

POLITICAL AFFAIRS A MARXIST MONTHLY

pa

March 2006

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**THE
BUSH
SPY
SCANDAL**
THE
CASE FOR
IMPEACHMENT



**AN EDUCATOR'S
VIEW OF CUBA**

**IMPERIAL
FAULTLINES**

**BATTLING
HETEROCENTRISM**

**INTERVIEW WITH
CUBAN CRIME
NOVELIST
LEONARDO PADURA**

\$4.95



IN THIS ISSUE...



Lawrence Albright digs into the Bush administration's NSA spying scandal, its historical roots, and its political motivations. Tying the spying scandal to other Bush administration repressive measures, such as the USA PATRIOT Act and subversion of anti-torture laws, Albright gives us the tell-tale signs that Bush is ushering in a police state. Gerald Home adds to this analysis an article on the international roadblocks confronting US imperialism and Bush policies. David Sugar points to the light at the end of the tunnel by highlighting recent developments in Venezuela in his discussion of the use of new technology in the Bolivarian Revolution. Brian Fitzpatrick points to viable alternatives in his essay on the Cuban education system and the social development of young people in that island country.

On the cultural and ideological fronts, we offer an interview with controversial Cuban novelist Leonardo Padura in both Spanish and English. Joel Wendland tackles the question of heterocentrism from a Marxist perspective, and Glenn Burleigh reintroduces us to some key ideas developed by Rosa Luxemburg, a major ideological leader of the German Communist Party.

Finally, we bring you commentaries on current topics, book reviews, new poetry, and much more. Please do not hesitate to share your comments, questions or criticisms.

Peace,
PA Editors

CELEBRATE
**International
Women's
Day**

MARCH 8
with PA



Illustrations by Victor Veloz

► After three years, more than 2,230 US troops killed and more than 31,000 Iraqis killed, Iraq still burns.



Marwan Ibrاهيم/AFP/Getty Images

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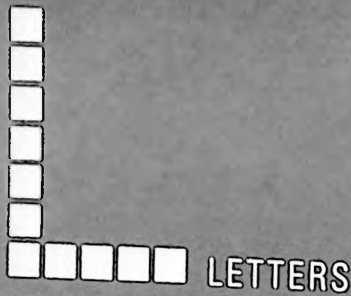
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Please send your letters to
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Political Affairs, 235 W. 23rd St., NY, NY 10011.

Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

Is This Where Our Nation Is Headed? Hayward, Wisconsin

At the birth of this nation, we were blessed with some of the greatest minds this nation has known. Men like Washington, Jefferson, Adams, Madison and others, with the same dedication to personal and religious liberty. Their vision and dedication in the forging of the Constitution of the United States has been proven by the test of time for over two hundred years, and has made of this country the envy and commanded the respect of the world.

It seems we now have abandoned the truth handed down to us by Madison, when he wrote,

Every new and successful example therefore of a perfect separation between ecclesiastical and civic matters is of importance. We are teaching the World the great truth that Governments do better without Kings and Nobles than with them. The merit will be doubled by the other lesson that Religion flourishes in greater purity, without than with the aid of Government.

At the risk of being labeled a "doom and gloomer," I am very much afraid that those dire predictions are now coming to the fore. The religious right has a firm control on the reins of government, and is not far from turning this nation into a theocracy, much like the theocracies of many of those countries in the Mideast. Our courts, with the confirmation of a majority of right-wing justices are in line to form what has rightly given us a very unpleasant taste in the mouth, that of a fascist state. Webster defines "fascist" as "a strongly nationalistic movement where all industry and labor is regulated by a strong national government, while all opposition is rigorously suppressed." We are now hell bent on the path to such a government, run by the religious right, and the power and money of big business. A government that

will, and is, running roughshod over the rights of the individual, and bent on tearing down the wall between church and state.

Warren Ogren

US Not America San Francisco, California

Some time ago you published a letter of mine asking writers and others not to call this country "America" and I appreciated that. Alas Steven Laffoley does it, not once or twice but 10 times in his article appearing in your December issue. "America" even appears in the Dylan photo caption, which at least you as editors could have changed.

While bemoaning the current state of US politics, Laffoley's article unintentionally celebrates the arrogant, imperialist, racist nature of those politics by giving this country the name of an entire hemisphere containing millions of other people, mostly of color. Along with stealing the name comes a profound contempt for all those people. Doesn't anybody realize it is simply insulting? Yes, I know it is usually just habit, but folks writing in *PA* should know better.

Elizabeth Martinez

High Test Score Tustin, California

PA's December issue is wonderful: beautiful cover and many distinguished and positive articles. I got all but one of Marxist IQ questions correct. Isn't this something: on January 16 I will turn 77, having been born exactly one day after Martin Luther King Jr. A donation is enclosed.

George T. Gaylord Jr.

Editor's Note:
Intelligent Design was a hot topic in February. Below is a sampling of the responses.

No Guarantee Detroit, Michigan

A very thorough and persuasive critique of intelligent design, but aren't you engaging in your own "leap of faith" in the very last

line, when you state that "science, education and reason can guarantee America's and the world's future"? Even with all that, democracy, the fighting spirit of the greatest of the ancestors and the future generations, plenty of luck, God on our side and a bag of chips, thanks to the mess our misleaders have made, we have at best a fighting chance, and no "guarantee" whatsoever.

Keep swinging,
Thomas W. Stephens

Fighting for Intelligent Science Bangkok, Thailand Via e-mail

Thank you for taking the time to write an excellent piece on the intelligent design. That was one of the first articles that actually delves into the agenda and motivation behind the people pushing this fraud, and it definitely gives me some more "ammunition" when trying to debunk people (many of whom are well-meaning but uneducated) that push this ridiculous non-theory.

I'm not even close to Marxist, so you can be sure my opposition to Intelligent Design doesn't stem from my political persuasion, but I'm very glad that there is a broad coalition of people (especially writers, journalists, bloggers, scientists, etc.) that are willing to fight this fight.

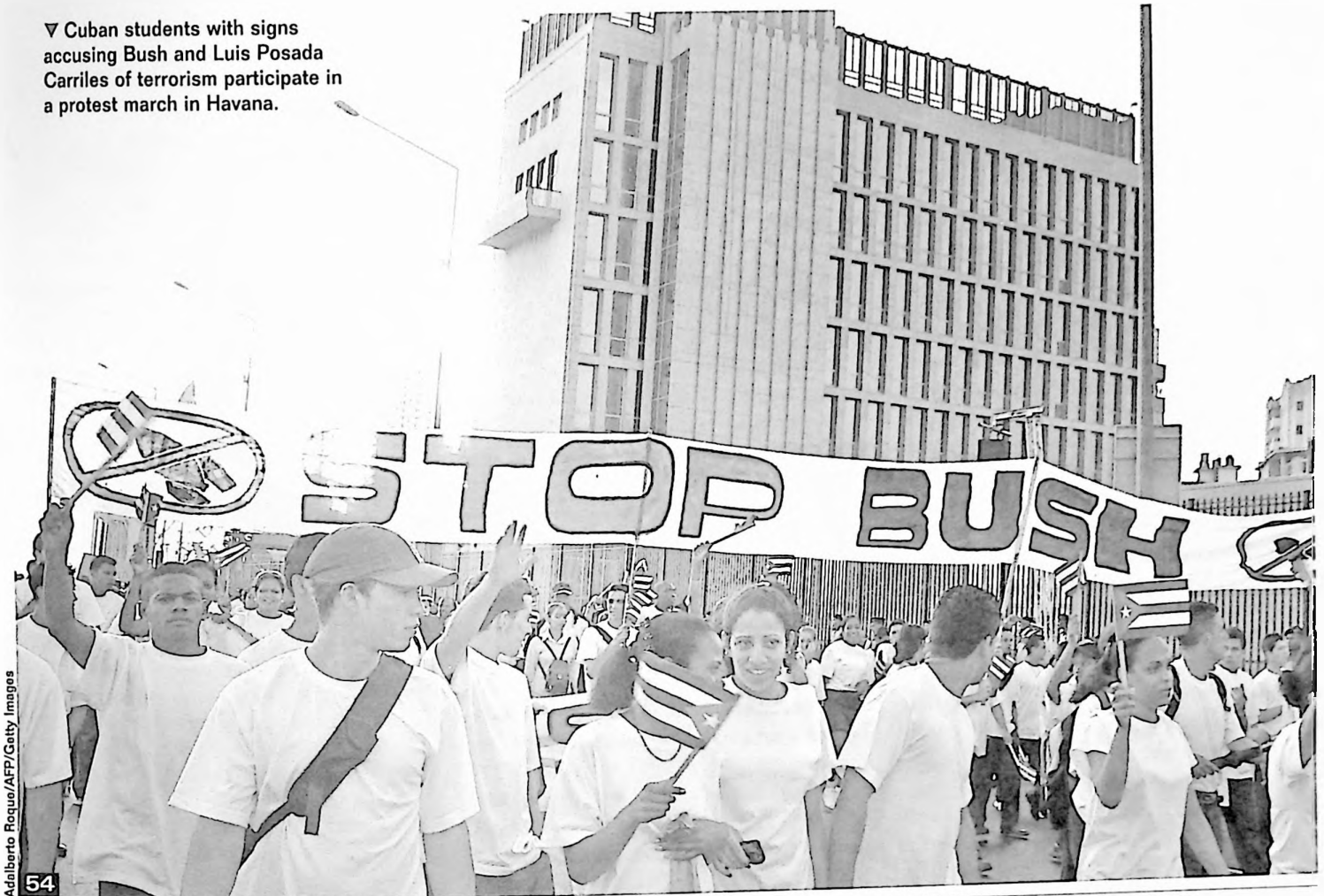
Sincerely,
Kirk Davis

Intelligent Design is Crap Alamogordo, New Mexico Via e-mail

I am "right-wing" and a Republican. I abhor the ideals of liberalism in all its forms. I also believe "Intelligent Design" is pure CRAP! Please don't lump all right-wing Republicans as believers in "Intelligent Design," or as fundamental Christians. Many of us believe that this insidious "theory" is as dangerous to American society, as is unchecked liberalism.

Thank you,
W.J. Bentley
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▽ Cuban students with signs accusing Bush and Luis Posada Carriles of terrorism participate in a protest march in Havana.



Adelberto Roque/AFP/Getty Images

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Dismayed about the Negation of God Via e-mail

I read with dismay just the title of your article "War Against Reason: The 'Intelligent Design' Scam."

God is not a "scam." Millions and millions of people believe in God. And thousand of scientists also believe in God. And whatever has happened in Pennsylvania will not change our beliefs. Because as the *Bible* says, it is for faith that we believe in God and all his might. You are right when saying that science is making war against God and those who follow God. Every effort is being done in a relentless but futile war against the almighty God. Believers in God can be prosecuted, insulted, massacred. But nothing will prevail against God.

Let me tell you that, whatever title or scam article is written to negate God, it is against God, not us, the people who believe in God. Science will do whatever effort to try to convince and mislead people to say that God is just an invention. The plan is to poison our children since early age with the "scam" of evolution hypothesis.

Thank God we understand those evilish efforts. Certainly, as the *Bible* has mentioned it, many will fall into the trap. But those who stay strong in the faith to God, we will receive the crown of life.

Maxei DeVraie

God's Cruel Jokes Via e-mail

Thanks for you article on ID.

A point that is sometimes missed, or rather understated, is that ID is anti-education. Put into a historical context, the "god of the gaps" could have been used to explain rainbows. Once we start to accept that what we do not understand is the work of an intelligent force, we lose all reason to discover. This is not about stimulating debate, as it is often portrayed here (in Australia), it is about stimulating ignorance, the nutrient of fundamentalism. Next come the priests and the soothsayers who are needed to explain the mysteries of the intelligent force. The world is full of things I don't understand: if there is an intelligent designer, why is my body wearing out? Why is the wealthiest nation the world has seen unable to provide basic health care? Why is there a glove puppet in the White House? If ever I run into this

cosmic Copperfield I'll punch him (invariably him) in the nose! Enjoy the holidays, ironically it was because the Romans were less than perfect astronomers that their calendar was out of step with the Earth's rotation that the early Christians when they stole the solstice got the date wrong!

Cheers,
Paul Storey

Poor Cover Choice Chicago, Illinois

As a both an artist and a regular reader of your publication, I was blown away by your poor choice of cover design for the February issue, featuring a roman-collared priest who is seemingly trying to explain the Church's view on creation. Unfortunately, this is a total mischaracterization of the Catholic Church's position on the teaching of evolution. As Owen Williamson points out in the featured article, [though, not strongly enough I think] the Catholic Church has been a strong partner in upholding the teachings of evolution, both today and historically.

I'm not sure if the artist was simply ignorant of the fact that his attempt to portray a generic right-wing religious ideologue was actually a depiction of a Catholic priest, or if this was a willful dig at Catholics. As a progressive Catholic who values both reason and faith, I am deeply offended by this altogether false portrayal.

Regards,
Valency Hastings

Editor's note:

We thank Valency Hastings' for responding to the cover art for the February issue, which depicts the struggle to stop ultra right-wing Christian fundamentalists from pushing their views in public school science classrooms. While we appreciate that one interpretation of the artists' rendering of this conflict might be that it is aimed at the Catholic Church, we would point out that ministers from many Christian denominations wear similar attire. We saw this image as a means of cluing the reader into the person's identity as minister. As Hastings notes, the Catholic Church does not support the agenda of the ultra right as it relates to teaching intelligent design as science. Thank you for your comments, and keep them coming.

Lost and Found in a Material World New York, NY

In the January issue of *PA* Joel Wendland has an interesting article on Marxism and culture. I am writing this to clear up what I consider a possible misunderstanding in that article of a view attributed to me. Comrade Wendland criticizes a formulation of socialist realism which he attributes to me but is really a view put forth by the late Sidney Finkelstein. Wendland says that in my article ("What Makes Good Art," *PA* June 2005) I argued "that Finkelstein believed that as culture approaches a realistic image of social life, the better it is." He then objects to my formulation of Finkelstein's position with regard to art and realism. He writes,

Riggins reduced Finkelstein's view of realism in culture to this: "The more the work of art deviates towards the idiosyncratic inner world of the individual alone, or to a small group divorced from the masses of humanity, the less likely it is that a Marxist critic will find the work capable of producing the 'aesthetic emotion' Finkelstein described."

