesters to rally in favor of affirmative action in downtown Cincinnati, OH.



Mike Simons/Getty Images

of the *United Steelworkers of America, AFL-CIO-CLC v. Weber* that a union could include affirmative action policies in its collective bargaining agreements. In *Johnson v. Transportation Agency, Santa Clara County, California*, the court ruled that affirmative action policies created to remedy past discrimination were constitutional. In 2003, the court upheld these earlier views in two decisions involving the University of Michigan,

one of which was authored by former Justice Sandra Day O'Connor.

Why is Affirmative Action Still Needed?

Despite the gains that over two decades of affirmative action policies have posted, serious problems continue to divide Michigan. Incidents of race-based violence still keep Michigan third on the FBI's list of

hate crimes. According to www.oneunitedmichigan.org One United Michigan, a coalition of individuals, businesses, labor unions and community groups that oppose the MCRI's proposed ban on affirmative action, persistent income disparity by race, ethnicity and gender, instances of job and housing discrimination and unequal access to education are important reasons why affirmative action policies are still needed.

Income disparity point to continuing discrimination by race and gender. According to US Bureau of Labor Statistic figures for May 2006, the median weekly pay of white men is \$763. Women as a whole earn a median of \$600. White women earn \$607. Black men earn \$577. Black women earn \$542. Latinos earn \$506. Latinas come in last with \$438. The poverty rate for African Americans is three times higher than for whites. For Latinos it is more than twice as high. Women and girls make up 56 percent of the 37 million people living below the government's official poverty line.

Income inequality results in no small part from lack of equal access to education. This fact is reflected most sharply in higher education. More than 31 percent of white men (over the age of 25) hold bachelor's degrees or higher. This figure is almost double that of African American men and women, according to recent US Census Bureau surveys. African Americans account for only about 5 percent of all doctoral degrees, though this figure has steadily risen since affirmative action policies were put in place. While more than 45 percent of white high school graduates are able to attend college, only 39.7 percent of African Americans with high school diplomas do.

Even when men and women hold similar occupations, suggesting similar education and experience, the income inequality persists, according to figures tabulated by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Men who hold well-paid management and professional positions earn a median weekly salary of \$1,160. Women in those occupations earn about \$350 less. In sales and office professions, men earn close to \$700 per week, while women take in a mere \$532.

According to the Asian American Justice Center, white men make up only 48 percent of the college educated workforce, but hold 90 percent of the top jobs, 96 percent of CEO positions, 86 percent of the law partnerships and 85 percent of the tenured col-

lege faculty positions.

In Michigan, the gender pay gap at 67 percent is wider than the national average, according to the Institute for Women's Policy

treat people of color and women equally when considering home sales and mortgages will be eliminated.

And based on the experiences of other

California had devastating effects on equal access to education and public contracts for minority and women students, business owners and workers.



Tim Boyle/Getty Images

△ Affirmative action policies have increased the representation of women in the professions.

Research. Women are only 10 percent of the state's engineers, 30 percent of its doctors, and less than 30 percent of its lawyers. In the construction and building trades, women hold a meager 4 percent of positions.

What Will this Initiative Do?

If passed, the proposed ballot initiative in Michigan would not protect civil rights. It would ban affirmative action and relevant programs and policies that are designed to end discrimination. Legal experts say programs that help women gain equal pay for equal work will be ended. Higher education scholarships, fellowships and grants that help women and minorities will be outlawed. The ability of state and local governments to determine fair hiring policies will come under fire. Equal housing and lending programs that require lenders and real estate companies to

states that have passed similar ballot initiatives, some public health programs that provide gender-specific care like breast, cervical and prostate cancer screenings as well as programs that aid female victims of domestic abuse may also come under fire. Also, requirements that state and local agencies collect data on race and gender statistics could be eliminated.

What Happened in Other States?

This proposed affirmative action ban in Michigan is patterned after similar ballot measures passed in California in 1996 (Prop 209) and Washington state in 1998 (I-200). A 2004 study published by the California-based Discrimination Research Center (DRC) and Equal Rights Advocates (ERA) shows that the passage of Prop 209 in

In California's construction trades specifically, since 1995, the study shows that even with a growth in available jobs the number of women fell by 30 percent. Prior to 1995, affirmative action policies that required contractors who accepted business from the state to apply outreach, training programs and hiring practices designed to attract and keep minority and women workers in the building trades had helped boost the numbers of women in that industry. According to the study, while affirmative action policies were in place, some California contractors met and even exceeded the goals set by state agencies with regard to hiring women workers. Since the ban on affirmative action, this positive development has been eroded.

In the immediate aftermath of Prop 209's passage, according to the DRC/ERA report, state officials who were legally mandated to

identify and eliminate racial or gender discrimination in their agencies no longer had the tools to do so. Many state agencies simply threw up their hands in frustration. A survey conducted in 1998 of several California public schools and institutions found many simply eliminated all affirmative action policies and even stopped collecting data on gender and race for fear of violating the law. A pending lawsuit, citing provisions of Prop 209, is challenging the legality of state funded gender-specific health care programs.

Other surveys conducted by California-based organizations found that enrollment of minority students in California's two top universities, UCLA and UC Berkeley, fell dramatically in the years following passage of Prop 209. The number of women professionals hired at UC Davis is reported to have fallen by 39 percent since passage of Prop 209. In fact, *the Los Angeles Times* reports that of the more than 4,800 students that

Many witnesses at a hearing held by the Michigan Civil Rights Commission in late May testified that they were deceived into signing the initiative.

enrolled at UCLA for the fall term this year, only 2 percent were African American – the lowest in decades. State contracts to minority and women-owned businesses has fallen by 25 percent, according to data provided by Americans for a Fair Chance. Meanwhile, job discrimination in California seems to have not been eliminated. According to a survey of employment agencies several years after the passage of Prop 209 by The Testing Project, employers appeared to prefer to hire white applicants to African American applicants almost three to one – with no available legal remedy to even the playing field.

In Washington state, the passage of I-200 is considered such an embarrassment to that state's reputation that the legislature is considering various means to amend the measure to restore affirmative action programs.

Who is Behind the Campaign to Ban Affirmative Action?

MCRI is backed by an organization of the same name, which is funded almost entirely by the ironically named American Civil Rights Institute (ACRI), headed by Ward Connerly. Connerly, a Republican, authored California's Prop 209 and led its campaign in 1996, which eliminated affirmative action policies in that state. His organization spearheaded and financed the effort in Washington state in 1998, which, after a misleading campaign that promised to protect civil rights, banned affirmative action there. ACRI provided over half a million dollars to the Michigan anti-affirmative action campaign in 2004 alone. ACRI is reported to have received more than \$400,000 from San Diego-based software developer John Moores, \$300,000 from Fox network mogul Rupert Murdoch, a \$250,000 loan from Colorado-based beer magnate Joseph Coors, and hundreds of thousands of dollars from wealthy businessmen from San Francisco, Kansas City and Dallas.

Connerly has long been hostile to affirmative action and civil rights, to the point of declaring his support for racial segregation. In a 2002 CNN interview, Connerly said, "Supporting segregation need not be racist. One can believe in segregation and believe in equality of the races." In 2003, Connerly admitted to violating California's campaign finance laws by failing to report the sources of more than \$1.7 million ACRI received. Some of that money paid for a failed 2003 campaign in California to ban the collection of racial data, and some, Connerly said, helped fund projects like the Michigan anti-affirmative action campaign. According to an Associated Press report, Connerly paid a \$95,000 fine to settle the issue.

As if a campaign to promote divisions and inequality is not enough, deception is a key tactic of the anti-affirmative action campaign. MCRI used its large financial resources to hire a small army of signature collectors trained to solicit signatures by encouraging voters to think that they were supporting civil rights. Many witnesses at a hearing held by the Michigan Civil Rights Commission in late May testified that they were deceived into signing the initiative. One African American woman told the commission that she signed because she was told that its passage would provide Black youth with better educational opportunities. As a result of this hearing and other testimony, the commission found that

widespread deception had taken place. Lawsuits to remedy the situation are still pending. MCRI's trouble with the truth is also reflected on its Web site. Under its FAQs, readers can find the erroneous claim that the initiative would not ban affirmative action.

As pointed to above, One United Michigan, is leading the fight back and is led by the state AFL-CIO, the UAW, the NAACP, the Michigan Catholic Conference, the National Women's Political Caucus, and the ACLU among many others. It has been endorsed by groups as diverse as Michigan Peaceworks, Pride at Work, the Gray Panthers, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, Latinos United, the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services, the Coalition of Labor Union Women, the Sierra Club, the Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation, the Detroit Federation of Teachers, the Associated Students of Michigan State University, the Anti-Defamation League and the Michigan Council of YWCA. Business groups, civil rights organizations, political parties, lawyers' groups, fraternities and community development organizations have also signed on. Local organizing chapters have been set up in almost 20 counties across the state with more on the way.

If MCRI passes, it will hurt all of Michigan's working families. It will dismantle existing protections against discrimination. Minority and women students, workers and business owners will find access to schools, employment or government contracts more difficult. Affirmative action policies nationally have helped an estimated five million minorities and six million women hold positions with higher job classifications than they would have otherwise. Those people who benefit are our mothers, sisters, daughters, spouses, neighbors and friends. When they benefit, we all benefit by the existence of affirmative action policies. When discrimination hurts them, it hurts all of us. We share a stake with them in ending discrimination and creating ways to overcome lingering barriers. Let's unite around the positive aspects of our democracy – equality and social justice – and reject the divisive goals of the ultra-right. Vote no on November 7th. □

WORLD PRIDE



Justin Sullivan/Getty Images

▲ Lancy Woo (L) and her lesbian partner Cristy Chung prepare to appear before the California appeals court in San Francisco to argue the constitutionality of same-sex marriage.