The last two words were left out of Wendland's quote. I have resupplied them because I want to correct the characterization of the intent of my article made by Wendland. Namely, that I was writing an article on "the Marxist method for judging artistic beauty" and using Finkelstein as an example. That was not my intent as I do not think there is "the" Marxist method. My intent was purely expository – to present Finkelstein's views to a contemporary readership who may be unfamiliar with them.

From that quote, however, Wendland derives the conclusion that one must prefer stick figure drawings of people with signs saying "strike" to the "Mona Lisa" by Leonardo Da Vinci. This would be a very strange conclusion and would only follow if it were thought that Leonardo's art was the expression of an idiosyncratic inner world rather than a social expression of the High Renaissance in Italy.

A more important point is to ask if my quote is warranted based on Finkelstein's views. Here is what Finkelstein writes: "The further the work of art is removed from real-

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COVER/ILLUSTRATOR
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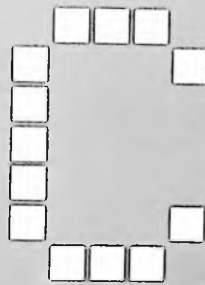
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COMMENTARY

GRIM KING GEORGE AND THE PRICE OF PAVING PARADISE

By Steven Laffoley

On a cloudless November morning, I stroll lazily along the sidewalk listening to an old Joni Mitchell tune, "Big Yellow Taxi." And while Joni sings the refrain, it occurs to me that her words provide an apt epitaph for the end of Grim King George's reign: "Don't it always seem to go that you don't know what you've gone till it's gone. They paved paradise and put up a parking lot."

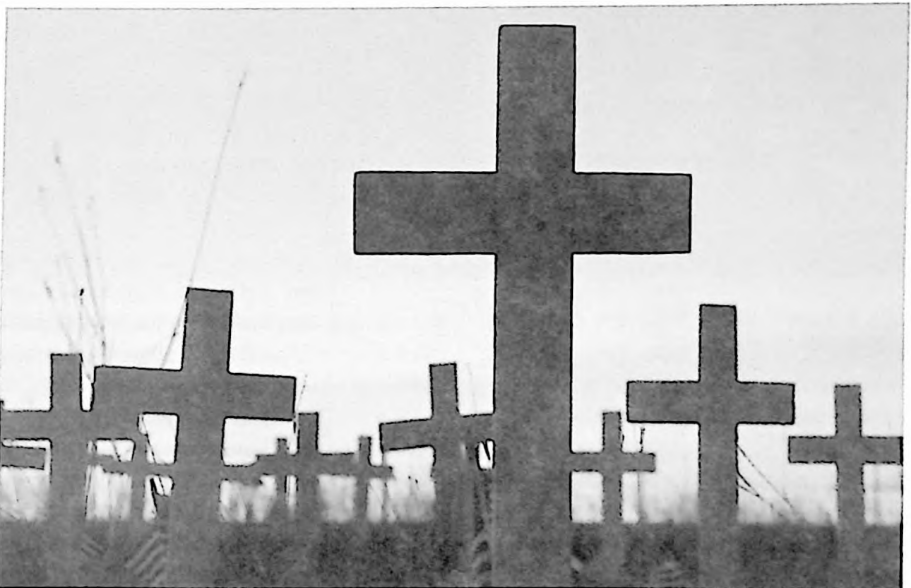
"The end of Grim King George's reign?" you say. "Isn't G. Dubya still living at the White House," you ask, "and aren't his mullah-like minions still ruling the land and running amok abroad?"

Well, yes, he is. And, yes, they are. But look, with poll numbers spiralling ever downward to ugly Nixonian levels, Grim King George has lost his popular mandate. Those who were once fooled are fooled no more. So my point is this: the emperor has no clothes.

His goose is cooked. His load is shot. And every right-thinking person can see it.

The King's chest-thumping bravado and swaggering Texas machismo are gone, replaced by Washington suit-and-tie management mumblings about "staying the course" in Iraq and anemic speeches likening fighting terrorism to fighting the cold war. (Even I was embarrassed for ol' King George on that one.)

■ The administration's endless, blundering incompetence intertwining seamlessly with the administration's contagious, contemptible corruption has sealed the King's doom.



Mandel Ngam/AFP/Getty Images

△ A makeshift memorial for US soldiers killed in Iraq at a protest camp near the ranch of George W. Bush in Crawford, Texas.

Among our contributors



Dan Brook teaches sociology at San Jose State University and can be contacted through his website: <http://www.brook.com/cyberbrook>.

Gerald Horne is a contributing editor of *Political Affairs*. His newest book is *Final Victim of the Blacklist: The Life of John Howard Lawson, Dean of the Hollywood Ten*, University of California Press.



Leonardo Padura is a novelist living in Havana, Cuba. His most recent novel, *Havana Red*, is available in English from bitter Lemon Press.

David Sugar works with the GNU project (<http://www.gnu.org>) and speaks worldwide on free software and government ICT policy.



Joel Wendland is managing editor of *Political Affairs*.

COMMENTARY



UN-CULTURED
SELFISH (M M)
ARROGANT A

John Moore/Getty Images

▲ Pakistani man in Islamabad protests the January US airstrikes that killed dozens of Pakistanis.

And while the self-righteous-Right wonders where the King's mojo may have gone, the sane center of America – the vast majority of folks now – all know the truth: the administration's endless, blundering incompetence intertwining seamlessly with the administration's contagious, contemptible corruption has sealed the King's doom.

Yup, the reign of Grim King George has deflated with a sad whisper and not a thunderous bang, just the hissing of a tom whoopee cushion. (Or is that the slithering sound of right-wing snakes returning to the soft mud beneath the rocks?)

Sure, I realize that there are three more years left in Grim King George's reign. And sure, I realize that, with no one to stop his madness, Grim King George will ensure three thousand or so more US soldiers will die in desert

sands, so many shredded to confetti by roadside bombs and rocket-launched missiles.

And yes, over the next three years, Grim King George will murder many more Iraqi men, women, and children – shot in their cars when they don't stop on command or blown to meat pulp in their homes while they sleep or they eat or they make love. He will murder them in the thousands and the tens of thousands. (But then again, like Tommy Franks said, we don't count the Iraqi dead, do we. Not in the reign of Grim King George, anyway.)

And back at home, the new Supreme Court – with its Grim King George appointed justices – will jerk sharply away from Justice and Liberty and Domestic Tranquility. They will sternly strip abortion rights from all women while giving corporations the



marxistIQ

miQ

1. Marx and Engels argued that all class-divided societies

- a. were morally wrong.
- b. were based on merit.
- c. were based on the exploitation of the nondominant class by the dominant class.
- d. could be overcome by reforms.

2. Marx and Engels saw the establishment of a working-class government as democratic because

- a. it would represent the interests of the overwhelming majority of people.
- b. it would be based on direct election of workers to public office.
- c. it would balance the interests of capital and labor.
- d. it would foster economic growth by tax cuts to everyone.

3. Marx's famous comment that religion is the "opiate of the masses" is interpreted by Marxists to mean

- a. religion is a form of drug addiction maintained by clerical drug rings.
- b. religion is a psychological painkiller for exploitation and oppression, without either addressing the causes or providing a cure for exploitation and oppression.
- c. religion should be regulated as a prescription drug.
- d. religion should be marketed as drugs to lower cholesterol and increase sexual potency in the US.

4. Marxists see eugenics, "sociobiology," and similar schools of thought as

- a. pseudo science that either directly or indirectly represents and fosters racist ideology.
- b. ideological weapons long employed by the capitalist class to foster colonialist policies globally and the oppression of ethno-cultural minorities in many multiethnic societies.
- c. schools of thought whose contemporary revival must be actively fought in the interests of all people.
- d. all of the above.

5. Marxists see concepts like "freedom" and "democracy" meaning

- a. empty ideological phrases.
- b. formal principles and ideals under capitalism which can only be made effective and real under socialism.
- c. concepts which are evolving to higher levels in capitalist societies.
- d. terms that must be abandoned if the working class is to advance.

How to Score Yourself:

0-3 correct answers: Read *The Communist Manifesto* and *Reader in Marxist Philosophy*. Both are published by International Publishers, www.intpubnyc.com.

4 correct answers: Write articles and reviews for *Political Affairs*.

5 correct answers: You are awarded the Lenin Prize for your depth of knowledge of Marxist thought.

Answers: 1] C 2] A 3] B 4] D 5] B

rights to steal everything – from the air we breathe, to the water we drink – being sure to send us the hefty bill.

You can bet that for three more years, Grim King George will continue his relentless gutting of environmental protection laws while ignoring or dismissing the rising temperatures of global warming, and the rising numbers of cataclysmic storms, and the rising ocean levels from melting polar ice caps.

And without a hint of irony, in the name of national security, Grim King George will drill for oil in Alaska and off Florida and anywhere else he damn well pleases.

And lastly, of course, with three more years still to go, the poor will get decidedly poorer and the rich outrageously richer.

But hey, the dark dream of the self-righteous right is over. It's a cloudless November morning in America, and all that remains is

dime-store political thuggery – and the slow ticking of three years' time.

Strolling lazily along the sidewalk, I listen again to Joni's refrain, "Don't it always seem to go that you don't know what you've got till it's gone. They paved paradise and put up a parking lot."

And I think: the US had a beautiful country, once.

I know, because it's gone. □

THE POLITICS OF INSURGENCY

By Dan Brook

"Gradualism in theory is perpetuity in practice."

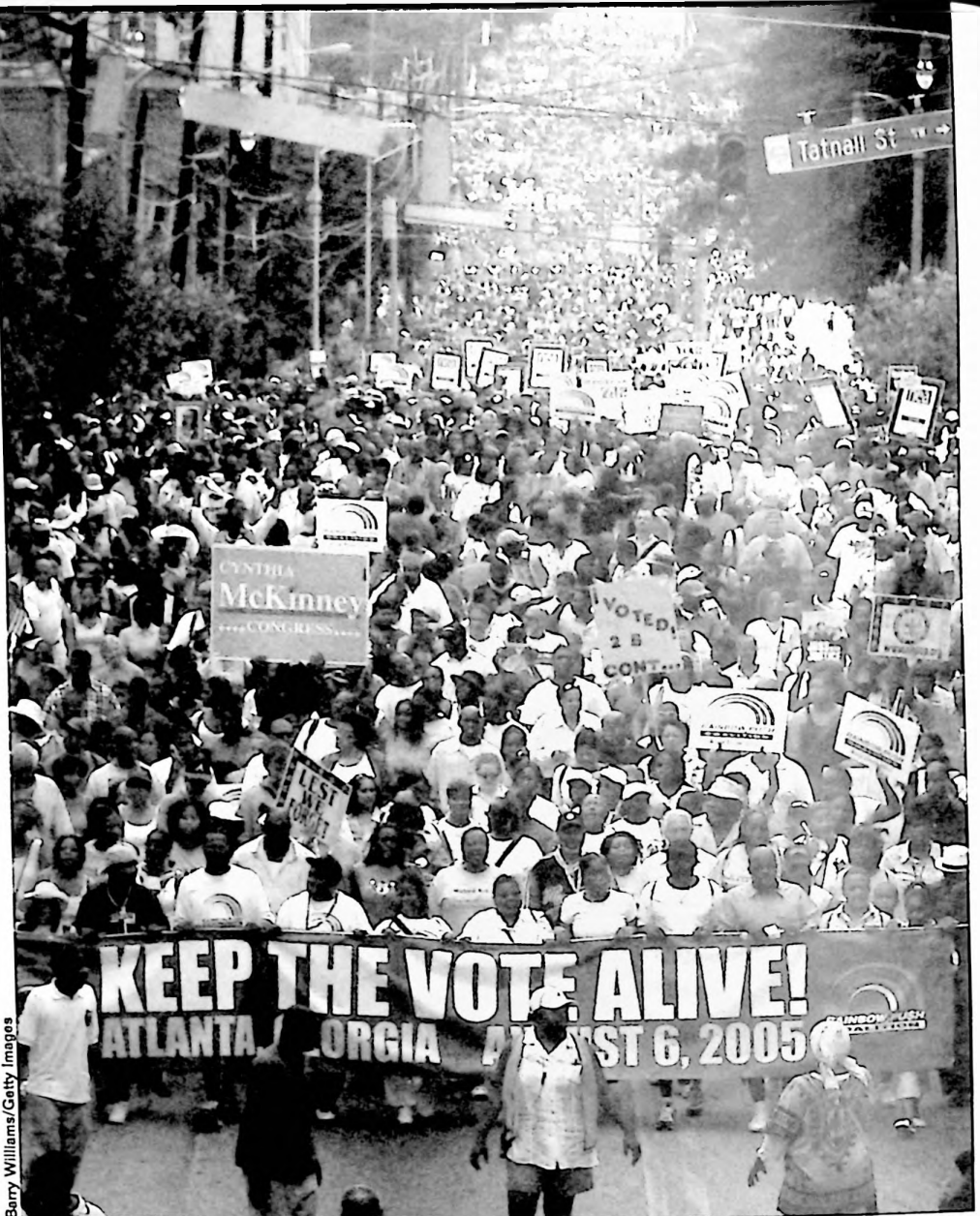
— William Lloyd Garrison

In spite of what is too commonly broadcast, preached and believed in the mainstream, routine politics is not enough for relatively powerless, oppressed groups, such as poor African Americans, Asian and Pacific Islanders, Latinos and Native Americans, to realize their collective will, particularly in terms of achieving parity in the political and economic spheres and, additionally, to deal with the critical problems of the so-called underclass.

Routine politics — that is, voting and elections, petitions, lobbying and interest group activity — is designed for stability. Routine politics can only accomplish minor, incremental change, at best. Never will it transform the fundamental structures of society; it never has. Pluralistic methods such as those of routine politics might affect certain facets of day-to-day life, but not the social, political and economic position of poor people of color in general and the underclass in particular. This is even more true for women of color who are a "minority" within a minority and an "underclass" within an underclass.

Small change might be able to be attained through routine politics and incrementalism, but large-scale change will not be accomplished through ordinary means; it requires extraordinary measures. Large-scale change can only be accomplished by the mobilization of people from the masses and the subsequent organization, social unrest, disruption, and demands that would be — and have been — produced. Mobilization of people, disruption of normal activities, and social unrest can also induce incremental change — as well if not better than routine politics — by the fear that it causes and the threat that it poses.