By Joel Wendland

War, the globalization of disease, nuclear dangers, climate change and poverty are among the world's most urgent problems. In the fracas, one issue has been sidelined: violence and repression aimed at lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) people. A brief survey of recent events shows that homophobia and transphobia have not disappeared. Indeed, in some places governments openly sanction atrocities against LGBT people. Still, this community has become more organized and outspoken, adopting the advanced principle of international solidarity in the cause of democracy and liberation.

There have been some key victories for LGBT equality. Gay couples in Northern Ireland recently won the right to adopt children, an expansion of a 2005 UK law that allowed non-married and gay couples in "civil partnerships" to adopt. After being together for 30 years, Emilio Menendez and Carlos Baturin became Spain's first married gay cou-

ple this past June under a new marriage equality law enacted by the socialist Zapatero government. Spain is also currently debating a proposed law that would guarantee civil rights to people transitioning between genders. In 2003, the US Supreme Court struck down a Texas state law that criminalized private consensual sex acts between same-gendered adults, declaring it demeaning and improperly seeking to control private lives. In Brazil, a campaign led by the Lula government called "Brazil without Homophobia" supports LGBT groups in the struggle for equality. Fiji and Romania have overturned criminal prohibitions on homosexuality and have passed broad anti-discrimination laws. In South Africa, a constitutional court decided in favor of civil marriage equality for gay and lesbian people. In Venezuela, President Hugo Chávez asserted the equality of LGBT people and invited them to participate as partners in the Bolivarian Revolution. Chávez described constitutional reforms that did not include anti-discrimination provisions for LGBT people as a serious mistake. The Revolutionary Gay Movement of

Local, national and international organizations are forming, educating, organizing and mobilizing local communities to support rights and equality for LGBT people.

Venezuela has taken the president up on his offer and is running LGBT candidates in local and national elections.

Everywhere, local, national and international organizations, coalitions and networks are forming, educating, organizing and mobilizing local communities to support rights and equality for LGBT people. They are taking on discriminatory laws and practices, fighting for access to medical care and other public services and are developing a new public voice in politics and culture in their communities and countries.

Progress, however, is uneven. In the US, the ruling Republican Party has made its anti-gay sentiments widely understood. Over the last six years, Republicans have pushed to introduce inequality for lesbian and gays into the US Constitution, fought to keep the Texas law and blocked effective hate crimes laws and federal anti-discrimination legislation. In 2004, Republican organizations funded anti-gay marriage ballot initiatives in 14 states, which both helped foster a hostile political and cultural atmosphere and turned out right-wing voters. In 2006, between 6 and 10 more states will have similar anti-gay ballot measures.

In a recent interview with *PA*, journalist Doug Ireland, who frequently covers LGBT

issues, argues that while it isn't likely that LGBT people will win marriage equality with this election, it is important for them and their allies, especially in the Democratic Party, to fight such ballot initiatives. "We know that in 2004 in many places, these gay marriage referenda helped defeat the national Democrats," says Ireland.

"This was very clearly seen in Ohio, where it was the turn out of the religious right by the anti-gay marriage referendum that sunk Kerry," he opined. Religious conservatives and even traditionally Catholic Democrats turned out to vote against gay marriage and against Kerry. "And that's going to happen this fall, if the Democrats don't get to their ass and start fighting these referenda," Ireland argues.

Right-wing campaigns have had direct consequences. Jeremy Bishop, program director of Pride at Work (PAW), an affiliated constituency of the AFL-CIO, has seen a dramatic change in the political climate. In an interview with *PA*, Bishop contrasted conditions under the Bush administration and the Republican-controlled Congress with the Clinton years, contending that "when an incident like Matthew Shepard's murder happened there was some kind of national dialogue. But now we have the complete opposite where the national dialogue is all about beating us up." Such politically sanctioned hostility, notes Bishop, "gives all the people who have bits of homophobia lurking inside the OK to act out on that."

Clarence Patton, executive director of the National Coalition of Anti-Violence

ideologues, religious figures and politicians focused their political rhetoric on what they see as a "national emergency," Patton says. This hate-filled public discourse likely facilitated a jump in hate crimes incidents. NAVCP reported 2,272 incidents with 3,450 offenders in 2004. In 2005, NAVCP reported 1,985 incidents, a figure that is still much higher than four years ago. Patton expects 2006 will continue a trend of high rates of this kind of hate crime.

The Republican Party's refusal to pass comprehensive hate crimes legislation has hurt the FBI's ability to collect data on hate crimes based on sexual orientation. For 2004, the last year for which it has released data, the FBI officially reported 1,197 incidents of hate crimes based on sexual orientation with 1,407 offenders, about half of NAVCP's statistics. According to Patton, the FBI isn't able to collect data from state and local law enforcement agencies where no hate crimes legislation is in place, leaving huge gaps in official federal statistics giving

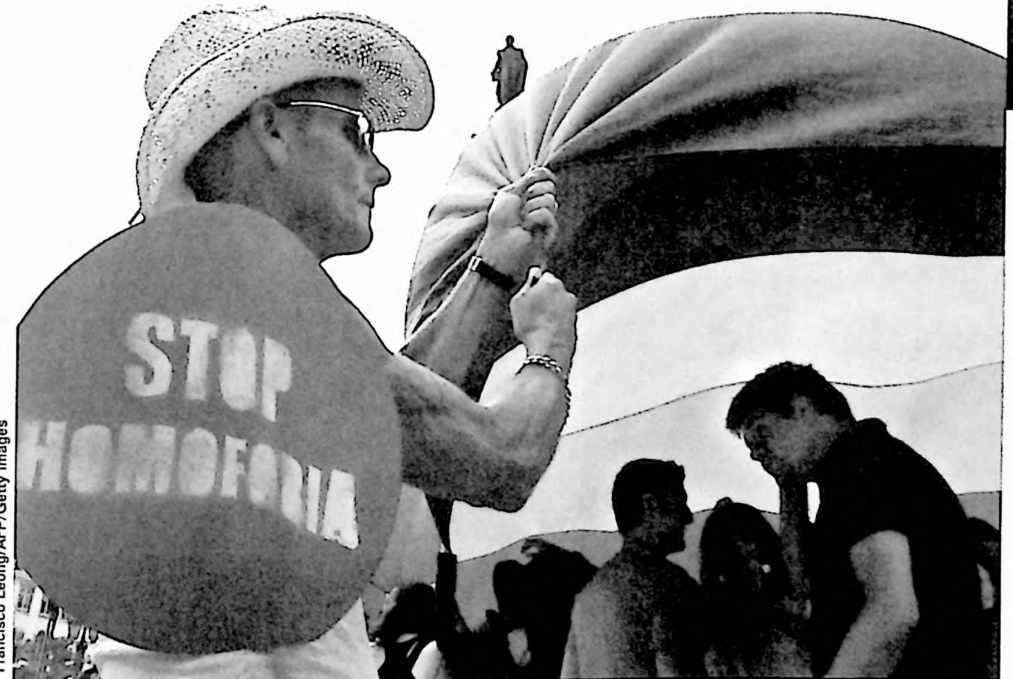
what the law mandates and what law enforcement officials are willing to do. Additionally, lack of training and ongoing incidents of police insensitivity leading to fears of further victimization cause many to refuse to complain to the police.

In addition to overt violence, surveys indicate that job-related discrimination (in hiring, wage raises and promotion), housing discrimination and harassment (in the workplace and the community) are still a severe problem. In a 2004 survey in Topeka, Kansas, for instance, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF), found that 16 percent of gay and lesbian workers reported being denied employment and 24 percent reported being fired because of sexual orientation. More than one-third reported being harassed at work.

While groups like PAW have made important progress on helping unions support their LGBT members to make real changes, positive developments are still at the beginning. More significantly, unions represent only about 10 percent of the workforce. NGLTF

In addition to overt violence, surveys indicate that job-related discrimination are still a severe problem.

Programs (NCAVP), argues that while there is no way to prove empirically a direct causal relationship between hostile right-wing rhetoric and violence, he believes that such a relationship is suggested by the data. Reacting to the Supreme Court decision on the Texas law, the emergence of gay images in popular culture and the Massachusetts decision to allow gay marriage, right-wing



Francisco Leong/AFP/Getty Images

△ Activists march in the gay pride parade in downtown Lisbon, Portugal.

a false impression. Even when laws exist requiring the collection of information on such hate crimes there is "a training and commitment gap," Patton says, between

recommends passage of a comprehensive federal law that prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation. Ireland echoed the NGLTF recommendation, saying, "We do

not yet have a national federal law prohibiting discrimination in employment, which is a key measure to protect gay people."

As difficult as conditions for US LGBT people have become, insists Ireland,

by comparison to the situation in the Eastern European countries and in the Islamic countries and in a great many African countries, we have an enormous amount of freedom that we have won in the last three and a half decades through struggle.

Ireland urges US organizations to build international solidarity with LGBT movements in other countries, educate their members about global conditions and organize events here that will mobilize the LGBT community in the US to support international causes. "We need to link up in solidarity with gay organizations in other countries," Ireland suggests, "where there is much more severe repression of homosexuality than here."

Arsham Parsi is a gay Iranian refugee who agrees with Ireland's call for solidarity. Because Parsi is gay, his government considers him the same as a thief or murderer. In recent times, executions and imprisonment of Iranian men and women for non violent sexual crimes has risen. Young gay men and teenagers and lesbians who express same-sex desires have been targeted.

Parsi fled Iran about 15 months ago to Canada after working underground in Iran for about five years. "When I was in Iran I could not speak out," he says, "because I was sure that they would have killed me. But when I escaped I spoke out because we need a voice to explain what LGBTs suffer in Iran." Parsi ended up in Canada, because, unlike the US and most European countries, Canada accepts people forced to flee their homelands because of violence or repression based on sexual orientation.