The radical flank effect suggests that insurgents make noninsurgents appear moderate and reasonable. Incremental change, in



▲ Thousands of marchers head down Martin Luther King Blvd. during Keep the Vote Alive March and Rally last August in Atlanta. The historic 1965 Voting Rights Act is up for renewal in Congress.

this way, may be granted by the power elite — who may fear losing anything but panic at the thought of losing everything — in order to co-opt members of the social movement. The defense mechanisms of the system include, among many other things, co-optation. With the fear of losing "too much" from powerful, radical demands emanating from social unrest, the power elite is likely to "give in" on a diluted version of some of these demands. By tricking some people and somewhat satisfying others — the essence of co-optation — it is hoped by those in power with the most to lose that the mass movement would be divided and weakened, and that the systemic crisis would be abated or, at least, postponed. Political repression is always a potential state resource, as we well know, but ideally, trickery is a more desirable tactic for the power elite than is brute force. It is much more effi-

cient and less costly for the elite to exercise "power without force," as Antonio Gramsci's concept and analysis of hegemony make clear.

Far-reaching change by routine politics and incremental methods may be a pie-in-the-sky, unattainable goal. Indeed, inequality under capitalism is neither a failure nor a perversion of the system, but is, rather, the purpose and its *raison d'être*. Like the game of "Monopoly," the real life game of capitalism guarantees a small group of winners and a much larger group of losers. Layered over the ancient oppressive systems of white supremacy (racism) and patriarchy (sexism), capitalism's losers are necessarily going to be disproportionately people of color and women. This is almost universally true across both time and space.

What is to be done? Whereas liberals sometimes seek to reform these types of

inequality and conservatives generally oppose those reforms, socialists and other radical progressives go to the roots of problems and specifically target the system itself for inherently producing social, political and economic inequality. While routine political change can address certain particular problems, these problems are, in actuality, symptoms of a larger disease, namely the structure and dynamics of the interrelated and reinforcing systems of capitalism, white supremacy and patriarchy.

Routine politics has not – and cannot – achieve the policies that would be necessary to transform the deplorable situation of the underclass. The ownership and control of productive property is simply not on the mainstream agenda. With about 13 percent of the population of the richest country in the world, for example, African Americans barely own or control any major means of production or communication in the United States.

The underclass especially, almost by definition based on its economic level, is not able to generate (capitalist) demand. Demand in a capitalist system is not based on actual need (e.g., being hungry or homeless or sick), but rather on the ability and willingness to pay the monetary price for a particular good or service. Since it is not profitable to produce or provide for the underclass, it must therefore be made unprofitable for the power elite not to do so. In a capitalist society, if the "invisible hand" of the "free market" will not provide, nothing else in this selfish economic system will. It is therefore up to the people to politically produce a visible fist to counter and compel the invisible hand to act in the people's interests.

"Working within the system" is not the best means – if a good one at all – to obtain progressive social change. It is not even likely possible, especially considering that the bureaucratic nature of institutions is fertile ground for suppression, marginalization, co-optation and infinite delay. The time, energy and resources necessary, along with the intrinsic behavior modification that comes from working with and within bureaucratic institutions, can easily channel one into accepting and adopting the mainstream methods of routine politics.

Although some are hesitant, others are more open to embracing the need for a mass movement in order to create the social space and political opportunities requisite for fundamental, progressive change in society. A strong social movement, perhaps coupled with a crisis of the state, is necessary in a

society based on ideals of stability, equilibrium, checks and balances, institutionalized means for achieving ends, bureaucracy and representative "democracy." This is what James Madison and the other "founding fathers" intended when they were framing the Constitution.

Madison wanted there to be enough freedom so that America would be a (nominal) democracy, but not so much that the working "have-nots" could take over political control from the owning "haves." Yet even the Declaration of Independence corroborates the belief that routine politics may not be enough. It explicitly states "that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends [i.e., natural rights, especially "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness"], it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government." (emphasis added). In this regard, what was true and necessary in the late 18th century is no less true and necessary in the early 21st century.

There are high barriers to change inherent in the routine political processes of US society, as there are narrow limits to what racial and ethnic minorities, women, poor people, and others who desire – and need – progressive change can accomplish through routine politics. The system is heavily biased towards tradition, wealth, status and privilege.

Ordinary people are relatively powerless, except when they disrupt the system or there exists some other structural crisis – whether it be financial, political, labor, environmental, military or otherwise. These are the only times when the power elite pay any attention to the serious problems that chronically plague our society. The lesson is that progressive social change has never been achieved without massive and sustained social disruption – whether legal or illegal, violent or peaceful, organized or spontaneous, proactive or reactive – instigated or led by people on the left. Historically, the form of disruption is not nearly as important as the fact of disruption, just as the changing forms of racism and sexism in the US have not been as critical as the unchanging facts of racism and sexism in our society.

Routine politics will not work for people of color in resolving the problems of the underclass, just as it will not work for the poor countries within the capitalist world system in resolving the problems of the derivative grave ills of widespread poverty.

Tragically, the growth of the underclass, both domestically and globally, belie the mistaken mainstream belief that "things only get better." More often in our ruthless system "things fall apart." Routine politics will lead to routine responses which, by and large, do not work towards the ends of social justice.

There is no natural evolution toward a bigger and better future, as the power elite, their corporate mass media mouthpieces, and too many others would have us believe. If anything, the capitalist system ensures a continuing polarization of income and especially wealth, as well as the destructive social and political consequences associated with economic polarization. This is historically true unless there is a countervailing force – not an evolutionary force, but a revolutionary one.

Unity, strength and extraordinary measures are necessary for both African Americans – and African countries – to be able to realize their wills and ultimately deal with and overcome their oppressive neocolonial burdens. This is no less so for Latinos and Latin American countries. If not in the fashion of Kwame Nkrumah's pan-Africanism, African and other marginalized countries must at least unite in a way similar to oil producing countries (OPEC) or the European Community (EC) and then collectively resist and renegotiate vital issues, such as economic growth, social development, investment, debt, trade, militarization, pollution and aid.

Ordinary measures produce ordinary results which leaves power and wealth in the hands of the power elite, those who construct, contribute to, and benefit most from this structure of hierarchical, polarized life. Only radical change through some form of mass movement – by people and countries, respectively – likely coupled with a systemic crisis, can give birth to the fundamental structural change necessary to deal with the problems of the social, political, and economic underclasses in the US and, indeed, the world.

Yet, if routine politics is not enough, neither is insurgent politics enough; both forms of political struggle are desirable and necessary in the hope of being effective. "Routine politics" within the system and "insurgent politics" outside the system working simultaneously and dialectically – a "scissors effect" – in an appropriate balance to fit the given social, political, economic and cultural contexts is our best hope to transform and repair the ongoing tragedies of systemic racism, sexism and poverty. □

THE GERMAN LEFT RISES AGAIN

By Manfred Sohn

You have to go way back into the early 1930's to find such a stronghold of left forces in a capitalistic German Parliament as it emerged from the last national election in September 2005. More than four million of the more than 60 million eligible voters in Germany, voted for the Left Party, a party which developed mainly from the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) and the Election Alternative for Jobs and Social Justice (WASG). The turnout was about 78 percent, meaning that the Left Party took nearly 9 percent of the vote and will send 54 members to Parliament.

Important as this part of the result of September 18 is, it is only half of the story of success of the day. In the months before the election it seemed nearly impossible to pre-

vent a coalition of the two right-wing parties of the country to take over the government from the former coalition of the Social-Democratic Party (SPD) of Gerhard Schröder and the Greens of Joseph Fischer. This coalition of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Liberal Party (FDP) campaigned openly on a program of accelerating the destruction of the social welfare state, fighting the trade unions and therefore accelerating the decline of wages, and reversing the previous governments decision not to join the coalition of US and UK to fight Iraq, Iran or any country that might dare not to bow down the wishes of the capitalist West.

It was not so dramatic as it was in the Spanish Civil War. But there was during September a growing mood in all left forces of "No pasaran!" – they will not come through. And they didn't. Big business and all

the big newspapers and TV stations were sure they would install a pure conservative government of CDU and FDP. But they failed. Now the CDU and SPD are forced to build a government which has to keep an eye on the membership and electorate of the SPD which is still deeply rooted in the trade unions and the average earning workers and pensioners.

The core issue was the social welfare state. From an outside perspective, it is important to understand that in most of the last century, because socialist alternatives existed, including the German Democratic Republic (GDR) on German soil, much of Western Europe developed close to socialism. In fact, up to 1989, socialism seemed on the verge of victory in some Western European countries. Both conservative and social democratic governments of the period felt compelled to do their utmost to win both economic efficiency and social security. You have to remember that the GDR, despite a lot of disadvantages in the eyes of Germans in the West, was a state without unemployment or homelessness. It had an excellent free universal health care system, an internationally respected free public



▲ Thousands of trade unionists flood the streets of Frankfurt, Germany on May Day 2005. The German labor movement has so far blocked efforts by the far right to dismantle Germany's social safety net.

school system from kindergarten to university and a stable pension system for the elderly whatever they did before during their lifetime. The GDR's social system was the benchmark for the West, and it forced the neighboring countries to develop social security and welfare systems along similar lines. In fact the farther west you traveled until 1989.

That year changed everything and marked the starting point of dismantling these achievements step by step. But there was a hook. In the east, the PDS, which openly was the heir of the United Socialist Party (SED) which governed the GDR for 40 years, won 20 percent of the eastern electorate on a regular basis, showing that the aim of socialism was still

Parallel to keeping up the fight for wages, for peace and for the social security network, we have to keep on discussing our socialistic aim.

deep rooted in a people which had experienced even a model of socialism full of shortcomings. Meanwhile, in the west, there was a growing feeling year by year, election by election that this capitalistic offensive was destroying the social structure of society. The mantra of the right was, "we have to cut the state the wealthiest of all the people will grow." But everybody could see that there was no growth, only destruction, shrinking of income and growing danger of fighting wars for the idiots in Washington.

That was the mood in which WASG developed in the west. This organization was mainly formed by disappointed trade unions and former members of the SPD – the most prominent of all Oskar Lafontaine, a former prime minister of one of the regions of Germany (Saarland), former leader of the SPD and finance minister in the first Schröder government who quit his jobs when this government went to war in Afghanistan.

Between this western-based WASG and the eastern Left Party/PDS are still culture differences which are inevitable after 40 years of development in different systems. But the main point is that they were able to campaign together in spite of heavy anti-Communist assaults from the right. We've also got the

valuable experience of proving that that we are able to win together.

This emerging new party is being built mainly out of these two forces. But most of the other left organizations – for example the tiny but active German Communist Party (DKP) – also joined the election campaign in favor of the Left Party and abstained from competing for votes during the election campaign.

The situation now is very crucial for the future. It may well be that the German left is at a kind of a junction. We are in a situation where more than four million voters have high hopes that the Left Party can live up to their expectations. But making real change will demand a big effort from the thousands of party activists. All depends on their ability to bring not only thousands or even tens of thousands but millions into the fight for an alternative development of our country. Therefore one of the questions for the left oriented toward Marx and Lenin in Germany is how to take part in the

emergence of this party – as part and parcel or as an independent organization commenting on its development from the sidelines? There may be no quick answers. Another difficulty faced is that this new party will always be tempted by capitalistic parliamentarianism. A job in parliament pays about \$10,000 a month – enough to think about keeping away from a revolutionary position.

Parallel to keeping up the fight for wages, for peace and for the social security network, we have to keep on discussing our socialistic aim, which is very similar to what Sam Webb wrote about in his article, "Our Best Hope," in the July 2005 issue of *Political Affairs*.

This year is indeed one of the most exciting years yet. We have to build a new left movement, and we have to build it in a way that unites the millions who gave us their vote – and we have to develop the aim of socialism in the process. We hope you will hear from us! □

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ity, the weaker becomes its artistic value" ("Art and Ideology," *PA*, June 1959). In the same article he also says "falsity" enters into art "when an artist ignores what society has made it possible for him to know, makes subjectivity a philosophy of life and art... and describes the entire world as if it were the walls of his own lonely, self-erected prison."

I contend that any fair reading of Finkelstein will show that my quote neither "misrepresents" Marxist thinking nor treats Finkelstein's views "poorly." I think the shoe is on the other foot, especially when Wendland takes my quote and claims to translate it into "an easy to follow math equation" which turns out to be neither easy to follow nor a math equation and leads to such ill-considered conclusions as that about Leonardo. The use of the term "less likely" in my formulation rules out any relation of equality and shows that the quote is descriptive and not prescriptive. That being the case, all the conclusions based on Wendland's speculations of "what Riggins seems to say" and "Riggins' analysis" (actually Wendland's misinterpretation) are unwarranted.

Thomas Riggins

Better Edits Houston, Texas

"He bitch-slapped those welfare queens so hard their taxpayer subsidized gold teeth rattled. Across the land, good Christians paused to listen to the satisfying thwap."

Where did this appear? *Vibe*? *Maxim*? The *GOP Newsletter*?

No, it was the most recent issue of *PA*.

Now I recognize more than most the necessity for satire or even giving a writer a certain latitude in portraying reality.

I also recognize the need for tight editing and given the racist and sexist nature of this society – and the need for a journal like *PA* to combat same – think the better part of wisdom would have been to request that this writer find another way to convey meaning.

Gerald Horne

Editor's reply

Gerald Horne is correct, the piece in question by P. Rockstroh in the December issue of PA was handled poorly and should not have been published. As pointed out the article was political satire, and the quote while accurate, did not reflect the view of the author, but was an attempt to expose the

racist point of view by speaking in his voice. It was handled poorly in many respects: the article was not clearly marked as satire leaving the reader with little to distinguish it from regular feature stories. However, it should be noted that even if had been identified correctly, the language utilized should not been printed. It is offensive to African Americans and other people of color for a white author to use such language, even when making an anti-racist point. Perhaps some might object, that Black comics and satirists use similar language in their work. We would make the following reply: first, their work does not appear in PA and second, they speak "from within the veil" as Du Bois used to call it, that is, as African Americans and from within the framework of the Black experience. License and permission in this connection is clearly quite a different issue.

PA remains committed to using political satire in its pages. It is an art of communicating that has been lost to some of the left and needs to be reclaimed. From Johnathon Swift, to Mark Twain, to Richard Pryor, George Carlin, Whopie Goldberg, Molly Ivins and Jim Hightower, it is an honored tradition of making people laugh and think. Speaking of Mark Twain, we should recall that for all his greatness, the language used in Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer, is simply not acceptable in today's world. Because of victories in the fight against racism our standards are different and higher. At the end of the day, judgement on satire is a matter of taste which includes a measure of who is doing it and toward what end. Our judgment in this case was wrong. At the same time, we remember the words of Neruda who wrote in an Impure Poetry, "those who fear the bad taste of things will fail."