Parsi, who is human rights secretary for the Persian Lesbian and Gay Organization, says, "The Islamic penal code says that if the government finds out any man has had sex with another man, he must be sentenced to death by hanging or be stoned to death or killed by some other terrible kind of death." Parsi adds that aside from fundamentalist interpretations of the Islamic faith, homophobia is deeply ingrained in Iranian culture.

Wary of the potential use of the issue of gay oppression in Iran to support a US-led attack on that country, Parsi says that "we

can not remove this culture by war." Even if regime change occurred tomorrow, he notes, the situation for LGBT people in Iran would be little different. Some people who want regime change in Iran may opportunistically use the atrocities against Iran's gay community to criticize the regime, but they do not sincerely believe in full equality, Parsi adds. "We believe we have just one way, send true information in Iran and when people get information they can support us."

For now, Iran's gay and lesbian communi-

This brief sketch of global homophobia and resistance shows that the question of full equality for LGBT people is at the forefront of the international struggle for solidarity and unity.

ties have no public allies inside Iran, according to Parsi. But he expressed hope in the international community of LGBT people. "In my opinion," Parsi says, "all of the LGBTs around the world are a family, a global family, and we should support each other and we will be successful."

In neighboring Iraq, LGBT activists report the formation of death squads within the sectarian militias. At least one militia, the Badr Corps had been assigned the task of hunting down and dealing with "immoral behavior."

The Iraqi LGBT Web site reports that gay, bisexual and transgendered people have been beaten, burned to death, killed in hand grenade attacks, kidnapped and shot execution style in the back of the head. In one incident, Hili describes two lesbians affiliated with Iraqi LGBT and working with the group to help the gay community and provide information to Iraqi LGBT who were killed in an Iraqi police raid in Najaf. The police, composed of Badr Corpsmen, officially accused the women of running a brothel.

Hili also accuses the US occupation forces of looking the other way. "When gay men have gone to the Americans for protection, they usually treat them very badly and laugh at them, and beat them in one reported incident." US forces have told gay and lesbian Iraqis to either deal with homophobic

violence on their own or leave. Hili reports that in one raid on a home, US soldiers discovered two gay men sleeping in the same bed and kicked and cursed at them. At the same time this wave of violence against Iraqi gays took place, the Pentagon publicized a report characterizing homosexuality as a "mental disorder," a conclusion it subsequently withdrew under intense criticism.

Hili says that there are no allies in Iraq, and he continues to seek international support.

In Eastern Europe, recent attacks on gay pride parades in Warsaw and Moscow, have highlighted cases of officially sanctioned homophobia. In Warsaw, a well-attended gay pride parade in early June was attacked by skinheads, religious extremists and anti-immigrant groups. According to Ireland, who reported on the event, the violent anti-gay demonstrators were mainly organized by ultra-right organizations with ties to a political party called the League of Polish Families (LPF). LPF is openly anti-Semitic, religious fundamentalist, anti-immigrant, homophobic and favors "brown shirt" tactics. Last May, LPF joined the ultra-right ruling coalition led by Lech Kaczynski, a staunch ally of the Bush administration.

The violent assault on the parade of several thousand Polish and international marchers was preceded by a government-ordered criminal probe of Poland's leading LGBT organization, Campaign Against Homophobia. Government investigators harassed the organization by "investigating" its financial dealings and false drug trafficking allegations. The Kaczynski government ordered the investigation at the request of the LPF. In the weeks leading up to the march, LPF leaders publicly called for violence. In previous years, LPF members merely harassed with hate mail, but this year LPF's new status emboldened it.

Just two weeks earlier in Moscow, extremists of similar ilk also attacked that city's first gay pride parade. In an added twist, the city's police aided the violence and arrested numerous parade marchers. According to Nikolai Alekseev, head of the Moscow-based Gay Russia, an organization that advocates for LGBT equality in Russia, neo-fascists weren't the lone culprits.

In an interview with *PA*, Alekseev said, "the attacks of May 27th are the full responsibility of the Moscow mayor [Yuri Luzhkov]. He's responsible for the wave of violence and hatred that took place." According to Alekseev, Luzhkov banned the parade in February, pub-

licly declaring it "immoral and unnatural," and announced the city would be unable to provide security if it took place. "They were not able to justify why they were banning it. They didn't have a single reason," Alekseev recalls. He believes that Luzhkov's public comments enabled neo-fascist extremists and others to assault the parade with impunity.

Since the attack took place, public documents obtained as part of a lawsuit against the city for violating the civil rights of the parade marchers reveal that Luzhkov had ordered his deputies "to take all possible measures" to stop the parade and to prevent "all public displays of homosexuality in Moscow," Alekseev says.

While Russian LGBT people claim few political allies in Russia itself, Alekseev says, the parade, the lawsuit, public discussion raised in the media and the political arena and international attention on the events have a positive side. "They talked about homosexuality more in the past few months than in the whole history of Russia," he contends. "People are ready to talk about it and discuss the issue," he hopefully remarks. As for future parades, Alekseev promises to continue to fight the ban on marching in court. He hints that his organization will simply go forward with next year's march.

Unfortunately, none of Russia's political parties condemned the violence. According to *Pravda*, Communist Party of the Russian Federation leader, Gennady Zyuganov described the parade as "unhealthy."

In other parts of the world, LGBT people are organizing. They are on the front lines against religious extremism and even, in some places, neo-fascist resurgence. Often, right-wing governments promote anti-gay sentiments to divide and weaken political oppositions. In Israel, for example, in an extraordinary show of unity, both Jewish and Muslim religious leaders denounced the Jerusalem World Pride 2006 march in August. Some extremist groups aligned with both religions threatened violence against parade marches if they marched near sacred sites. World Pride organizers refused to give into threats and denounced religious dogmatism that adheres to ancient pronouncements that demand killing men and women because of sexual orientation. In neighboring Lebanon, the LGBT rights group Lebanese Protection for Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals and Transgenders (Helem) is publicly organizing and calling for overturning the ban on that country's criminal prohibition on homosexuality.

In Nigeria, a coalition of gay and lesbian organizations and human rights activists are fighting a proposed ban on same-sex marriage in that country's national assembly. They carry on this struggle under threat of criminalization both for homosexuality and for public advocacy for the rights of LGBT people. Nigerian

2006, a joint statement released by more than two dozen African LGBT organizations based in 17 countries called for full civil rights. It called for full access to health care and public services and criticized "so-called liberal" western governments for supporting global economic policies "that divide our



Denis Sinyakov/AFP/Getty Images

△ Russian police forces arrest Volker Beck (C), a member of the Bundestag and a German lawyer after he was beaten by opponents of a planned gay pride parade in front of the Moscow City Hall, May 27, 2006.

President Olusegun Obasanjo supports a proposal to prosecute LGBT activists. In Uganda in August 2005, Victor Julie Mukasa, a lesbian activist who heads Sexual Minorities in Uganda was forced into hiding, after her home was raided by police. The Ugandan government, under President Yoweri Museveni, who has strong religious and ideological ties to the Bush administration, has expressed deep hostility to gay and lesbian people.

In 2005, Behind the Mask, a South Africa-based LGBT media outlet, led a campaign to publicize the case of seven men convicted in Cameroon on sodomy charges. Behind the Mask pointed out that laws criminalizing homosexuality violated international human rights principles and that the seven men should be freed.

Many African organizations view their struggle for LGBT rights as more than a simple matter of democratic rights. For them, it is an anti-imperialist struggle as well. In April

societies and create the poverty in which hatred, and homophobia, breed."

This brief sketch of global homophobia and resistance shows that far from being a secondary issue, the question of full equality for LGBT people is at the forefront of the international struggle for solidarity and the unity of our class and democratic movements. It is a key part of the global struggle against the ultra-right and various forms of extremism. Because the extremist Bush administration and the Republican-controlled Congress have done so much to promote homophobia here and abroad, changing control of Congress in November would be an important step. Sidestepping so-called cultural issues like LGBT equality in favor of "real issues" or to appease moderate or conservative voters aids the divisive tactics of the Republicans and allows them to use the club of homophobia to advance their extremist agenda. □

HOW CUBA SURVIVED

By Rémy Herrera

From an economic point of view, Cuba's growth performance from 1959 to 1989 was far from bad – despite strong external pressure, especially from the US embargo. Between 1959 and 1989, the Cuban economy recorded an average growth rate in its annual gross domestic product (GDP) of almost 5 percent. The average GDP per capita grew slightly more than 3 percent annually. As a consequence, over the same period, Cuba bears comparison rather well with the other Latin American countries. Cuban GDP in 1989 was only slightly less than that of Brazil and was at almost the same level as that of Mexico. On the contrary, at that time, it remained higher than that achieved by Argentina, Chile, Peru, and pre-revolutionary Venezuela.

Entry into the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) provided the Cuban economy with strong impetus; but in 1989, its national income remained less than half that of the USSR. The major feature of the Cuban economy over these three decades remained its dependence on external markets, mainly due to the island's specialization in sugar. The influence of external factors has always been important, sometimes even decisive, in accelerating (CMEA) or decelerating (US embargo) the strategies implemented by the revolution. In spite of strong constraints, and some insufficiencies, these strategies made it possible for the national economy to realize considerable advances in agriculture, industry and infrastructure.

One of the brightest successes of the revolution is undoubtedly the creation of a high-quality pharmaceutical and biotechnological complex. The third plan (1986-90) supported the production of a broad range of goods in the electronics sector. However, even with this rather favorable assessment, we cannot overlook the insufficiencies and deficiencies that persisted in



Jorge Rey/Getty Images

▲ A man harvests tobacco at a plantation in Pinar del Rio, Cuba.

the Cuban economy at the end of the 1980's. To recognize these weaknesses is to make a historical observation, but to consider relations between Cuba and the USSR as the continuation of a neocolonial pact, under the cover of socialism, is to make an ideological judgment. The Soviet Union did not own any means of production or land. Even if Cuba never succeeded in being a self-reliant country, its socioeconomic development only started in 1959 with the implementation of the socialist project.