Joe Sims

A Shared World Montreal, Canada

Though the times seem quite similar to 1965 with its quagmire of Vietnam being repeated in the quagmire of Iraq, they are different. Politics is not a pendulum swinging back and forth from left to right but rather a spiral where events return to the same place on the helix but at a higher level because humanists learn from previous experience.

Detroit today resembles Berlin after World War II with blocks of where homes once stood which went up in flames in July of 1967 left in rubble and weeds. The main

streets are deeply cracked breaking axiles. The city itself is now eighty five percent Black and almost eighty five percent a slum as punishment for its courage in 1967. The former automobile capital of the world has seen the work flow out primarily to Asia. Workers are having a more and more difficulty putting food on the table for their families and this is true not only for Detroit.

Surprising as it may seem to practical men. The root solution lies in systems of thought since mankind's thinking drives his action. There are two opposing philosophies, the philosophy of sharing the planet versus that of conquering it. In the United States, the world's only remaining superpower, this dichotomy is most vividly expressed in religious terms. Dr. Martin Luther King, who followed Jesus, shared while a succession of self-proclaimed Christian imperialist presidents have tried to conquer the world. It is not a contradiction to admire both Che Guevara's violent liberation of Cuba and at the same time love the pacifist Dr. King. The correct means to achieve sharing depends on the circumstances. Passive resistance would not have saved the world from Adolph Hitler yet Dr. King's non-violence was totally appropriate at Selma, Alabama in 1965.

The humanist astronomer Carl Sagan reviewed the geographic expansion of human history.

Human history can be viewed as a slowly dawning awareness that we are members of a larger group. Initially our loyalties were to ourselves and our immediate family, next, to bands of wandering hunter-gatherers, then to tribes, small settlements, city-states, nations. We have broadened the circle of those we love. We have now organized what are the modestly described as superpowers, which include groups of people from divergent ethnic and cultural backgrounds working in some sense together – surely a humanizing and character-building experience. If we are to survive, our loyalties must be broadened further, to include the whole human community, the entire planet Earth. Many of those who run the nations will find this idea unpleasant. They will fear loss of power. We will hear much about treason and disloyalty. Rich nation-states will have to share their wealth with poor ones. But the choice, H.G. Wells once said in a different context, is clearly the universe or nothing.

William Bunge

Which Side Are You On? Via e-mail

Brother,

I reupholstered this old song to make it fit a current situation. Since United Technologies Corp. bought Sundstrand in 1999, they have been moving hundreds of jobs out of Rockford, IL. Recently, executives of Hamilton Sundstrand (UTC subsidiary since '99) announced their intention of moving another 160 union jobs from the 11th St. manufacturing plant to Singapore. For further information, check out uaw592.org or the *Rockford Register Star*.

You can publish this on-line or in the magazine, if it suits you.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

In Solidarity,

Tim Mills

Member In Good Standing

UAW Local 5

WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON?

Come sisters and brothers,
Good news to you I'll tell
Of how the good old union
has come in here to dwell.

CHORUS: Which side are you on?

Which side are you on?

Which side are you on?

Which side are you on?

My grandpa built this place.

Me and daddy worked here, too.

A big shot told me yesterday,

Plant closing day was due.

CHORUS

don't GO BEGGIN' FOR YOUR JOB.

Don't YOU GROVEL ON the floor,

WHEN THE SHOP IS DISAPPEARING,

AND it's headed for Singapore.

CHORUS

Oh workers can you bear it?

Oh tell me how you can?

Will you STAB at YOUR OWN BROTHER,

Or will you take a stand?

CHORUS

Don't SCURRY for the bosses,

Don't listen to their lies.

Us workers haven't got a chance

Unless we organize.

**Adapted from a song
by Florence Reece,
Union Miner's Wife.
1931 Harlan county
Tim mills**



NOBODY ASKED ME, BUT...

By Don Sloan

■ The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) has confirmed that oil prices per barrel have not caused a hardship for everyone.

ExxonMobil awarded execs an extra \$30.2 million in bonuses for fiscal year 2005.

■ Does "is" mean "is"? At a Washington hearing looking at participation in Vice President Dick Cheney's energy task force in 2001-2, execs from ExxonMobil and Chevron replied they did not participate. A subsequent White House document indicated their involvement in the group that decided on US energy policy. When requisitioned, the execs said that what they did, did not meet the legal definition of "participate."

■ It has been uncovered that the US military has a cadre of Iraqi journalists on the payroll who regularly publish in Iraqi dailies on the glory of the occupation.

■ The US trade deficit hit \$66 billion a month at the end of 2005, a new record and up 11 percent since September 2005.

■ All Saints Episcopal Church outside of Pasadena has been informed its tax-exempt status is being reconsidered in the wake of its former rector's anti-war sermon last year.

■ Henry David Thoreau said that if a government imprisons unjustly, the true place for a just man is in prison. US citizen Jose Padilla has been incarcerated for three years without formal charge or habeas corpus.

■ Wal-Mart's average wage is only a little higher than the federal minimum wage: Wal-Mart CEO's each got a \$12.5 million bonus at the end of 2005.

■ If you love your books, let them go and be read.

■ Going to church no more makes you a Christian than sleeping in your garage makes you a car. (Garrison Keillor).

■ The CDC has been accused of hoarding crucial data that might help us prepare for vaccinations if the flu bug actually hits us. If.

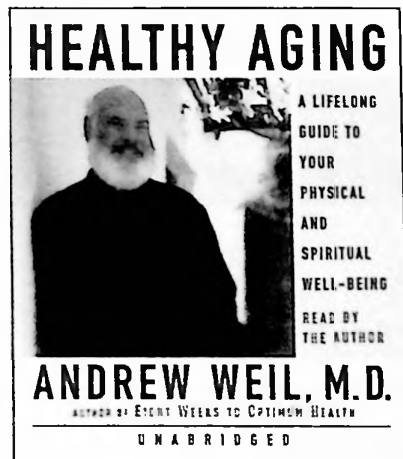
■ Mark Twain: There are lies, damn lies and statistics.

■ "Now is not the time to allow our hands to be idle or our souls to rest until we save humanity."

Healthy Aging: A Lifelong Guide to Your Physical and Spiritual Well-Being.

Andrew Weil, M.D., New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Reviewed by Annie Fox



■ Weil provides an extensive program of diet, exercise, thoughtful use of supplements, and the like, intended to help one live a healthy old age.

Healthy Aging is the latest in Weil's popular series of books on natural, healthy living and is a breath of fresh air among guides for healthy, successful aging and for gerontology. Weil combines a much needed dose of reality about growing old with respect for acceptance of what life brings and a true appreciation for what is good and valuable in aging. The spirit of this book is nicely captured by his quote attributed to Greek philosopher, Epictetus: "Make the best use of what is in your power, take the rest as it comes."

Weil rejects immortality and eternal youth as "unworthy" goals and ardently argues against antiaging medicine on both philosophical and scientific grounds. In order to age gracefully, we must remember that: "The benefits and costs of aging cannot be separated.... If you resist aging, you may deny yourself its benefits" and that "aging and death give meaning to life." The text critiques the ageism inherent in much of the cosmetics and cosmetic surgery industries. However, the parallel sexism is not addressed and Dr. Weil is not opposed to using these products if they make one feel more self-confident. Without doubt, this weakens the critique.

Acceptance of aging does not imply acceptance of an old age of disease. Rather, the goal is to extend the healthy portion of life, compressing disease into the very end of life. Based on his interpretation of oxidation and inflammation theories of aging, Weil provides an extensive program of diet, exercise, thoughtful use of supplements, and the like, intended to help one live a healthy old age. Much of this advice will seem familiar, some more esoteric. One could adapt Weil's advice on a general level ("eat more plants," nap, and exercise), a highly detailed level (nine specific recommendations on how

to select multivitamins, alone, with scores more for other aspects of diet, exercise and life) or anywhere in between. While we lack the background to evaluate Weil's detailed advice, much of what he offers appears sound – can't hurt, might help. Certainly his suggestion that one practice "stress protection" is a welcome change from the more usual calls for "stress reduction," which ignore the realities of everyday life for most workers, old or young. Active relaxation using breathwork and/or meditation, on the other hand, is accessible to virtually anyone.

Weil's style is straightforward, down to earth and quite readable. He does occasionally slip in discrete social-political commentary, such as a critique of the current limits on stem-cell research and repeated comments about the profits to be made with various antiaging and/or age-denying potions, drugs, cosmetics and surgical procedures. This latter would be more convincing if Weil himself hadn't introduced a line of skin-care and supplement products sold by Origins.

Because Weil's target audience is the lay public, academic readers will chafe a bit. In developing his interpretations of oxidation and inflammation theories of aging, Weil uses the work of respected scientists and accepted theories. He tends to argue by analogy and circumstance, however, rather than via the usual principles of cause and effect, so that his reasoning is not transparent. However, while the book is not as chock-full of scientific evidence and citations as one might like, notes and recommended readings are provided. The fact that Weil's books are so popular suggests that his message is resonating. Regardless of the validity of Weil's theories and value of his detailed recommendations, the philosophy and spirit of this book make it worth the reading. Just hold on to your wallet! □

Dance of the Dialectic: Steps in Marx's Method.

Bertell Ollman, Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2004.

Reviewed by Vicki I. Linton

Bertell Ollman's recent book *Dance of the Dialectic* is a magnificent manual on the Marxist method for understanding the nature of class society, capitalism and social relations. If the accomplishments of this book could be summarized in a single statement, it would be that Ollman successfully presents Marx's thought as a coherent unity by systematically explaining the apparent difficulties, contradictions and various emphases in his work that have long puzzled, perplexed and even divided Marxist thinkers.

For example, Marxists have long fought (often bitterly) over the influence of Hegelian philosophy in Marx's work. Some say that Hegel is a dominant influence and responsible for the best in Marx's thought. Others deny this and insist that Marx ultimately rejected Hegelian dialectics and idealism, discarding apparently abstract concepts such as historicism, humanism and alienation in favor of rigorous "science." Ollman notes that this debate among humanists and "structuralists," who have both made equally valuable contributions to an understanding of Marx, resulted from different "vantage points," "levels of abstraction" and "generalities."

Ollman's major point is that Marxist thinkers who do engage in these kinds of debate usually ignore an important feature of Marx's work: his movement from different levels of abstraction and generality, depending on his particular investigation or focus of emphasis. Ollman's book painstakingly charts and describes the various critical and analytical tools Marx employs at different points in his investigations. All that is missing in Ollman's book is an easy-to-use diagram with a visual representation of this system.

The following example illustrates Ollman's approach. There are four aspects of dialectics that Marx uses: identity, contradiction, quantity/quality and interpenetration of opposites. On the surface, the basic meanings of these terms are different, even contradictory. Yet all are claimed to be essential in the framework of Marx's critical method.

If a Marxist thinker uses one aspect (at the expense of the others) to explain a particular social (or natural) phenomenon, the results may appear to differ from or even contradict the results of another thinker who employs a separate aspect of dialectics to explain that same phenomenon. This leads to debilitating infighting, sharp-tongued accusations that so-and-so "isn't a true Marxist" or such-and-such a trend of thought is "revisionist," and precludes bridge-building and serious engagement. In the end, we often talk past one another without sympathetically addressing our differences, using agreed upon terminology, or making an effort to understand the particular emphasis or focus the other side is attempting.

For example, one important controversy has emerged over the question of determinism, such as the role of the economic aspects of life in determining the superstructure (ideas, laws, religion, etc.), as compared to the role of human agency in history. Here, both perspectives are important, says Ollman, for understanding the nature of capitalism and class struggle, but they are formulated according to separate sets of analytical criteria. To touch on one more example, is

This book will sharpen and deepen one's understanding of the method Marx used to analyze capitalism, how it works, and where it is heading.

it the falling rate of profit or the difficulties in realizing value that spark economic crisis? Both perspectives have validity, but both require different conceptual tools and vantage points found in Marxist thought. In each of these examples, the levels of abstraction, generalities and vantage points "are complementary and all are required," says Ollman, "in order to 'reflect' the double movement [history and process] of the capitalist mode of production."

Bourgeois ideology, warns Ollman, distorts the ability to provide a full picture of capitalism by emphasizing narrow views of human experience. It effectively presents social life under capitalism as natural and ahistorical. It mystifies experience by allowing us to grasp only a small slice of reality at a time. Rarely, indeed, does it ever lie outright; in fact, ideology often "feels" true. Sometimes it is created by the willful effort of the capitalist class; at other times it emerges as a result of alienated life under capitalist society. But, to be sure, Marxists have a special responsibility not to play into it by following its lead and limiting their representations of reality to partialities.

The Communist movement should benefit from this book, because Ollman presents the possibility of developing a rigorously comprehensive and coherent Marxism that encompasses different levels of thinking about human experience. Ollman is asking us not to narrowly reject different conclusions arrived at by means we do not advocate, but to expand the horizon of our thinking. Ollman's instructions may be regarded as a corrective for sectarianism and an incentive to work out a fuller theoretical basis for practical action. Such an approach might encourage people who are confused by bourgeois ideology or just by limited thinking, to take better, more advanced or even revolutionary positions. This book will sharpen and deepen one's understanding of the method Marx used to analyze capitalism, how it works, and where it is heading. □

The Torture Papers: The Road To Abu Ghraib.

Edited by Karen J. Greenberg and Joshua L. Dratel, Cambridge University Press: 2005.

Reviewed by Thomas Riggins

The *Torture Papers* is a collection of the official memos and documents written by officials of the US government to justify the use of torture and the return to the methods of the Spanish Inquisition by the Bush administration. Michael Rater of the Center for Constitutional Rights has said it "may well be the most important and damning set of documents exposing US government lawlessness ever published." It shows how the Bushites have attempted, and are still attempting, to subvert the Constitution and make the US a government not of laws but of men (and not very bright ones at that).

Lewis, in his introduction, says the documents in this book "are an extraordinary paper trail to mortal (sic! moral?) and political disaster: to an episode that will soil the image of the United States in the eyes of the world for years to come." Lewis quotes Jay S. Bybee whose memo to Alberto Gonzales, counsel to the president, asserted, "Physical pain amounting to torture must be equivalent in intensity to the pain accompanying serious physical injury such as organ failure, impairment of bodily function or even death." He also stated that interrogators may engage in actions that are "cruel, inhuman or degrading" so long as the physical pain is not as intense as the above. Lewis reminds the administration "that torture does terrible damage not only to the victim but to the torturer."

One of the editors, Karen J. Greenberg, writes "what the reader is left with... is a clear sense of the systematic decision to alter the use of methods of coercion and torture that lay outside of accepted legal norms...." She names names. John Yoo, Alberto Gonzales, Donald Rumsfeld along with some lesser known figures advocated and defended these new policies. It is to the credit of Colin Powell and his legal advisor William Howard Taft IV that they did not support the policy of torture.

Coeditor Joshua L. Dratel tells us the memos and other papers in this collection reveal the "bad intentions" of the government officials involved – that "three pernicious purposes" were involved. These were "(1) the desire to place the detainees beyond the reach of any court or law; (2) the desire to abrogate the Geneva Convention with respect to the treatment of persons seized in the context of armed hostilities; and (3) the desire to absolve those implementing the policies of any liability for war crimes under U.S. and international law." He points out that these government officials, all ultimately under the authority of President Bush, acted completely contrary to the established principles of American law and that they have no "claim of good faith." They acted as people who reject "equal application of the law, equal justice for all, and a refusal to discriminate based on status, including nationality or religion."

No one will deny that this is a useful reference book. The evidence in it should lead to an impeachment inquiry if the fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution have not already been so eroded that Bush has the right to think he can do as he likes and the law be damned.

Progressives will not be shocked by what they find in the pages

The evidence in this book should lead to an impeachment inquiry if the fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution have not already been too eroded.

of this book. The behavior described is old news. The government has tortured and murdered people for years, from the days of slavery, the eradication of the native peoples and the war against the Philippine independence struggle, the Koreans, Vietnamese and others up to the current war in Iraq. We showed some restraint in the two world wars, at least in the European theater. What is new with the Bush administration is the desire to find a legal basis for this activity and have it formally recognized and institutionalized. That liberals and moderates, and even some conservatives are becoming outraged is a good sign. But how this will ultimately turn out is still in doubt. There are powerful political and corporate forces behind the Bush administration who are supporting all of his initiatives and who see that the imposition of a new interpretation of "rights" towards people abroad is only a first step to imposing such a regime of torture and presidential tyranny here at home. These are people who realize that the economic deterioration of the American people calls into question their ability to dominate this country by traditional democratic methods.

Let us hope this book will have a wide readership and will embolden our supine mass media to engage in more research and expose the machinations of the far-right Republicans and their allies. It was, after all, the reportage of the *Washington Post*, the TV show *60 Minutes* and the articles of Seymour Hersh in *The New Yorker* as well as that of *Newsweek* and the people at the ACLU, among others, that originally brought all this infamy to light – so there is still some hope for us. □

Superpower Struggles: Mighty America, Faltering Europe, Rising Asia.

John Redwood, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Reviewed by Gerald Horne

The author of *Superpower Struggles* is the well-known British Tory, who also served as his nation's trade and industry minister in the early 1990s. Despite the title, this work mimics Redwood's most recent book, *Stars and Strife*. This is even more curious since it is apparent that "Rising Asia" will be a cornerstone of the 21st century with grave implications for Redwood's "Mighty America" and "Faltering Europe" in particular. It is almost as if this prospect is so calamitous for the writer that he cannot bear to confront it, despite the enormous consequences of accelerated development in the planet's most populous continent.

Instead, the author's antipathy is trained on the European Union. Though some have seen the rejection of the EU Constitution by voters in France and the Netherlands as a progressive development, it is useful to note that this staunch conservative was also hostile to this document. Since the result of the French rejection has been a boost in the fortunes of President Jacques Chirac's right-wing foil, Nicolas Sarkozy, who is expected to replace him in the next election, it is fair to ask if this slowdown in European integration was as positive a development as some have imagined.

The author goes on at some length about the supposed dangers of further European integration and notes that

now that Europe is talking about creating a defense identity – in other words, having its own army, navy and air force – and a common foreign policy, the US policy establishment in Washington is having second thoughts.... [T]he self-same people who have decided that the euro should topple the dollar, that Airbus should overwhelm Boeing and that European farming methods will exclude the [US] midwest, are now out to design a foreign policy and a defense policy for their fledgling European state.

The author expresses alarm at "Germany's flirtation with Russia" and "France's flirtation with China," adding that the "EU's interest in creating a rival system and policy to the United States of America is beginning to ring alarm bells in the Pentagon and the White House." Unsurprisingly, there were cries of glee and high-fives all around in elite US circles when the EU Constitution was defeated.

To be fair, the author does note some trends in Asia that are difficult to ignore, especially China's consumption of manufactured goods, raw materials, foodstuffs, other agricultural products and consumer goods as well as the dramatic growth of its industrial output. In his all-too-brief scrutiny of Asia, he adds that "we can look forward to the day when...China will have an economy twice the size of that of the United States. Why does this matter? It matters because the origins of a country's power in the world lie in a strong and large economy." Still, the author focuses most of his book on the allegedly "laughable" EU.

One reason he is so angry at the EU is because he feels it provides a mortal threat to the unity of his beloved UK. As he sees it, the

It is almost as if the author would rather doom his country to the slow but sure decline that is presently afflicting US imperialism, than pursue other options on the continent.

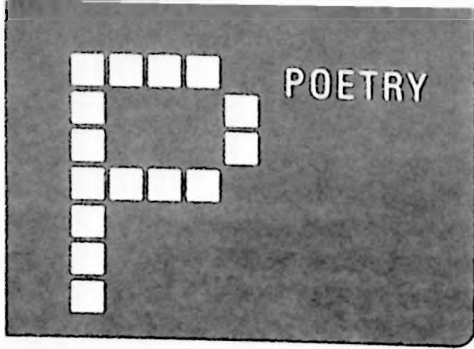
drive to independence in Wales and Scotland has been fueled in part by the fact that Brussels might provide subsidies to newly minted nations that equal or even dwarf London's benefits. Ironically, the drive toward deeper European integration has unleashed divisive tendencies: witness the separatist stirrings in Corsica, Northern Italy, the Basque region of Spain, etc. This profoundly important trend also derives in part from imperialism's attempt to foment various forms of nationalism to obstruct class-based projects. Thus, the US now faces a serious, well-supported sovereignty movement in Hawaii that bids fair to reduce the stars on the flag from 50 to 49.

In turn, the author is not hostile to the idea of Britain withdrawing from the EU and is more positive about London deepening its ties with the US. He is supportive of the idea of the London continuing a so-called "special relationship" with Washington, a view that led to Tony Blair's disastrous support for the criminal invasion of Iraq. Redwood recognizes, however, that "looking beyond the short to medium term, we cannot take US superiority for granted." It is almost as if he would rather doom his country to the slow but sure decline that is presently afflicting US imperialism, than pursue other options on the continent.

But the UK may be so tied to the US that unraveling this relationship will be problematic. "British companies have invested more in the US than US companies have invested in Britain," writes Redwood.

We have now reached the point where half of all the foreign investment in Britain comes from America. Two-fifths of all Britain's investments around the world are in the US. Only a quarter of foreign investment in Britain has come from our EU trading partners, and only a third of our outward investment has gone to other EU states.

Thus, he considers seriously the idea of Britain pulling away from the EU and joining NAFTA. Hence, though provocative and significant insofar as it indicates the growing unease in London and Washington about the rise of the EU and China, this book is utterly disappointing. □



Mist Lit By Moonlight

From where we're standing, a gray opaque sea
Spreads across the open field.

Above the surface, a single twisted branch
Emerges, like a drowning arm hung on a man
Who gasps once & goes under.

A night breeze gnaws at the edges of our clothes.
Without a word, you raise the shining tenor to your lips.

& now the first slow drawn out notes
Glide across the mist toward the farther shore.

An urgent rush of wings pushes against the darkness,
& I remembered how the swallows nested in the high window
Of the imprisoned revolutionary,
& how the guards smashed the nest,
Yet the swallows returned.

Again & again the nest was destroyed,
Still they returned,

Until they'd given birth to a poem of swallows
Eyes shut tight, close in the nest,
Their origami wings furled,
Until they were ready

& then their white wings lifted,
& they were soaring
In the wide euphoria of flight.

***Playwright/Revolutionary Ernst Toller was arrested after the
downfall of the 1919 Bavarian Soviet. He spent five years in
prison. The anecdote of the swallows is true.**

Michael Shepler

ZILLION TAMBOURINES

a zillion tambourines
splashing against
the green wall of silence
we nurse our wounds
in the pure waters of dolphins
cleanse our back
of the sores of the city

creditors with hi-tech daggers
tell us who dressed these plantations
in skirts of steel and asphalt
where we must pry pearls from life with a crowbar
trying to balance light between shoulders
in the midst of dung stacked in rectangles
where the head can become
a cesspool of wrecked slave ships

we have come to sit in the blue chair
fish in pure stream of consciousness
watch the hummingbirds
folding the day with their wings
watch pastel sunsets whisper
as leaping swordfish bull's-eye the open sky

fifty drummers in a circle of flowers
weaving in and out of brown rhythm
helping to remake us
a mind in trance
nodding in revelations of fireflies
fire in the pillow bosom
of Fannie Lou Hamer
we rest our head in a cloud
trying to retain
the iron sear
of Robeson's
baritone

by Kamau Daaood
Reprinted with permission from
City Lights Pocket Poet Series no. 57, 2005

River

Each road here
was worked over deer tracks,
bull buffalo furrows.
All led to and from my private ways
providing imports for life.
Trade occurred here.
Marketplaces from time before silver,
before coin, from that time
where people bartered for
wares they worked and then some.
A white shell came
from the west where
Red Stone facing back
was waiting.
Each offering gifts
with their presences.
To this day tooled stone
still holds Memory
The shell long ago
gave great prides.
Today brittles in the cache
of a collector's drawers
splintered.

Allison Hedge Coke

Published with permission from her forthcoming
book, *Blood Run* (Salt Publishing).

Rust Belt Blues

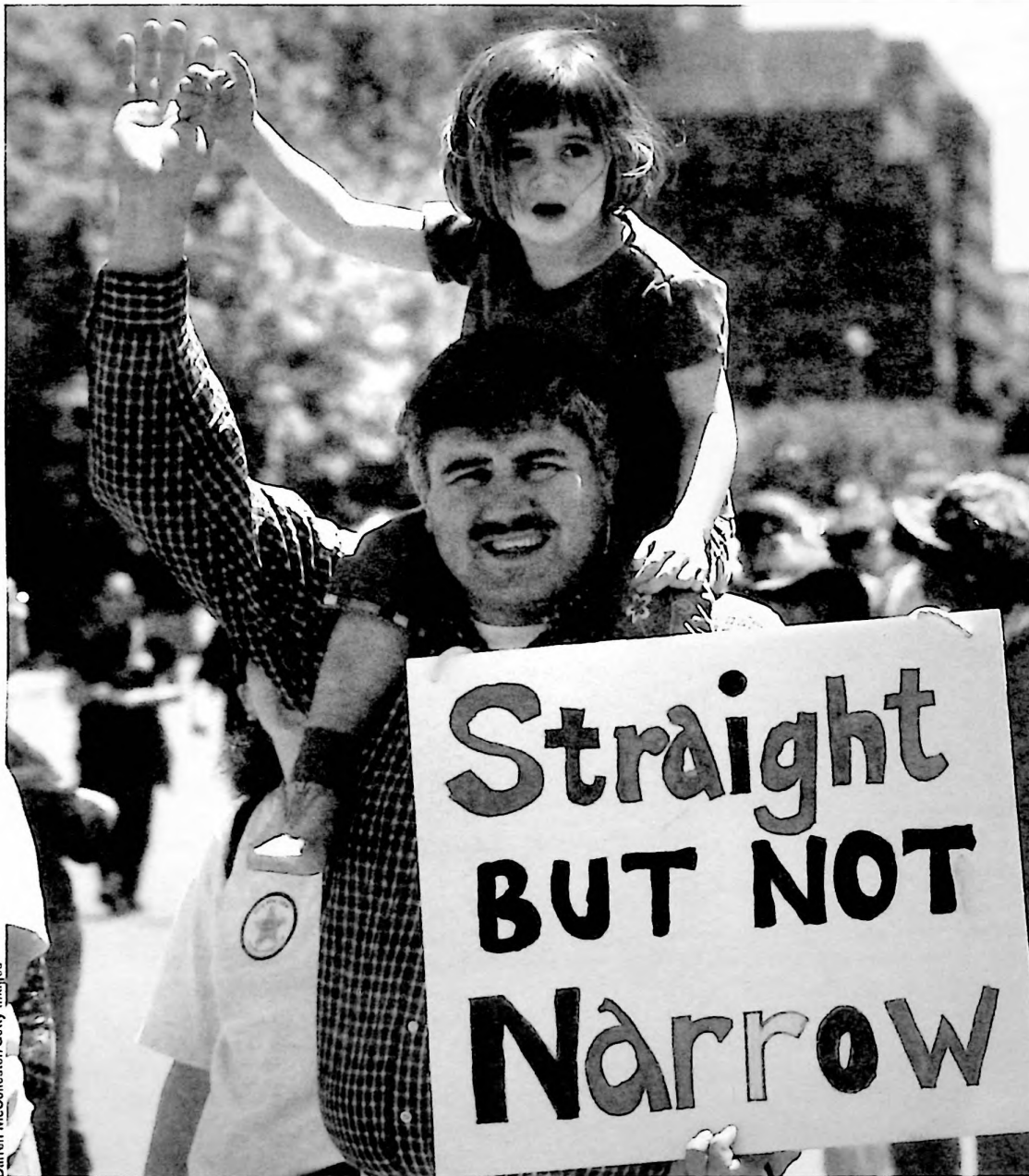
A car idly whickering poison.
A chunk of brick kicked across
a vacated lot of distant significance.
Car waiting on somebody buying
something. Snow and ice slouched
in piles in front of closed for remodeling,
an obscure untranslatable joke.
Walk these streets with me. Hold
your breath till somebody asks you
for something, then give it away.
Somebody's down the block
tossing salt on cement: manna-corrosion. Car waiting-not for us.
A handful of black birds disintegrate
on the branches' sway. Seventeen shades
of gray and one red mitten.