The collapse of the Soviet Union pushed the Cuban economy into an extremely serious crisis. In the 1990's, the government's response was to maximize the flow of foreign currencies in order to increase imports and to guarantee both the needs of the people and the conditions of the recovery. The dismantling of CMEA, in which the foreign trade of Cuba was integrated and which protected it from the risks of the world markets, caused a brutal fall in exports (-79%) and imports (-73%) between 1990 and 1993. This followed sharp falls in investment and con-

If the Cuban state had to admit, temporarily, the penetration of market mechanisms, it seems to have succeeded in submitting them to the benefits of the people.

sumption, amplified by the hardening of the US embargo and foreign indebtedness. Productivity fell, as did GDP (-35% in volume between 1989 and 1993). The crisis hardly affected sugar production. The budget deficit grew because of increased needs for subsidies to publicly-owned enterprises and the political decisions to preserve, in spite of scarce resources, social cohesion by limiting the degradation of employment, wages, food distribution, education and health care. It was

quite different in the Russian "transition" to capitalism.

It was in this extremely difficult context that the revolutionary government engaged in fundamental reforms of the 1990's. The "special period in time of peace" began. Specifically, the response to the crisis consisted, initially (1990-93), of resisting external shocks by distributing the cost of the adjustment and the supply restriction. In a second response period (1993-96), the government attempted to reactivate the productive forces related to the sector of the economy that dealt with exports or foreign investment in order to achieve a quick and favorable reintegration into the world economy. In a third response period (1997-2000), the goal was to improve efficiency to reduce external pressure. The key measures in each period were geared toward equipping the economy with new growth engines to relieve the sugar sector and to generate cash receipts. The dollarized entries of capital associated with tourism, foreign direct investment and the sending of currencies from abroad favored growth recovery. The Cuban choice to remain socialist bore its fruits. Growth *recuperación* and macroeconomic internal balances took place at the end of 1994. Tourism replaced sugar as a strategic priority and is one of the keys to Cuba's economic success.

Consequently, one of the most important structural reforms was that of the sugar industry. Despite the extent of the reformation, the "end" of sugar specialization took place in a few months and involved a broad consultation of the workers. Accelerated in 2002, these reforms meant that 70 sugar refineries would be closed; production would be concentrated in the most efficient *centrales*; management would be trained to accommodate the modernization of equipment; more than one million hectares would be released for stock-farming or cultivation; and above all, more than 100,000 workers would be retrained and employed in new areas. As for agriculture taken as a whole, where results recorded since the crisis are most disappointing, the dilemma is to solve the difficulties encountered without permitting land privatization.

It is clear that the role of the state is crucial in the present restructuring of the Cuban economy, as well as in its future successes – especially in socialist planning. The state

effected this reorganization at a minimal socioeconomic cost and achieved its essential goal of preserving the socialist system, thanks to the centralization of a certain number of key decisions, the coordination between its micro and macro policies, and the affirmation of the primacy of social needs over any other interest. As a dollarized sector, tourism distorts access by Cubans to US currency, but the state organizes transfers of the receipts generated to ensure the continuity of the social system. Foreign direct investment and joint ventures were encouraged, involving autonomous outflows of capital and sometimes destabilizing the working relationships. The state protected the laws of labor and the role of trade unions while limiting wage differentials. Even during the dollarization period, each foreign firm paid wages in foreign currency through a "bridge company," which paid, in a second step, the workers' wages in Cuban pesos. The attention of the state had also to be redoubled in order to fight against corruption.

The sending of currencies from abroad increased the concern over inequalities, but the state has always firmly prevented all private accumulation of capital. Work for one's own

lot of activities (in trade, in craft industries, in the provision of services, and so forth), without legalization by the state of the recruiting of employees, except by the family holding the licenses. Stores were also opened where the transactions were conducted in dollars (or convertible pesos), as well as agricultural markets in which private peasants, recent recipients of land distributions, cooperatives and state farms can sell part of their production. Nevertheless, the majority of basic goods continues to be provided to the people, at very low prices, by the state food system (*libreta*), by the working canteens and by the restoration of collectives in schools and hospitals or directly by home-grown produce. Moreover, the army is frequently solicited to supply the official state markets with foodstuffs. The "free" sales made it possible for a number of peasants to grow rich, but these liquidities did not enhance capital dynamics or control any creation of value by the private use of wage-earning work. In brief, if the Cuban state had to admit, temporarily, the penetration of market mechanisms, it seems to have succeeded in submitting them to the benefits of the people. Thus, it is not possible to speak, until now, of a "transition" to capitalism in Cuba.□

Effects of the Adjustments to the Crises in the 1990's: Comparison Between Russia and Cuba

	Russia	Cuba
Life expectancy – men: 1990 (years)	63.8	72.9
Life expectancy – men: 1994 (years)	57.3	73.6
Life expectancy – women: 1990 (years)	74.3	76.5
Life expectancy – women: 1994 (years)	71.1	76.9
Infant mortality rate: 1990 (for 1,000 births)	17.4	11.1
Infant mortality rate: 1993 (for 1,000 births)	19.9	9.4
Population growth rate: 1990-2000 (%)	-0.3	+0.6
GDP growth rate: 1990-2000 (%)	-5.1	-1.9
Population: 1990 (million inhabitants)	148.3	10.7
Population: 2000 (million inhabitants)	145.5	11.3
Number of inhabitants per physician: 1994	224	202
Nutrition: 1994 (calories per day)	2427 < x < 3386	2833
Population below poverty line: 1990 (%)	10	6.3
Population below poverty line: 1993-96 (%)	23 < x < 35	14.7

Sources: IMF (1995), World Bank (1996), OECD (1995), Oficina nacional de Estadísticas (various years), and Ferriol Muruaga (2004).

WHAT'S WRONG WITH GLOBALIZATION?

by Erwin Marquit

Globalization, as the term is generally used, refers to the extension of the production and distribution of goods and services on a vastly greater international scale than ever before.

This increasing internationalization of economic activity is primarily the result of developments of what Marxists call the "forces of production," referring in broad terms to the land, factories, and the workers who operate them. These "forces of production" include but are not limited to technological progress in transportation and information exchange; computerization of economic data processing; automation and robotization of production; growing numbers entering the work force; and rising levels of education.

These factors facilitate the globalization of productive activity. This occurs by reducing obstacles in coordinating goods and services across great geographic and cultural divides.

In this sense, the technological ability to coordinate the forces of production efficiently across international boundaries does not have a class character. It is an objective process and operates as one of the laws of motion of the economy. The class character lies in their application.

The capitalist economy takes advantage of these changes. It does so in order to globalize its relations of production correspondingly. By "relations of production" is meant private appropriation of wealth that characterizes the capitalist system.

This, in turn, stimulates even more development of the forces of production in directions that escalate the process further. Any stimulation of the development of the forces of production for the purpose of producing profit for capitalists does indeed have a class character.

Some confusion in a Marxist understanding of the many-sided character of globalization arises from the term *relations of production*.

This is because of two distinct kinds of relations among people involved in production: the ownership relations; those aspects of social relationships in production that do not



Joe Roodie/Cathy Images

△ Sylvia Moore works on the Tom's of Maine deodorant assembly line in the manufacturing plant March 28, 2006 in Sanford, Maine. The Colgate-Palmolive Company announced recently that it's buying Tom's of Maine, the leading maker of "natural" toothpaste. The US market for Natural oral and personal care products is valued at \$3 billion and is growing at 15 percent per year.

specifically reflect the interests of the owners of the means of production. These two aspects are not the same. Confusion arises when they are equated. In traditional Marxist literature, the class character of the *relations of production* is a consequence of the ownership or property relations in regard to the "means of production." The term "means of production" refers to the factories, farms, etc used for production. In other words, ownership, determines class character. However, there are dimensions of production that do not have to represent the interests of the owners. For example, tech-

nology or equipment can be sold by a US company to another country.

Depending on use, this part of the forces of production, need not necessarily have a class character. A socialist oriented or a developing country use might give it a different quality.

For these reasons, the globalization of the forces of production do not have a class character, although the direction in which they develop is primarily the result of the operation of class forces.

These relations and forces of production comprise what classical Marxist political

economy calls "the mode of production." Marx argued that there was a "unity" or "correspondence" between these two elements.

While class character is determined by ownership, the productive forces have several components:

1. One component consists of the objects undergoing transformation in the production process (*objects of labor*). They include natural resources such as land, water, raw materials, oil, gas, other sources of energy and chemicals, auxiliary materials, and semi-processed components.

2. Another component is made up of the *means of labor* (e.g., tools and places of production such as factory plants, transportation and communications and electric grids). Taken together these constitute the *means of production*.

3. A third and most important component of the forces of production, however, is formed by the *social productive forces* also called *forces of labor*.

The social productive forces are workers and the way they are related to one another in the production process. The organization of production and the technology employed in it can be considered to fall partly with the means of production (for example, the non-human elements of an assembly line), and partly within the social productive forces (workers on an assembly line). The relationship among the workers in the organization of production can be called the *technological relations of production*. More on this later.

mediately seems to raise a paradox in regard to the forces of labor. Since those performing the labor obviously have a class

relationship between those performing the labor and the means of production.

In a class-divided society, the particular technology used can be imposed on the laborer for purposes of exploitation, such as technologies that are dangerous to the health or even life of the laborer. The imposition of the technology on the laborer therefore can, and indeed often does, have a class character, but the class character does not reside in the technology, but in the way it is used. Members of preclass societies have also (wittingly or unwittingly) used methods of labor that shortened their life spans.