Jim Daniels

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IF NOT NOW WHEN?

It's Time to Stop Neglecting Heterosexism



Darren McCollister/Getty Images

◄ A father and daughter carry a sign during the 34th annual Boston Gay Pride Parade in Boston, Massachusetts.

By Joel Wendland

Are you like me? Do you sometimes think that if you ignore something – a toothache, the credit card company or the leaky faucet – it will just stop being a problem? It will go away and leave you to worry about the important things. Unfortunately, this is how some progressives and Marxists try to deal with the question of gay rights and equality. Sometimes we say, "there are more important problems" or "that is just too complicated for me to think about" or, even, "let's set aside the things that make us different and focus on the real struggles at hand." These kinds of attitudes are part of a larger problem that has come to be called heterocentrism.

Heterocentrism is a concept that is related to the practice of heterosexism. The latter implies the enforcement of unequal conditions for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people (LGBT). Like other forms of discrimination, heterosexism serves the ideological purpose of normalizing certain social relationships under capitalism in order to help perpetuate it. On one level, and we see this in the current period, heterosexist explanations of normal sexual activity and personal relationships say that homosexual activity and same-sex relationships undermine traditional cultural values, i.e. heterosexual activity and marriage. A key reason for raising the specter of a homosexual attack on "normal" marriage is to foster hatred and division among ordinary people against other members of their communities, their families and in the working class in general. The ultra-right, the main source of this heterosexist ideological drive, hopes to drive wedges into communities and sections of the working class in order to weaken them politically and to cloud their very specific interest in common political action, class unity and shared economic, democratic and cultural interests.

But "normalized" sexual relationships and "traditional" ways of forming heterosexual family arrangements is more than an ideological issue, and it is certainly more than a wedge issue. Heterosexism is the practice of normalizing certain social relationships that are particular to capitalism itself. Heterocentrism is a legal, cultural and linguistic device of heterosexism. Related to homophobia, or the more overt practices rising out of hatred or fear of homosexuality, heterocentrism might be clarified by putting it in relation to similar terms

used to describe the marginalization or exclusion of other oppressed groups.

Ethnocentrism, for example, describes the racist practice of viewing culture or history through the lens of a dominant racial or national group. Androcentrism, or male-centrism, suggests a sexist mode of expression or way of seeing the world that excludes women from history, politics and discussion. In both cases, men or whites or some combination of the two are viewed as normal, intelligent and the subjects of history, while those excluded are silenced, ignored and are given attention only when they impact those in the "center." Heterocentrism applies a similar approach except with heterosexual people as normal and valuable, while LGBT people are relegated to the margins of social life, rejected, undervalued and so on. Any "centrism" then is a kind of metaphor for describing

So in effect, we might safely say that Aristotle may have displayed homosexual behavior, but indeed Lincoln was queer.

social relationships and power: dominant and powerful groups are at the "center," while oppressed groups are on the margins.

The social implications are obvious. Ethnocentrism promotes racist practices. Androcentrism promotes sexist practices. Heterocentrism promotes antigay discrimination. Even if the practitioners express sympathy for oppressed groups, or espouse democratic and egalitarian principles, exclusion, hate and violence along with social discrimination across the board result.

We can note examples of heterocentric practices in many areas of life. Dominant culture, while it has opened up some space for gay and lesbian topics, tends to overwhelm us with heterocentric images of "traditional" family arrangements and sexual relationships, while sidelining, disparaging, ignoring or otherwise demeaning homosexual activities, desires or images. Think of all the movies that you saw this past year, the television shows, the books and magazines you read, and advertisements in just about every social space available. While some hints of homosexuality (and less demeaning images

of homosexuality) have touched the edges of this enormous cultural tidal wave – "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy," *Brokeback Mountain*, and intensified political activity by the LGBT community in many local and state political campaigns against anti-gay measures – it is painfully obvious that life in the US is represented as straight as an arrow.

Think of the furor created over the 2004 book *The Intimate Worlds of Abraham Lincoln*, by C.A. Tripp. Tripp, a one-time colleague of renowned biologist Alfred Kinsey and not a professional historian, put together a massive amount of documentary evidence indicating that Lincoln had numerous sexual and love affairs with men. While speculation about Lincoln's sexual life has a long history – rumors about affairs with men even arose during his presidency, and the great Chicago poet Carl Sandburg noted bisexuality in his biography of Lincoln – it has long been ignored. In fact, when Tripp's book appeared, his critics accused him of all kinds of things from misreading the substantial amount of documentary evidence to discussing something that had little relevance to understanding Lincoln or his times. Even those who presented themselves as sympathetic to equality suggested that Tripp had gone too far and that we really didn't need to know if Lincoln slept with men. Meanwhile the same historians might have tripped over themselves to learn more about the heterosexual intimacy of other presidents and their wives. This contradiction reflects a heterocentric view because it explicitly says that homosexual desire isn't worth public discourse or being recorded historically, especially when it seems to have been an integral part of the life of a personage so central to US history as the Great Emancipator.

So what can Marxists say about heterocentrism as part of the ideology and practice of heterosexism? Scrutiny of Marx's work reveals that he had little to say on these matters, while his partner Engels more directly delved into the private sphere of sexuality, sexual desire and the historical development of personal relations in some of his major scientific works. Specifically in *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), Engels surveyed enormous amounts of anthropological data to theorize about the role of families and sexual desire in the societies he studied.

Reading Engels' book through contemporary eyes is startling in some ways. It

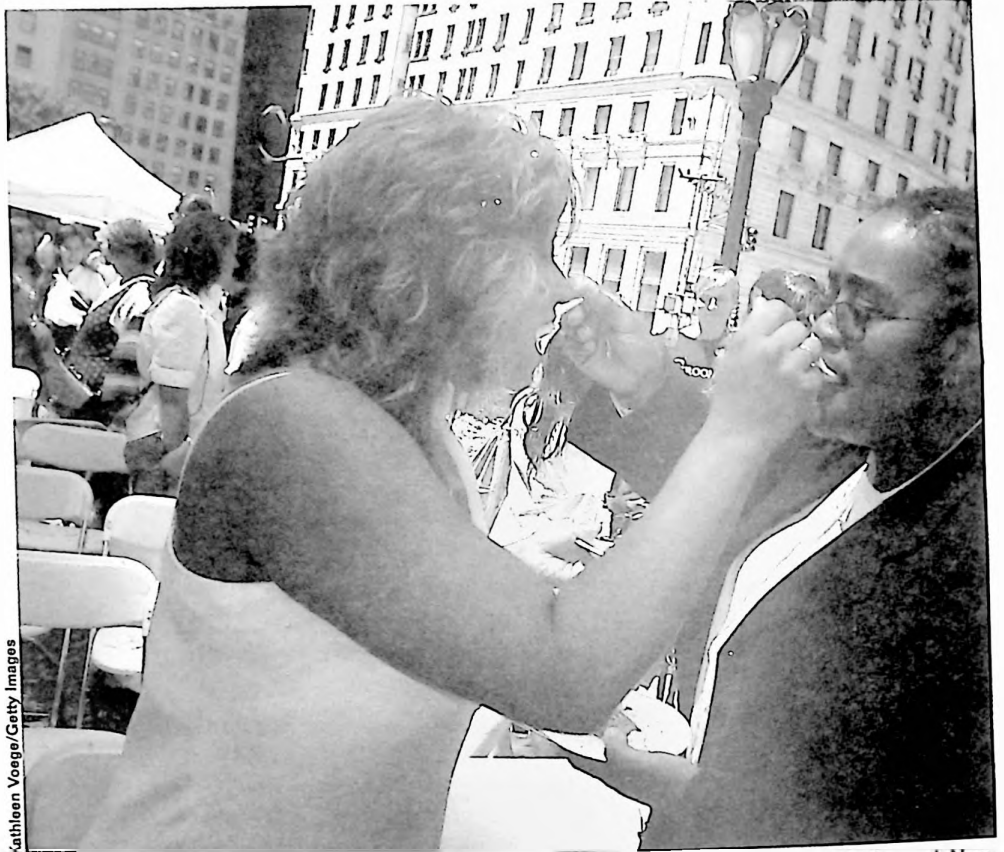
PROBLEMS IN MARXISM

rejects the notion that certain sexual practices are "normal" or "natural." By identifying major shifts in both sexual behavior and the organization of family and kinship ties and linking those shifts with changes in property relations, Engels showed that types of sexual activity and the rules of sexual behavior were not encoded in our genes but manufactured in society by people themselves (with the strongest influence coming from the ruling classes).

While Engels had little to say about homosexual practices, homosexual desire or ideological references to homosexuality, presumably his rule of thumb about the social rather than biological nature of human activity applies here. (Some scholarship on Engels' letters suggests, however, that indeed he did not apply his own theories to this question, as he may have privately opposed political movements that called for legal measures guaranteeing gay equality and may have regarded homosexual acts as abnormal and even pathological.)

Engels' work also points to historical formations and transformations of social identities that have been based on particular roles within family arrangements and on types of sexual activity (that have changed and are changing over time). "Identity" is a modern term which describes the process of expressing or understanding a collective or community nonclass relationship (or a network of relationships) to existing dominant groups, resulting in a shared (though often disputed) approach to subverting, resisting or struggling to transform the power relations. In other words, sexual, economic and political repression of women and their responses to it forged something we now call a gender identity (though social class, sexuality, nationality and other kinds of identities make talking about gender in an isolated way simplistic).

As sexual, economic and political domination of women by men emerged in Greek society, Engels notes, Greek women used different strategies to subvert male authority or in some small manner resist exploitation and oppression, even if applied only a private level. Without offering a detailed social history of women in ancient Greece, Engels does hint that social identities organized around sexual activity and family arrangements were socially constructed by the need for maintaining property relations, patterns of consumption, the division of labor and by



Kathleen Yoerge/Getty Images

△ Newlyweds Elizabeth Medina-Turner (L) and her partner Sharon Antonia Turner, of Maplewood, New Jersey, feed each other cake following the 4th annual wedding party ceremony to kick off the gay pride parade in New York City.



Craig Mitchell/Dyer/Getty Images

△ LGBT activists are fighting job and housing discrimination, for fair access to health care, for the right to marry, and for real protections from hate crimes.

humans who struggled over how those identities and relations would be defined.

Anthropologists have found evidence that many cultural groups from many different parts of the planet at many different points in their development regarded homosexual acts as commonplace and indeed a normal part of human development. Biologists and sociologists have also shown that it is a common human activity in modern times. Recent discoveries in the field of genetics suggest that the predisposition to same-sex activity is a genetic variation along the lines of hair color and right-handedness. None of this empirical data, however, has much to say about the social value of sexual relationships or of the relatively modern formation of homosexual social identities.

Historian Barry D. Adam notes that social identity per se is defined only within a complex system of power and domination, especially in class societies. Indeed, if homosexual activity is seen only as a normal and common activity, a social identity of homosexuality doesn't emerge. Only with the formation of capitalism, especially with industrialization, and its partic-

Since "class" is lived out in different ways by different people, we should not demand the erasure of identities for the sake of class struggle.

ular ideology of the heterosexual family, along with the emergence of urban areas and "homosocial" spaces (places where people of the same gender interact and form intimate bonds that sometimes turn into sexual and love relationships), such as factories, bars, theaters and molly houses, does a specifically homosexual identity develop. With this identity also emerges the political movement for equality. So in effect, we might safely say that Aristotle may have displayed homosexual behavior, but indeed Lincoln was queer.

Why is this distinction important? It is important because its apparent opposite, "normal" heterosexuality – as a category of social value, not just a description of the performance of certain biological functions – became a basis of capitalist relations of production. As Engels noted:

The form of the family corresponding to civilization [by this Engels specifically means capitalism] and under it becoming the definitively prevailing form is monogamy, the supremacy of the man over the woman, and the individual [implied as heterosexual] family as the economic unit of society.

Engels clarifies that the family is a ruling class concept created for the purpose of maintaining order in the ruling class, providing rules for the inheritance of property, fostering political stability, maintaining the economic independence of the bourgeoisie from the church and shifting to a secular basis for politics and power.

But what does it mean for working people? Engels says that the ruling class imposes its values on oppressed classes and demands that the oppressed accept their values and emulate their actions. Ruling classes come to believe that their values are universal and seem shocked when we ignore or reject them. In *Origins*, Engels offers little in the way of explaining what practical use other than this ideological self-indulgence and self-deception the bourgeois family has from a working-class perspective. But from Marxists after Engels, we gather that the family setting is a place for reproducing the barest means of existence, passing on capitalist social and cultural values and training for consuming commodities. In other words, reproducing the status quo.

Engels further notes, however, a "great contradiction" created by the imposition of a "normal" bourgeois sexuality and family. Under the guise of "love" the capitalists promote greed, competition and the "shabby individual." The heterosexual individual is invented, and to defend it, heterosexism with its double-edged sword of heterocentrism and homophobia.

So how do we take all of this into account when developing our anticapitalist, pro-socialist values, and in expanding the horizon of our understanding of the nature of this democratic struggle? Do we insist that a total subversion of "normal" bourgeois heterosexuality is a big step in the revolutionary process? Yes. Beginning with a thorough self-examination for heterocentric and heterosexist impulses, we should advocate in our movement, unions and community organizations for gay equality by following the practice of advancing openly LGBT people into leadership of our movement and by extend-

ing our unique talents for coalition building to LGBT issues. Working-class publications, schools and educational tools should give value and voice to a diversity of social identities and their complex interaction in each of our own lives, while also advocating our specific and universal liberation as groups within a great class struggle. The basic Marxist-Leninist principle of the right of self-determination and development should be followed on this question. We should recognize the dialectical link between the particular, what has been disparaged as "identity" politics, and the universal nature or what is referred to as the "fundamental" identity in capitalist society – class and class struggle.

Elevating one side of this dialectic in order to erase the other is an error. It is incorrect to say that class is a more "fundamental" aspect of capitalist life and thus attention to it, class struggle and class-based social revolution will alone erase democratic problems of oppression and inequality aimed at nonclass based groups such as LGBT people. This is a form of heterocentrism disguised as revolutionary politics because it suggests that we can ignore the day-to-day realities faced by gay people. Since "class" is lived out in different ways by different people, we should not demand the erasure of identities for the sake of class struggle. Insisting on this kind of complete conformity instead of broad unity distorts an accurate understanding of our great struggle and serves the interests of the ruling class, which is a ruthless overseer endlessly looking for points of tension and division to push wedges between us. Overcoming this error requires that we also accept that identity cannot be separated from class exploitation and pretend that real liberation can come by ignoring how capitalism works.