The fact that Marxists can refer to an early communal people as a *preclass society* or a *classless society* indicates that the forces of production do not have a class character. A conquering horde, such as the legions of Caesar, can exploit the same group of people by extracting tribute from them without any change in the forces of production.

In a class-divided society, the technological relations of production can have a class character if they are structured so as to reflect the interests of the owners to the detriment of the workers. Thus the relationship of supervisors to the workers being supervised can have a dual character. Insofar as supervisors are necessary for the organization of production on a shop floor, their role has the class character of a worker. But insofar as the supervisors takes on the task of intensifying the labor of the workers or otherwise enhancing the extraction of surplus value, the work of the supervisors has the same class character as of that of the owners of the factory.

determined by whoever owns the means of production, so that its actual use in production clearly has a class character.

For example, the technology that greatly reduced the cost of international long-distance calls does not have a class character. The ability of appropriately educated workers in India to work in English-language call centers that serve the United States does obliterate their working-class character. Their employment by US firms to displace call-center workers in the United States is what gives this side of globalization a class character.

These economic processes are objective and independent of human will.

Globalization of the forces of production cannot be fought any more than the destruction of machinery in England in the nineteenth century could reverse the industrial revolution there. Our attention has to be focused on the way technological development is applied economically.

Marxist economists of Cuba, China, and Vietnam are very much aware of the positive and negative consequences of economic globalization. On the whole, they view it positively, utilizing globalization of the forces of production in three ways.

They use it to establish cooperative economic relationships in the socialized sectors of their economies without the exploitation of labor.

China, Vietnam, and to a lesser extent Cuba, are using globalization to attract capitalist investment in order to speed the development of their own productive forces.

They are also beginning to make foreign direct investment in capitalist countries in areas that are beneficial to their own domestic production.

This last initiative – export of capital that clearly involves the exploitation of labor in other countries – obviously raises new questions requiring Marxist analysis. For example, how are labor-management relations shaped by state-owned enterprises operating in a capitalist economy?

Globalization of the forces of production – a law of motion of the world economy – is not the problem. Marxist political economy has always understood that social problems do not arise from the forces of production, but from the relations of production under which forces of production are put to work. □

Globalization of the forces of production cannot be fought any more than the destruction of machinery in England in the nineteenth century could reverse the industrial revolution there.

character, how can one assert that this most important component of the forces of production does not have a class character?

In Marxist terminology, the term *class* is used to distinguish social relationships between one group of people and other groups in regard to the control over the means and product of production. Thus the term *class* refers to social relations (that is, property relations) among people, and not to the production

In keeping with what has been said above, the globalization of the means of production do not have a class character. They way they are put to use, however, is controlled by those who own them. This is what imparts a class character to the relations of production. A technology of production, as part of the means of production, does not in itself have class character even if it endangers a worker's health. But the use of such technology is

A BOOK OF REVELATIONS:

A REVIEW OF CHARLES FREEMAN'S *THE CLOSING OF THE WESTERN MIND*



Johannes Simon/AFP/Getty Images

△ Christian rituals were adopted at the founding of the Catholic Church to give an ideological basis for the Roman empire.

Reviewed by Thomas Riggins

The *Closing of the Western Mind* is a great introduction to the origins of Christian thought. Today with so many competing versions of Christianity, ranging from traditional Orthodox and Catholic views to liberal socially-conscious Protestantism and right-wing evangelical fundamentalists, it is helpful to have a guide such as this which explains how the original Christianity of the ancient world came about. Freeman will do a

credible job of tracing this history from Roman times to the High Middle Ages.

In his introduction he tells us that he will be dealing with "a significant turning point" in Western civilization. The point he has in mind is that time in the fourth and fifth centuries AD "when the tradition of rational thought established by the Greeks was stifled." It would take the West a thousand years to recover.

The Greek rational tradition was firmly established by the fifth century BC – its two

greatest founders were Plato and his student Aristotle. Unfortunately, Freeman confuses modern day empiricism with rationality and thus misapprehends the significance of Plato, following in the footsteps of his master Socrates, in the establishment of the rational method in Greece. Plato's thought was not "an alternative to rational thought" but one of the most extreme examples of it, subjecting all beliefs to the test of logical argument whenever possible.

Be that as it may, Freeman thinks that the

Greek rational tradition, today's term would be "scientific," was deliberately squashed by the Roman government from the time of Constantine with the aid of the official Church. The wide-open intellectual environment of the Roman Empire, both religiously and philosophically came to end in the 4th century when the Emperor Constantine made Christianity the "official" state religion. The "official" version became the only legal version and thus was the "orthodox" version. "The imposition of orthodoxy," Freeman writes, "went hand in hand with a stifling of

The Roman state adopted the religion and forced it upon everyone with the motive of controlling the minds of the population for the benefit of the empire.

any form of independent reasoning." The rule I would formulate here is that the more any belief system deviates from the original intentions of its founders the more intolerant and anti-rational it becomes.

Christianity was from the outset anti-rational. Freeman says, "It had been the Apostle Paul [actually an interloper, not one of the original 12, who never knew Jesus in the flesh-tr] who declared war on the Greek rational tradition through his attacks on 'the wisdom of the wise' and 'the empty logic of the philosophers'...." When Christianity became the official creed it closed down any contrary thinking thus dooming the West to a thousand years of backwardness.

A good example of this mind closing is given by Freeman when he discusses the dispute between St. Ambrose and the pagan Roman Senator Quintus Aurelius Symmachus. To my way of thinking the pagan Symmachus had an open modern mind while Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan and teacher of St. Augustine, was a bigot.

In the late fourth century the seat of the Western empire was at Milan and there were still many pagans (believers in the old traditional religion) who wished to be free to continue their form of religion. The Chris-

tian authorities were determined to repress all forms of religion save their own. One of the major symbols of the traditional religion was the Alter of Peace which adorned the Senate in Rome. The Christians had it removed. In 383 AD Symmachus and other senators petitioned the Emperor to have it restored. Ambrose (a major power behind the throne) was opposed and the petition failed. The mind sets of the two sides are clearly expressed in the following written exchange:

Symmachus: "What does it matter by which wisdom each of us arrives at the truth? It is not possible that only one road leads to so sublime a mystery."

Ambrose: "What you are ignorant of, we know from the word of God. And what you try to infer, we have established as truth from the very wisdom of God."



David McNew/Getty Images

△ Does the otherworldliness of Christian dogma deny people justice in this life?

The truth, however, should be able to triumph without the aid of the rack and the stake.

I pointed out above that Paul had no personal knowledge of Jesus in the flesh. Freeman asserted that the intolerance of the Christians (their rejection of logic and science) stems from Paul. What is worse, when, for political reasons, the Roman state adopted the religion and forced it upon everyone its motive was to control the minds of the population for the benefit of the empire, the actual teachings of Jesus were no more suited to the ends desired by the Romans than they are to those of the Bush administration and its evangelical base.

Paul, according to Freeman, distanced himself from the original 12 disciples (who distrusted his claims) and ended up, as we know, creating a theology that appealed to the Greco-Roman world and was rejected by the Jewish community from which Jesus came. In order to do this the real historical Jesus and his teachings (peace not war, forgiveness not vengeance, love and respect not hatred and contempt – i.e., Martin Luther King not Jerry Falwell or Pat Robinson) had to be replaced with an unreal Christ beyond history. Thus, Freeman writes, "Paul makes a point of stressing that faith in Christ does not involve any kind of identification with Jesus in his life on earth but has validity only in his death and resurrection." Thus the burden of actually having to follow the particular ethical path that Jesus the human trod is removed.

Since the claims made for Jesus as the Christ are simply impossible to accept from the point of view of reason, reason is dumped and replaced by "faith." Freeman gives the following quote from "the fourth-century ascetic Anthony: 'Faith arises from the disposition of the soul those who are equipped with the faith have no need of verbal argument.'

It is also interesting to note, as Freeman does, that Anthony is claimed not to have learned "to read or write, the point being made by his biographer that academic achievement was not important for a 'man of God' and could even be despised."

Freeman is incorrect, I think, in holding that the personal commitment Christians made to Christ (becoming "a single body with Christ... achieving a full identification with Christ through his death and then rising

with him from the dead") was "something new in antiquity."

This very belief was characteristic of the devotees of the Egyptian god Osiris whose worship in the cult of Isis and Osiris was widespread throughout the Roman Empire and whose popularity may explain why Christianity proved so popular to the Greco-Roman population.

Mary idolatry, still rampant with some forms of Christianity, may have stemmed from this cult connection as well. Freeman points out that Isis was the patron goddess of mariners and her symbol was the rose. Mary replaced her as the patron of sailors

The actual teachings of Jesus were no more suited to the ends desired by the Romans than they are to those of the Bush administration and its evangelical base.

and her symbol was also the rose. He also says "representations of Isis with her baby son Horus on her knee seem to provide the iconic background for those of Mary and the baby Jesus."

The Greek rational tradition demanded that people think for themselves and take responsibility for their actions. Christianity introduced a different conception of moral responsibility. It introduced the idea of "don't think, just follow orders." Freeman quotes a long extract from William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, in which a Jesuit explains the value of living the monastic life (every religion has something similar to this, as well as extremist political groups of the left and right). The Jesuit explains that if you obey the orders of your religious superior, no matter what they are, you can do no wrong!

The Superior may commit a fault in commanding you to do this or that, but you are certain that you commit no fault so long as you obey, because God will only ask you if you have duly performed what orders you received.... The moment what you did was done obediently, God wipes it out of your account...."

Nice. Not even God respects the Geneva Conventions, why should Rummy or Bush? We have to agree with Freeman when he declares that, "Here the abdication of the power to think for oneself is complete."

The book clearly demonstrates that religion in the West has been used to deprecate and reject reason (unless the church can misuse it in its own interests). It also demonstrates that the modern world, the progressive part at any rate, represents a return to the Greek outlook. When Freeman, in reference to the teachings of the church says, "The ancient Greek tradition that one should be free to speculate without fear and be encouraged to take individual moral responsibility for one's views was rejected," we can today assert that now in the 21st century, despite the tragic history of "real existing socialism" in the past century, no genuine Marxist committed to people's democracy would agree with the church on this matter. The most important internal reason for the

Intellectual self-confidence and curiosity, he points out, which lay at the heart of the Greek achievement, were recast as the dreaded sin of pride. Faith and obedience to the institutional authority of the church were more highly rated than the use of reasoned thought. The inevitable result was intellectual stagnation.

Reading Freeman's well written and interesting book will give you a great background and a deep historical understanding of how Christianity came to dominate the Western world for a thousand years, what that has cost in terms of intellectual degradation, and how, if the peoples of the West are to better their condition in the new century they must regain the intellectual confidence so characteristic of Greek civilization. I would maintain that the Marxist tradition, freed from the failed authoritarian models of the last century, is the best contemporary intellectual tool to achieve this end. But it is important to note



Brendan Snielowski/Getty Images

▲ A Christian activist holds a crucifix and a cross while performing the Stations of the Cross in front of the Russell Senate Office Building as part of a political gesture.

collapse of the socialist block, I think, may have been the lack of real participatory democracy and citizen involvement. Traditional Christianity as well as fundamentalism may likewise now be facing this malaise which is also characteristic of American democracy under the Bush administration. What Freeman writes about the Church can be extended to these other groups as well. He points out,

that the Greeks were not the only people to have a rational outlook. Similar thinkers can be found in the "classical" periods of other cultures, such as Ancient Egypt, China, India and the Islamic culture of the Middle Ages, to name but four, and the hope of a progressive future for all the world's peoples rests on a blending of the best progressive tendencies in all cultures. □

BOREAS

By Sam Heimer

And if one day I should throw you off my back, the burden of the world, and eat you in my extreme pity, I will be sure as the day is long to cut off the arm that in the end betrayed you.

- Sea to Sailor

Alas, your condolences will not reach me where I'll be hanging my hat.

- Sailor to Sea



Illustration by Sam Heimer

In the early morning hours of December 15th, 1901, the *Sindia*, a four-masted, 329-foot, steel hulled barque en route from Kobe, Japan to New York City, ran aground off the coast of Ocean City, New Jersey. The same storm that blew the ill-fated *Sindia* off course flooded the New England town of Miskatonic Bay. A light schooner idly drifted through the streets of the town until its mast tapped the window of the bedroom I had just been birthed in; a sign I was truly the son of a seaman.

I was orphaned at the age of ten. My mother passed of a brain fever the day I was born; my father, untreated stomach cancer a fortnight short of my tenth birthday. Due to the lack of a more nurturing institution, my father's illness, bestowed upon me, went undetected until I was put under the care of my grandmother at the age of nineteen. In a rather sickly state I moved to Ocean City, New Jersey, with my fiancé Annabel, with high hopes of beating my illness.

I have always believed in the healing power of salt water.

NOTUS

The *Sindia*, a ship in John D. Rockefeller's Anglo American Oil Companies' fleet, carried Kerosene to the Far East at the height of the Boxer Rebellion. The ship was to return with silk, camphor, and porcelain to be sold in time for the holidays. It is rumored that the crew used the turmoil of the times to loot Buddhist temples; legend has it there are still gold and jade statues in the lowest sunken ballasts of the ship. From Japan the ship sailed across the Pacific Ocean and around Cape Horn, the very tip of South America. Upon reaching Ocean City, New Jersey, the crew mistook a light ashore as a bastion of hope amiss the howling winter gale: the New York harbor. Perhaps they had been drunk, holding an early Christmas celebration, but I am not one to speculate. The captain of the ship, Allan Mackenzie, was brought before a British naval court where he was found to have "failed to exercise proper and seaman like care and precaution." They suspended his certificate for six months. Mackenzie never mastered a vessel again; a broken man, he died in his native Scotland before his suspension ended. It is said he spent his last days confined to a hospital bed. At all hours of the night he would speak in barely discernable tongues about curses and lurking. His mad ravings were said to have been brought on by a nervous breakdown after his court hearing, for you can take the seaman out of the sea, but you cannot take the sea out of the seaman. In his last testament he had asked to be pushed out to sea on a dinghy, which was carried out by a distant cousin. I often play with the idea that after his dinghy was swallowed up by the sea his corpse, reanimated by salt water and maritime voodoo-lore, walked across the Atlantic and took his place behind the wheel

of his beloved ship, which now lay half buried between the 16th and 17th street beach off the shores of Ocean City, New Jersey.

From Corsons' Inlet I could see the mast of the *Sindia* sticking out of the water off in the distance, a cold memorial to miscalculations. This thin strip of beach and dune where the bay meets the ocean has always been a place of sobering reflection for me. For the last week I have been tormented with the idea of widowing my wife and leaving behind a legacy of nothing. It was a rather warm day for November and the sea was calm. Normally weather like this puts me in good spirits but the weight of thought was overbearing. I neared the end of the peninsula and off in the water saw a glint of light reflected off some shiny surface. Intrigued I rolled up my pants and waded into the water; it was a knife. A rather small blade with a serrated side; it was a sailor's rigging knife. I pocketed the blade and it didn't even dawn on me where it could have come from.

The next day I was admitted to the hospital.

ZEPHYRUS

I was diagnosed inoperable after a fortnight's wait. I passed the time reading peculiar articles in the local paper about coyote sightings and the depleting population of the piping plover. They were nice enough to have my belongings sent for: a few changes of clothing, my shaving kit, a few magazines, and that peculiar knife. When the doctor brought the bad news Annabel fought back tears, my Grandmother began cursing in Slavic. Secretly we had all known for some time now and had saved our mourning and goodbyes for a later date. Even I had come to terms with my coming death. What I hadn't come to terms with was leaving Annabel with nothing but debt and heart break. Teary eyed she promised me she would be a proud widow, my grandmother had arranged to have us wed in my hospital room.

As a child I would often have wild dreams and night terrors; this personal history wasn't enough to quash the thought of this vision as drug induced. I dreamt I was walking far down on the bottom of the ocean where fish have features that are attributed to their proximity to hell. So far down that the only thing that pierced the water was the melodic song of a nearby pod of whales. A luminescent glow off in the blackness caught my attention; upon further investigation it was emanating from the shattered hull of a ship. As I guessed moments before reading it myself, the escutcheon read '*Sindia*'. An icy current of water seemed to flow away from the ship carrying a most distasteful odor of rot and disease and a low chant that sounded like "Ship is burning, ship is sinking, only the rats swim to shore." At this point I was frozen with fear, and yet still I entered the ship following the glow that was coming from the

lowest region of the vessel somewhere in the undamaged port-ballasts. I made my way through the crew's quarters and climbed through rattle down rigging to reach the bottom level of the ship. Peeling photographs floated here and there amidst porcelain jars, crates of rotten hay, and the poor coxswain who seemed very well preserved in the cold salt water. The coxswain, who seemingly could have prevented the sinking of the *Sindia*, was pinned to the cabin wall by a crowfoot that was rammed through his chest. All of his appendages floated freely as if he was dancing and he had a most sobering look of triumph on his face. I walked past him into the ballast room; there was a corpse half picked clean by crabs sprawled on the floor. To either side of the man were large jade dogs sitting at attention, obviously where the luminescence was originating. I edged closer to the man; he donned captain's attire. I had finally met Captain Allan Mackenzie, the man of the ship to which I felt such a connection. Alas I had been a fool, and gotten too close. He grabbed me by the hospital tunic and pulled me close to his half consumed face. "I was once what you are, you will be what I am!" With the captain's grave warning, the coxswain, still tacked to the wall, peered around the doorway and started laughing. I panicked and started flailing; I then realized that humans lose their gills after the fetal stage and oxygen was necessary to breathe, and started taking in mouthfuls of ocean water. I awoke screaming in a wet bed; I had pissed myself.

It was also rumored that Mackenzie attempted suicide as the ship was sinking. I imagine he either wanted to go down with his beloved vessel, or simply realized he would never sail again. The initial grounding of the boat prevented him from going to his quarters to retrieve his pistol so he took a knife from the coxswain, threatened to kill him for his follies and then brought the blade to his own neck. A few crew members tackled him and held him kicking and screaming until their rescue.

The next day Annabel was admitted to the hospital. The doctor said she had pneumonia; my Grandmother said it was of heartbreak. As Annabel's condition worsened from some phantom ailment, I got progressively better and better. Apparently the cancer was receding and even exiting through the blood filled bowel movements that had been plaguing me for the past week. A miracle perhaps, but I know better. The law of Equivalent Exchange states that you release on condition of receiving an equivalent in return. Maybe Annabel sold her soul in hopes of saving me, or maybe it was some freak occurrence, but as the nurse was packing my bags to be released the doctor was giving my fiancé an hour to live. I slipped a diamond ring onto her finger, picked up her frail body, and ran barefoot, crying, five blocks to the ocean. The whole way she looked up at me with a proud content look; as we crossed the dunes she told me she loved me, and even though I didn't believe in God

or the afterlife, she'd wait for me by the gates of heaven, and then she passed. Screaming, I waded into the water still clutching her body. All too late were the healing powers of salt water. As my scream echoed down the shoreline waves carried off my wife. As far as depression goes, I was on a slow boat to China.