By insisting that sexual activity with members of the opposite sex and the social value attributed to it is no worthier than homosexuality and by advocating social equality, we can shake the foundations of bourgeois morality. We should not allow the ruling class or its antidemocratic allies to define our families, who we can love or what roles each of us can play within our households, our organizations or in society. Our ultimate purpose should be to reject the received cultural values of inequality, repression and abuse that support and reproduce capitalist exploitation in favor of the egalitarian principles we call for in a socialist system. □



**BREAKING INTO
THE BOYS' CLUB:**
ROSA LUXEMBURG'S PLACE IN HISTORY

By Glenn Burleigh

Too often in our theoretical work Marxists overlook the contributions women have made in the arena of socialist thought. While Marx, Engels and Lenin made monumental contributions to the study of socialism, and we should diligently study their works, sometimes we neglect the contributions of revolutionary women leaders like Rosa Luxemburg.

Rosa Luxemburg's rise as a leader in the German socialist movement was not an easy one. The German socialist leadership was mostly male and few female theoreticians were published in German papers. Overcoming sexism within the movement as

an immigrant in her 20s was quite an accomplishment, the result of her ability to grasp the dialectic and dig deeper than most of her contemporaries.

The article that thrust her into the limelight of German socialist thought was "Reform or Revolution," a refutation of "Problems of Socialism" by Eduard Bernstein. Bernstein's

article was published in *Die Neue Zeit*, a newspaper edited by German Social Democratic Party (SPD) leader Karl Kautsky, and is viewed as a rejection of scientific socialism in favor of evolutionary social change.

Bernstein's reformist current, reviled by Lenin, became a strong force within the SPD and if not for Luxemburg it might have gone unchallenged in the socialist press. "Reform or Revolution" called the reformist tendency into question, and Luxemburg helped lead the fight against opportunism and kept the SPD a revolutionary party.

An examination of the details of Bernstein's argument and Luxemburg's criticisms demonstrate the continuing relevance of Luxemburg's conclusions.

Rosa Luxemburg's contributions to socialist thought are the hallmark of a true dialectical materialist.



Samantha Sin/AFP/Getty Images

△ A sculpture by Jens Galschiot entitled "Hunger March" is displayed during an anti-WTO protest in Hong Kong last December. Capitalist organizations such as the WTO and IMF simply have failed to alleviate the suffering of billions on the planet. Marxist critics say that because capitalism aims to maximize profit, it cannot solve the major social problems of the world.

Bernstein's Argument

According to Bernstein, reform of capitalism will lead to socialism; capitalism is capable of creating an egalitarian state, he said, and therefore there is no reason for the working class to seek the conquest of political and economic power. The trade unions will create good working conditions, good pay, and true working-class power in the economic system; and capitalists will become mainly administrative in their economic role. In general, he suggested, the ever-evolving nature of capitalism would destroy its contradictions by means of credit, cartels and better means of communication.

The rise of the international credit system, he said, will enable capitalists to borrow in times of overproduction and economic downturns, allowing them the stability needed to stop the cyclical nature of the economy and ensure the resources necessary to keep the workers employed at a living wage.

▼ Despite global integration of capitalism through advanced communication and finance capital, the system's contradictions have not been resolved.

Bernstein added that cartels would allow for regulation between capitalists to stop the competition of capitalism and allow business interests to sell their products at mutually acceptable profit levels, further stabilizing the economy.

New communication methods will allow the capitalists to run industries more efficiently, Bernstein insisted. Being able to know what supply and demand levels are, on a faster basis, would allow them to regulate production better. This would act as a means of stopping overproduction and evening out the economic cycles of capitalism.

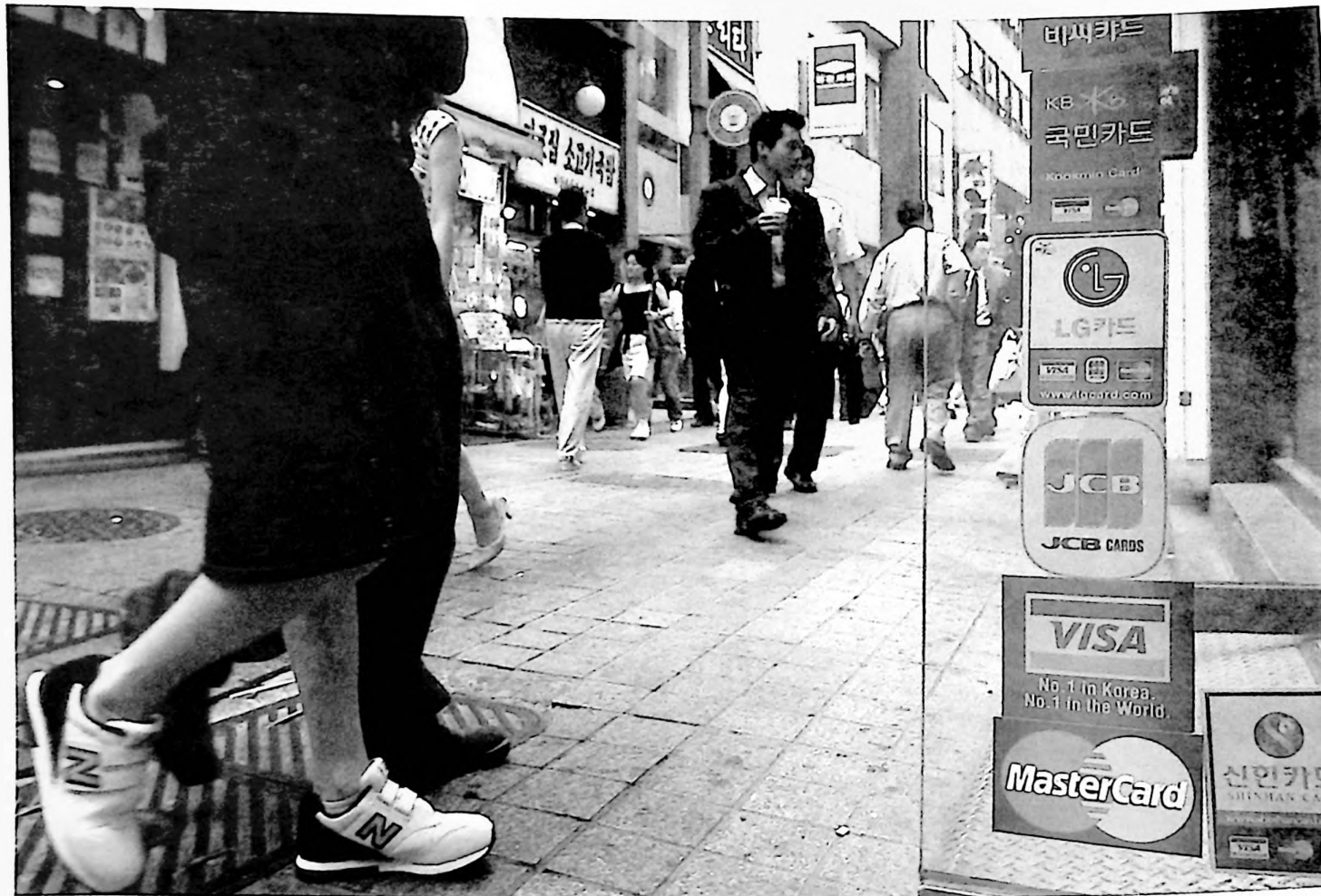
Luxemburg's Refutation

By connecting capital, Luxemburg countered, the emerging international credit system increases the mutual sensitivity of capitalists to economic crises, keeping production artificially high and separating production from ownership by creating "social" capital in this international credit system. It also causes a small group of capitalists to accumulate immense productive powers and increases the social nature of production.

Cartels, for their part, increase the rate of profit in one field at the expense of the rates of profit in others, which creates conflict between industrial conglomerates. As members of the cartels move to restrict production, to stop crisis, they will idle productive capacity, putting workers out of their jobs. Finally, when world capitalist forces extend to their limits, regulations in those countries will give way to hyper-competition. This will create worsening conditions for workers, sharpening the class conflict.

While better communications leads to quicker reaction times, Luxemburg argued,

Has the ever-rapid increase of centralization of capital into fewer and fewer hands led to a resolution to the problem of overproduction?



Kim Joo-Hwan/AFP/Getty Images

they do not resolve the inherent contradictions and inadequacies of capitalism.

Luxemburg also disputed the idea that nonrevolutionary trade unions would be able to function as true organizations of class power. While a necessary part of the conscious development of the working class, unions, she said, that take a purely economic (i.e. not class-based) stance will never move the working-class towards power.

Bernstein asserted that trade unions will be the primary player in the development of working-class power in the socialist/Communist future. He asserts that they will lead the fight against the increasing rate of profit and turn this rate into the rate of wages. The main flaw in this argument is that it looks upon trade unions as an offensive force, but they are also a defensive one. Often trade unions do not lead working-class assaults; they protect the working class from capitalists' attack. "They express the resistance offered by the working class to the oppression of the capitalist economy," said Luxemburg.

Today's Relevance

The world credit system has continued to grow, involving larger sections of the world's population, and yet, the cyclical nature of capitalism has not been corrected. In the United States, where credit is readily available, we still have massive economic insecurity, much of which is actually caused by the levels of debt owed by the government, corporations and individuals.

Not only do cartels continue, but also many have now been replaced by the height of capitalist productivity, the monopoly. Has the ever-rapid increase of centralization of capital into fewer and fewer hands led to a resolution to the problem of overproduction?

An increase in competition for profits is becoming more and more apparent in our society. Real earning power continues to fall, more and more jobs are sent to low-wage countries and competition between industrial conglomerates continues to sharpen. Take a look at the oil industry: while extracting the highest rates of profits ever, they are creating massive problems for the auto industry they have partnered with for so long. The increase in oil prices has lead consumers

FOR FURTHER READING:

Reform or Revolution, 1900
 Leninism or Marxism, 1904
 The National Question, 1909
 Theory and Practice, 1910
 The Accumulation of Capital, 1913
 The Russian Revolution, 1918

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www.marxists.org

to move away from SUV's, and their higher profit margins, and back to smaller, less profitable and more fuel-efficient cars, causing car companies to sustain profit losses.

With the advent of better and better communication technologies (e-mail, Web, cell phones), we can say that if this had been a true key to unlocking the contradictions inherent in capitalism, we would be living in a socialist wonderland, by now. In fact, better means of communication are the very mechanisms that are leading to the sharpening in conflict, both within the capitalist class and between the two classes. The ability to access information anywhere in the world has lead to a rapid expansion into previously unindustrialized countries, causing increased population centralization, and, as a result of this, increased proletarianization.

In our own country, the lack of a class conscious approach to building the movement within most trade unions along with increased right-wing corporate assaults has lead to a weakening of workers' economic and political power. Business unionism, which became rampant during the McCarthy era, especially with the expulsion of the socialist and Communist elements within the CIO, has created a system that discourages class-struggle trade unionism.

Like Marx, Engels and Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg's arguments stand up today. The timelessness of her contributions to socialist thought is the hallmark of a true dialectical materialist, and her arguments are just as relevant today as they were when first written.

Finally, Rosa thanks for fighting to get your thoughts out there. Thanks for breaking into the boys' club. Generations of Marxists, male and female, have gained insight and direction from your writings. □

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Chavez V 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 world peace and democracy. The convention delegates as well as...

President H. Venezuela, made demo after six ye, recall refer August 15th 55% major

Labor is at the forefront of the struggle to defeat Bush on November 2.

▼ Does relinquishing privacy rights make you feel safer?