There was a clan of Viking that would only attack on a clear harvest moon, or blood moon as they thought it; their name escapes me. A harvest moon was always most beautiful on cloudless nights hanging just above the ocean's horizon as viewed from the boardwalk where I was currently parked thinking about my lost Annabel. I had this little fantasy as a teen that on one of those clear harvest moon nights Viking long ships would silently pull ashore and hordes of Norseman would siege the boardwalk raping, killing and looting. There would be no moon tonight though, a large thundercloud was rearing behind me inland; just beyond the bay distant thunderclaps were audible. At this point I was entertaining the thought of death.

I didn't see him flank my auto. Before I could reach for the revolver in the glove compartment he flung open the drivers side door and stabbed me in the stomach twice and dragged me out to the curb face first. He took my billfold and was off running, leaving me for dead.

EUEUS (East Wind)

There I was on the beach of a harsh mistress called sea. I crawled over the dunes and down the beach on my hands and knees leaving a trail of red; I fell short of the water. The discordant cacophony of the crashing waves and coming storm was deafening. The gulls formed lines around my heaving body all vulturine like and roared with carrion mocking laughter. Coyote haunts bayed from the dunes behind me; their sad, chamel song brought ghost crabs out of their sandy graves in hopes of a hot meal. The whole scavenger world came out to watch me die and I wasn't even wearing my Sunday best. The tide was coming in, washing away the tiny fingers of crimson that disavowed my organs to dissipate in the nearing salt water. I felt pins and needles in my hand; just then I noticed I had crawled down to the water's edge with that damn knife in tow. I flung it aside into a tittering patch of plover and gulls that scattered with my last act of irritation. The nearing surf immediately rose and pulled the cursed blade back into the sea. Finally the tide reached out and gently carried me into the shallows. The tittering scavengers and shore fauna dispersed, the sea went calm, and the massing thunderclouds broke, exposing a most beautiful blue dusk.

I have always believed in the healing power of the salt water.□

TRABAJANDO POR EL CAMBIO

Por Tony Pecinovsky

Hoy en día el salario mínimo federal de cinco dólares con quince centavos la hora (el mini-salario) ya no sirve para mucho. Con \$5,15 casi, casi puedes comprar dos galones de gasolina, casi puedes ir al cine, o casi puedes comprar dos hamburguesas y un refresco en McDonald's. Sin embargo, millones de norteamericanos se sostienen con \$5,15 la hora. En dólares reales, \$5,15 por hora equivale a poco más de \$200 a la semana, o alrededor de

Según una encuesta de opinión pública, el 79 por ciento de los respondientes estaban a favor de un aumento del salario mínimo.

\$10.700 por año. Olvídate del cuidado de tu salud, de las vacaciones, de pagos por enfermedad, de fondos de jubilación y de un trabajo seguro; los trabajos de salario mínimo muy pocas veces ofrecen estas clases de beneficios. Y, si eso fuera poco, según un reporte divulgado en el 2002 por el Instituto de Política Económica (EPI, por sus siglas en inglés) el salario mínimo federal ha "perdido el 10 por ciento de su poder adquisitivo" desde 1997, la última

vez que fue aumentado. Y, no queda duda que el poder adquisitivo del mini-salario federal ha decaído aun más desde 2002.

Con toda y la cercanía de las elecciones bianuales, ya es más importante que nunca de que comprendan las familias de clase trabajadora el papel del salario mínimo federal en cambiar el balance de fuerzas políticas en contra de la ultraderecha y sus compinches corporativos. Esperan estos definir los términos del debate ideológico; buscan dividir a la clase trabajadora y así triunfar de manera sobresaliente en estas elecciones. Pero los sindicatos laborales, grupos comunitarios, organizaciones religiosas y otros están en lucha contra ellos. Van ganando control de antemano del debate ideológico, forjan la unidad de clase trabajadora, en especial con

comunidades de color, y utilizan a la cuestión del mini-salario como pista de lanzamiento para la movilización de votantes progresistas este noviembre.

El Debate del Mini-salario

El salario mínimo federal, establecido por primera vez en 1938 durante la administración del presidente Roosevelt, creó lo que los economistas llaman un "piso salarial," un mínimo debajo del cual no se dejan caer los salarios. Y, desde entonces el mini-salario federal siempre ha sido atacado.

Grupos de ala derecha como es la Heritage Foundation alegan que el aumentar el salario mínimo aumenta el desempleo, corre a los negocios de las comunidades y causa alzas en los precios de bienes del



Sandy Huffaker/Getty Images

△ Un aumento en el sueldo mínimo afectaría positivamente a millones de familias trabajadoras.

sector de servicios mientras hace empeorar la calidad de los mismos. Dicen estos que los aumentos en el salario mínimo no hacen nada para eliminar a la pobreza y que en realidad solo sirven los aumentos para aumentar en vez de disminuir a las diferencias salariales entre la gente de color y las mujeres a un lado y los hombres blancos al otro. Mientras que sueña la Heritage Foundation del mercado libre y de la mano invisible obrando en la luz ideológica de oferta y demanda, hay quienes ofrecen un análisis más objetivo, así desmintiendo los argumentos más frecuentes.

¿Es cierto que los aumentos en el salario mínimo aumentan al desempleo, corren a los negocios de las comunidades o resultan en aumentos en los precios de bienes del sector de servicios? ¿Y cómo se relaciona el salario mínimo con las cuestiones de pobreza e igualdad de razas y géneros?

¿Hace Aumento del Desempleo?

Según un estudio hecho por el EPI en 1998, "luego del aumento más reciente en el salario mínimo en el 1996-97 el desempeño del mercado de empleos a bajo salario fue lo mejor que se había visto en las últimas décadas..." Los patrones absorbieron los aumentos en el costo de mano de obra con más productividad, menos gastos para reclu-

tamiento y capacitación, menos ausentismo y un mejoramiento del moral. Según el reporte, no se encontró a ninguna "pérdida sistemática significativa de empleos". Y en los estados en donde se haya aumentado el

Los aumentos en el salario mínimo sí levantan a millones de gente y les permiten pagar la renta, comprar alimentos y quizás ahorrar unos centavitos.

salario mínimo por arriba del mínimo federal (unos 17 estados más el Distrito de Columbia ya tienen salarios mínimos superiores al federal) no se ha notado ninguna pérdida significativa de trabajos.

¿Correr a los Negocios?

La gran mayoría de los trabajos a bajo salario se encuentran en el sector de servicios, ventas a menudeo, restaurantes y limpieza, entre otros. Aunque muchos de nosotros quisiéramos correr Gap, a McDonald's y a otros, aumentos de salarios

no son la bala de plata. Ni con el salario mínimo estatal de Oregon, de \$7,50 la hora, se han logrado correr al Gap ni a McDonalds. Todavía hay restaurantes de comida rápida en Vermont en donde el mínimo es de \$7,25 la hora. Un aumento en el salario mínimo no va a correr a los negocios del sector de servicios, simplemente porque los consumidores no van a otros estados para conseguir bienes del sector de servicios. Un residente de Illinois (donde el salario mínimo es de \$6,10 la hora) no va a viajar hasta Missouri (donde el mini-salario es de \$5,15) para ir al cine, comer hamburguesas o comprar ropa porque así no sale ahorrando. Las diferencias entre los precios del sector de servicios en Illinois y en Missouri tienen más que ver con los impuestos, los factores geográficos y niveles generales de educación de la fuerza de trabajo que con diferencias en los salarios mínimos. Y es igual por todo el país.

¿Se Aumenta a la Pobreza?

Se estima que unos 7,3 millones de trabajadores (un 5,8 por ciento de la fuerza laboral del país) recibirían un aumento en sus salarios si fuera aumentado a \$7,25 el salario mínimo federal, lo propuesto por el senador Kennedy (estas figuras no reflejan a los estados donde el salario mínimo ya es de \$7,25 la hora o más). Debido a los efectos colaterales, más bien recibirían un aumento tam-



Alex Wong/Getty Images

△ Trabajadores que ganan el sueldo mínimo mantienen a sus familias pero no ganan lo suficiente para salirse de la pobreza.

bién unos 8,2 millones de trabajadores (un 6,5 por ciento de la fuerza laboral del país) que ahora ganan alrededor de un dólar arriba del salario mínimo.

Según la Heritage Foundation, "solamente el 2 por ciento de los trabajadores norteamericanos ganan el salario mínimo, pero un 5 por ciento de la fuerza laboral está sin trabajo". "¿Cuál grupo necesita más ayuda?" preguntan ellos. Según su lógica, la lógica de oferta y demanda, se aumentaría la demanda para los trabajadores a salario bajo en proporción directa con la reducción del salario mínimo; por ejemplo, estarían los patrones más dispuestos a ocupar a más

una ciencia. Los negocios, comenzando con Henry Ford y el Taylorismo, han aprendido dividir las funciones de trabajo en sus componentes más pequeños y se calcula con precisión la fuerza de obra y el tiempo necesario para completar una tarea determinada. Una vez que se haya ocupado a la cantidad necesaria de trabajadores no hace falta ni uno solo más, ni por mal pagado que sea.

En realidad, el argumento de la Heritage Foundation no es más que una burda estrategia de dividir y conquistar. Si se oponen los trabajadores desempleados a los trabajadores de bajo salario, ambos acaban peleando por las migajas. Los aumentos en

más del 15 por ciento de afronorteamericanos saldrían beneficiados por un aumento. Los latinos forman más del 13 por ciento de la fuerza laboral, pero los latinos serían más del 19 por ciento de todos los trabajadores impactados por un aumento.

Las familias trabajadoras del 20 por ciento más bajo de ingresos reciben solamente un 5 por ciento de los ingresos nacionales. Pero si hay aumento en el salario mínimo más del 38 por ciento de los beneficios se destinaría a estos trabajadores de escasos recursos. Un aumento en el salario mínimo ayudaría a dismantelar las estructuras del racismo institucionalizado y ayudaría a pro-



Sandy Huffaker/Getty Images

▲ Obreros agrícolas cosechan fresas en una finca en Carlsbad, California.

gente a salarios inferiores y así se disminuye la tasa de desempleo.

Sin embargo, de manera muy conveniente para ellos la Heritage Foundation ha hecho caso omiso de un aspecto central del manejo de negocios. En la gran mayoría de los trabajos del sector de servicios y muchos otros similares solo hace falta un número determinado de trabajadores para desempeñar determinadas clases de trabajo, y ese número los patrones lo saben perfectamente bien. A McDonald's les hace falta a tanta gente para preparar hamburguesas y papas fritas o para trabajar en la caja durante las horas pico de mediodía. El GAP solo necesita a tanta gente para las ventas y abastecimiento de ropa durante el tiempo navideño. Los comerciantes han hecho de esto todita

el salario mínimo no aumentan a la pobreza, pero sí levantan a millones de gente y los permiten pagar la renta, comprar alimentos y quizás ahorrar unos centavitos.

¿Qué Tal la Igualdad de Razas y Géneros?

Muy al contrario del mito de ala derecha, la gente de color y las mujeres son los grupos que más se beneficiarán con un aumento del salario mínimo. Son mujeres más del 60 por ciento de los trabajadores que se beneficiarían de manera directa de un aumento a \$7,25 la hora. Se estima que beneficiarían de manera directa un 7,3 por ciento de la fuerza laboral femenil total. Los afronorteamericanos representan más del 11 por ciento de la fuerza laboral total, pero

porcionarles trato igual a todas las familias de clase trabajadora.

La Lucha Actual

En 1938 el mini-salario fue de 25 centavos la hora, cantidad que equivale a \$3,35 en dólares del 2005. El salario mínimo federal alcanzó su máximo poder adquisitivo en el 1968 cuando era de \$1,60 la hora, que equivale a \$9,12 en dólares de 2005. Si el mini-salario actual de \$5,15 se hubiera mantenido al tanto con la inflación, a estas alturas hubiera alcanzado a los \$8,70 por hora.

Aunque nadie tiene esperanzas de ver a un aumento del mini-salario federal a corto plazo (por lo mínimo, no hasta después de las presidenciales de 2008), los sindicatos de trabajadores, grupos comunitarios, orga-

nizaciones religiosas y algunos comercios están luchando y ganando aumentos a los salarios mínimos a nivel estatal. Missouri es un ejemplo perfecto de cómo cobran apoyo las organizaciones de base para aumentar al salario mínimo mientras movilizan a los votantes a que acudan a las urnas para las elecciones bianuales.

En Missouri, fuerzas progresistas como son la Unión Internacional de Empleados de Servicio (SEIU, por sus siglas en inglés), Acom, La Coalición Electoral Progresista de Missouri, y Trabajos con Justicia, entre otros, formaron a la coalición "Darles a los Missourianos un Aumento" que financió y organizó a una iniciativa electoral sobre el salario mínimo. Desean aumentar al salario mínimo en Missouri de \$5,15 a \$6,50 la hora y luego pegarlo a la taza inflacionaria.

Para conseguir una votación en noviembre sobre la cuestión del aumento en el salario mínimo, la coalición tuvo que presentar para el 9 de mayo u antes las firmas válidas de 93.000 votantes registrados. ¡No fue nada fácil! Y más difícil aun, la coalición no comenzó a recolectar firmas de manera oficial hasta el 1º de abril. En solamente cinco semanas la coalición tuvo que organizar y llevar a cabo una campaña a escala estatal, ocupar a empleados para coordinar y dirigir a los equipos y caminar por las calles, movilizar a cientos de voluntarios y combatir a los intentos de la ultraderecha por confundirles y distraerles a los votantes (firmantes potenciales de la petición) de la cuestión verdadera.

La coalición también tuvo que conectar su campaña a las elecciones bianuales. Antes de la campaña las bases democráticas de Missouri tuvieron una sola motivación para ir a las urnas en noviembre: elegir entre dos candidatos federales, Claire McCaskill y Jim Talent, para representar a Missouri en el

Senado. Se dio cuenta "Darles a los Missourianos un Aumento" que la iniciativa electoral sobre el salario mínimo les ofrecería a los votantes demócratas otra razón por votar esta vez, y si es que votan más bien votarán por los candidatos demócratas, ayudando así a McCaskill a triunfar sobre Talent.

Según una encuesta de opinión pública de la compañía Garin-Hart-Yang, el 79 por ciento de los respondientes estaban a favor de un aumento del salario mínimo. La encuesta también encontró que la iniciativa gozaba de más apoyo entre los subgrupos demócratas: el 93 por ciento de los afroamericanos, el 91 por ciento de demócratas, apoyaban a la iniciativa el 90 por ciento de los que apoyaban a McCaskill, el 89 por ciento de mujeres sin estudios universitarios y el 89 por ciento de familias sindicalistas. La encuesta también encontró que la iniciativa goza de una inmensa popularidad entre los votantes no identificados como demócratas: el 86 por ciento de los no decididos (en las elecciones por el Senado), el 80 por ciento de los independientes y el 79 por ciento de los votantes rurales apoyaban a la iniciativa.

Descubrieron los miembros de la coalición que la iniciativa sobre el salario mínimo ayudaría a McCaskill a ganar cerca de 3 puntos de porcentaje sobre Talent. Si los votantes de clase trabajadora acuden a las urnas para aumentar al salario mínimo, bien pueden resultar decisivos entre una demócrata pro-libertad de escoger, pro-trabajadores y pro-cuidado de salud a un lado, y un republicano anti-libertad de escoger, anti-trabajadores y anti-cuidado de salud.

En un período de cinco semanas la coalición logró recolectar a más de 210.000 firmas y el 9 de mayo las entregó al secretario de estado. Se estima que a estas alturas ganan el mini-salario actual más de 42.000

residentes de Missouri. Según la coalición, el nuevo salario mínimo, si los votantes lo aprueban este noviembre, va a generar entre \$3,3 millones y \$4,3 millones cada año en nuevos ingresos para el estado e inyectará a más de \$21 millones en nueva actividad a la economía.

Conclusión

Aunque no lo vamos a saber por seguro hasta noviembre, ya parece muy probable que los trabajadores de salario mínimo en Missouri van a recibir ese aumento de \$1.35 por hora que tanto necesitan. Y, si la campaña del salario mínimo aumenta la votación de McCaskill en un 2 o 3 por ciento, vamos a tener a una demócrata de centro-izquierda en el Senado en vez de otro republicano ultraderechista.

Hay otra razón también que presta una importancia estratégica a las iniciativas electorales estatales sobre el salario mínimo: las iniciativas electorales, además de movilizar al voto a nivel estatal y sentar las bases para un futuro aumento del salario mínimo federal, también levantan la cuestión de la redistribución de riquezas.

La redistribución de riquezas es algo central para el movimiento por una sociedad más igualitaria, más humanitaria, socialista. Y aunque puedan alegar algunos que un aumento del salario mínimo es una mínima victoria, la mayoría de la gente y en especial las familias de clase trabajadora que ganan el mini-salario ven a un aumento en el salario mínimo como paso gigante por el sendero correcto. Además, si no podemos unimos para tomar pasos pequeños, ¿cómo vamos a poder algún día tomar juntos los pasos grandes? □

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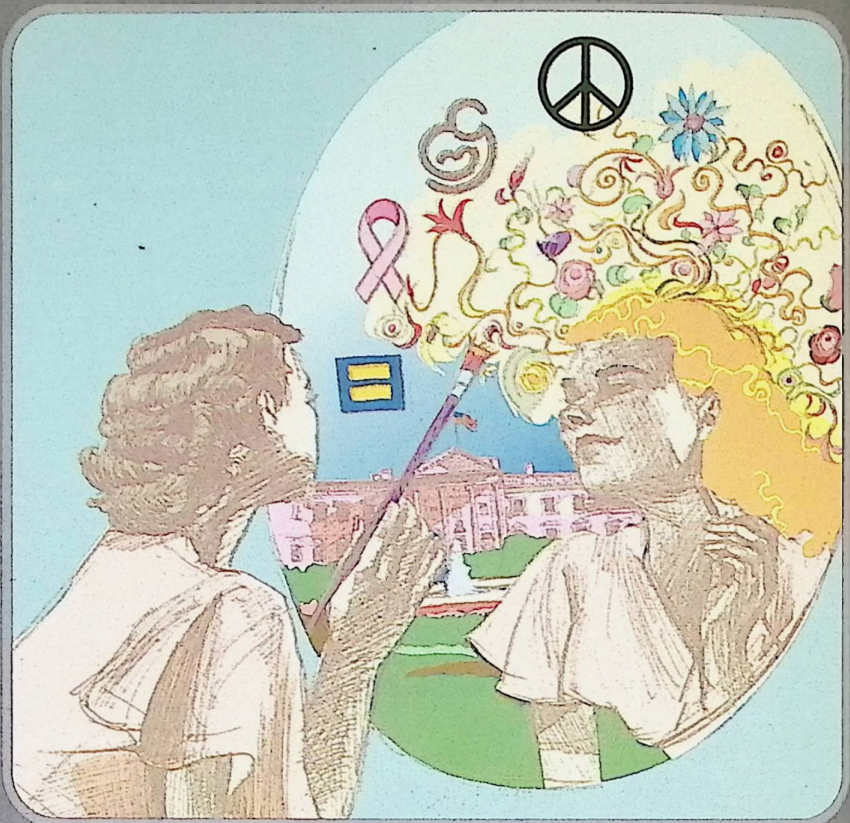


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