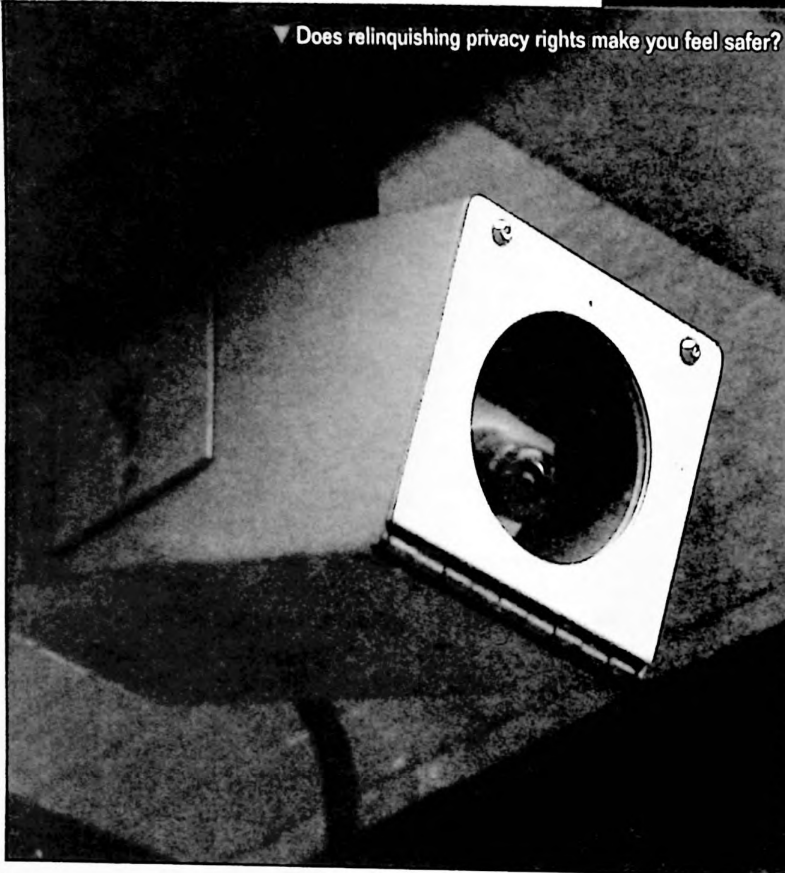
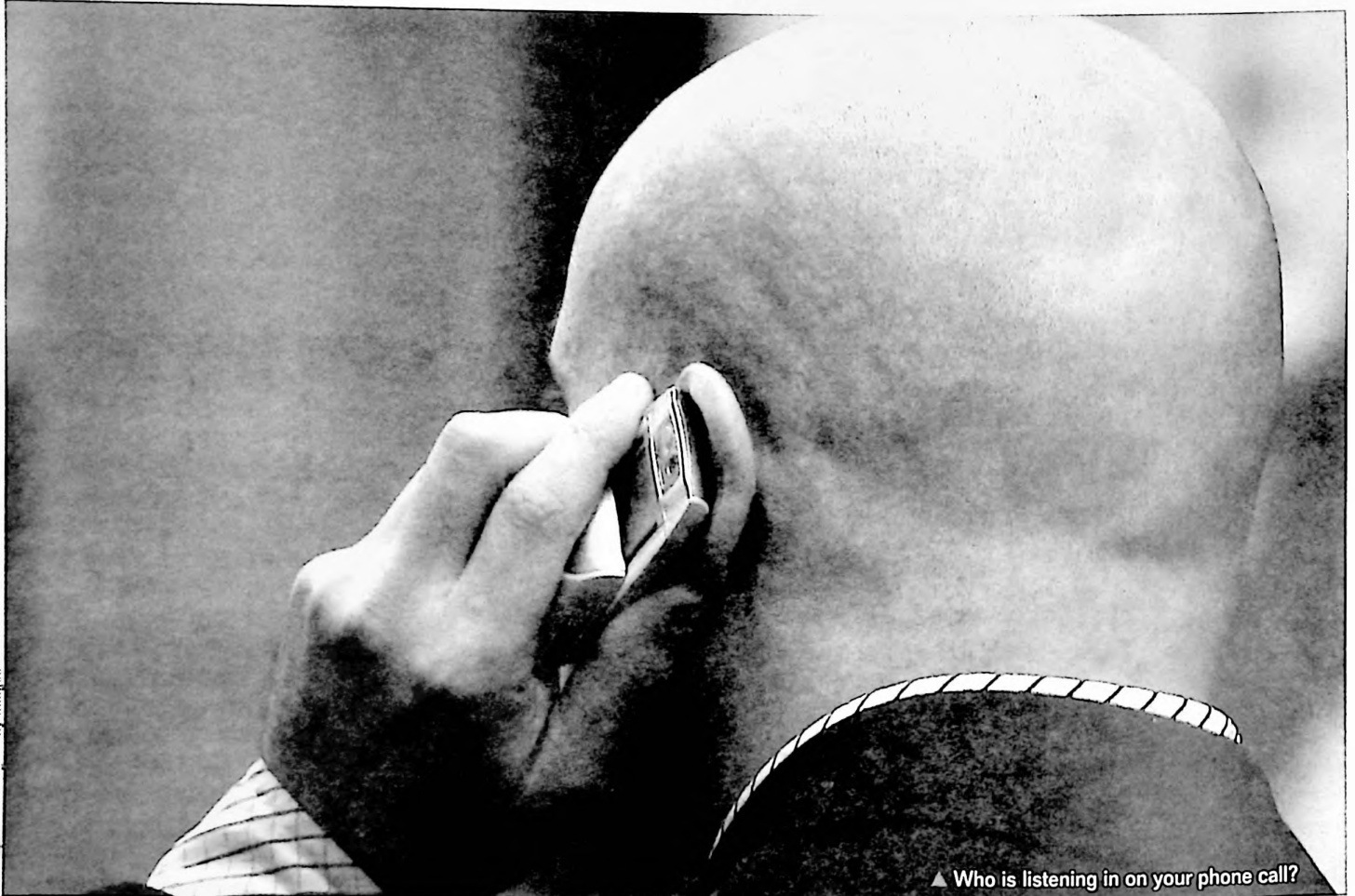


Photo by Mario Tama/Getty Images

SPIES AND LIES

THE CASE FOR IMPEACHING BUSH



Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

▲ Who is listening in on your phone call?

By Lawrence Albright

In case there was any room for doubt, President George W. Bush's reliance on his big brother no longer refers to Florida Governor John Ellis "Jeb" Bush. Nor would he be referring to Janis Joplin's original backing band. Big brother, in Bush's case, now clearly is the National Security Agency (NSA).

It has recently been revealed that Bush signed a highly classified executive order in 2002 which gave the NSA the authority to conduct electronic monitoring of both US citizens and foreign nationals residing in the United States. While details of the secret program remain sketchy, it has been confirmed that the surveillance includes monitoring e-mail, telephone calls and other forms of communication. Thousands of people may have been affected by this program.

It has also been reported in the media that the justification for the use of the NSA came from a classified memorandum written by Justice department official John C. Yoo, who was earlier involved in the writing of another departmental memorandum which contained a very narrow definition of what could be said to constitute torture. That memorandum, not signed by Yoo, was disavowed by the Justice Department after its existence was disclosed.

The "Super Secret" National Security Agency

The National Security Agency (NSA) is often referred to in the media as a "super secret" agency. Although the NSA was established in 1952, its existence wasn't officially acknowledged until decades later. Author James Bramford, in his book, *The Puzzle Palace: Inside America's Most Secret Intelligence Organization*, first published in 1982, was the first writer to bring the NSA to broad public attention. Concerns about whether the NSA was involved in domestic surveillance 23 years ago were but rumors until the disclosure of Bush's secret order was made public.

The NSA exists for the purpose of code breaking known as cryptology. Its official Web site states that:

The National Security Agency/Central Security Service is America's cryptologic organization. It coordinates, directs, and performs highly specialized activities to protect US gov-

ernment information systems and produce foreign signals intelligence information. A high technology organization, NSA is on the frontiers of communications and data processing. It is also one of the most important centers of foreign language analysis and research within the government.

The Agency's website goes on to describe its key focus as including both signals intelligence (SIGINT) and information assurance. The former involves monitoring of communications while the latter, according to the NSA, involves insuring that the US government's classified information remains secure.

The NSA also, along the way, takes credit for the development of the super computer, the cassette tape, the microchip, quantum mathematics, nanotechnology, biometrics and semiconductor technology. The NSA is headquartered at Fort Meade, Maryland which, its website helpfully notes, is "between Baltimore and Washington, DC." NSA operates a "national spy museum," the National Cryptologic Museum, which is open to the public. It also is an aggressive recruiter on the nation's campuses.

While the NSA may indeed be on the frontiers of communication and data processing, the agency may also find itself on the frontiers of Congressional hearings now that Bush's secret directive has been exposed.

The Rule of Law and Intelligence Gathering

One of the most astonishing elements in the disclosure of the Bush directive and the NSA is that it may be the first time a president has authorized a government agency to engage in what could be construed as criminal conduct under the law, the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA). Richard Nixon, to be certain, attempted to use IRS audits and other means to harass his perceived enemies, but his efforts pale in comparison to Bush's order.

FISA, 50 U.S.C. Â§1801, declares it to be illegal for government agencies engaged in foreign intelligence and counterintelligence activities, including both the NSA and CIA, to engage in domestic intelli-

September 11, 2001 provided the ultra-right with the pretext they needed to pursue their ultimate agenda: the consolidation of an unprecedented degree of power along with efforts to marginalize their opposition.

gence activity against US citizens except under the most restrictive of circumstances. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) as the investigative arm of the US Justice Department has historically had responsibility for domestic intelligence gathering, and the abuses of that agency have been well documented.

The National Security Administration is hardly unaware of the statute. In February of 2000, the NSA submitted a report to the Congress as required by the 2000 Intelligence Authorization Act. This report, entitled "Legal Standards for the Intelligence Community in Conducting Electronic Surveillance" made the following points:

Electronic surveillance is conducted by elements of the Intelligence Community for foreign intelligence and foreign counterintelligence purposes. Because of its potential intrusiveness and the implications for the privacy of United States persons, such surveillance is subject to strict regulation by statute and Executive Order and close scrutiny. The applicable legal standards for the collection, retention, or dissemination of information concerning US persons reflect a careful balancing between the needs of the government for such intelligence and the protection of the rights of US persons, consistent with the reasonableness standard of the Fourth Amendment as determined by factual circumstance.

The Fourth Amendment to the Constitution provides:

The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.

The executive order referred to in the NSA's report to Congress in 2000 was Executive Order 12233, which complimented the FISA in attempting to balance the need for national security while protecting the constitutional liberties of US citizens. According to the NSA report:

Both documents reflect a deference to US persons' rights by closely regulating the conduct of electronic surveillance that either targets US persons or may result in the acquisition of information to, from, or about US persons. For example, in order to conduct electronic surveillance against a US person located within the United States, FISA requires the intelligence agency to obtain a court order from the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court. If the United States person is abroad, the Executive Order requires that the Attorney General approve such surveillance. In both instances, generally speaking there must be probable cause that the target is an agent of a foreign power. In addition, the information sought by the surveillance must be foreign intelligence that cannot be obtained by other less intrusive collection techniques. Furthermore, even if a US person is not the target, all foreign intelligence electronic surveillance must be conducted in a manner that minimizes the acquisition, retention, and dissemination of information about unconsenting US persons. Information about a US person who is not an approved target, if lawfully acquired incidental to the authorized collection, may be retained and disseminated if it amounts to foreign intelligence or counterintelligence; otherwise, it may not be retained or disseminated.

One element of Executive Order 12233 that has particular resonance for today is the following comment in the NSA report.

Pursuant to 2.3 of E.O. 12333, there may be other instances where [intelligence on US citizens] may be collected, such as with the consent of the person concerned or where the information is needed to protect the safety of any persons or organizations, including those who are targets, victims, or hostages of international terrorist organizations.

However, the executive order did not provide an exemption from the need to obtain a court order from the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (FISC). This was reiterated on April 12, 2000 by NSA Director Lt. General Michael V. Hayden in a statement for the record to the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. He stated the

NSA may only target communications of a US person in the United States if a federal judge finds probable cause to believe that the US person is an agent of a foreign power. Probable cause exists when facts and circumstances within the applicant's knowledge and of which he/she has reasonably trustworthy information are sufficient to warrant a person of reasonable caution to believe that the proposed target of the surveillance is an agent of a foreign power. Under the statute, a judge may determine a US person to be an agent of a foreign power only if there is information to support a finding that the individual is a spy, terrorist, saboteur, or someone who aids or abets them.

The Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (FISC) meets at the Justice Department. As can be expected, most of its decisions are classified and not available for public scrutiny. However, the Justice Department is required by FISA provisions to report annually to Congress. On April 1, 2005 the report was sent to Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert by Assistant Attorney General William E. Moschella along with an unclassified cover letter which advised that during 2004 there were 1,758 applications for FISC approval of surveillance and intelligence gathering. Of these, the government withdrew three applications. The FISC did not disapprove any of the applications.

The Supreme Court has also been called on to address the issue of government surveillance on US citizens. In the case of *Katz v. United States of America* (1967), the court held that the Fourth Amendment applied to surveillance which did not include any physical intrusion, but stated that the position taken by the court did not extend to matters of national security. In the *Keith* case from 1972, however, the court did suggest that since national security considerations were fundamentally different from traditional crime that Congress would want to consider affording US citizens protections consistent with the Fourth Amendment, a precursor of the FISA.

The Bush Administration Goes to War on the Constitution

While it may be fashionable to trace the Bush administration's animosity to constitutional constraints on its power to the tragic events on September 11, 2001 there were harbingers of things to come even before that infamous date.

The 2000 elections, which saw Bush's highly questionable victory over then Vice President Al Gore, revealed the utter contempt of the



△ Protesters challenge the legitimacy of Bush's repressive domestic policies and his war on Iraq.

Luka Frazza/AP/Getty Images

Republican Party machinery toward the Constitution. In Florida, the term "pregnant chad" entered the language as part and parcel of a disenfranchisement of voters throughout the state who, according to demographics, were solidly inclined to vote for Gore. This process was aided and abetted by Florida Secretary of State Katherine Harris, now serving in the House of Representatives for Florida's 13th district. Similar issues occurred elsewhere (and in Ohio during the 2004 election).

It is too early to tell if this latest disclosure might cause some of those "Republican Eagles" to start molting, if not bolting.

In one of those ironies that would be amusing if it weren't so frightening, the Supreme Court effectively decided Bush's 2000 victory, a first in the history of the Supreme Court and the nation. In view of the Bush administration and the ultra-right's hostility toward the judiciary, one is tempted to wonder how they reconcile their philosophical and political positions with the gift they were given by the court five years ago.

To use one of Bush's favorite expressions, make no mistake, September 11, 2001 merely provided the ultra-right with the pretext they needed to pursue their ultimate agenda: the consolidation

of an unprecedented degree of power along with efforts to marginalize their opposition by portraying them as either unpatriotic or fools.

Toward this end, the Bush administration and its allies steam-rolled Congress into the passage of the USA Patriot Act. In addition to its other provisions, the USA Patriot Act also amended the FISA. It increased the number of judges serving on the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (FISC) and allowed roving or multi-point surveillance under FISA. Access to business records was substantially amended along with the following very significant change in the statute: Where prior to the passage of the USA Patriot Act, an agent seeking an order from the FISC would have to certify that obtaining foreign intelligence information was the sole purpose of the surveillance, under the current, amended, rules the agent has to certify only that foreign intelligence is a "significant purpose" of the surveillance.

The USA Patriot Act is, of course, full of vague language subject to interpretation, but from the above amendment it can be seen that the once rather precise FISA has been similarly affected. Such language opens the door to government-sponsored activities that would have previously been abuses. As of this writing, the Senate has approved a six month extension of the USA Patriot Act, a victory over Republicans who were insisting on nothing less than a permanent reauthorization. The act, which would have expired December 31, 2005, is headed to the House of Representatives.

Bush is said to be furious at the disclosure of his secret directive



► The Watergate burglaries were part of a Nixon White House project to spy on political opponents.

Paul J. Richards/AFP/Getty Images

to the NSA, but it is useful to remember he was not so furious about the media leak which resulted in the disclosure that Valerie Plame, the wife of Ambassador Joseph Wilson, was an undercover officer for the CIA, after Wilson publicly expressed his differences with the Bush administration's policy in Iraq. The reason for the distinction, it is clear, is the ultra-right's utter vindictiveness toward anyone it perceives as

It is too soon to tell whether the Bush administration's flagrant disregard of the Fourth Amendment of the Constitution will result in his censure or impeachment.

a threat along with a moral rectitude that the ends justify the means. The disclosure of Plame's identity was intended to hurt a critic of the administration, notwithstanding the fact that they were complicit in disclosure of classified information.

The exposure of the Bush directive authorizing NSA intrusion into domestic intelligence gathering, on the other hand, is an embarrassment to a president who has gone to extraordinary lengths to portray his administration as guardians of American freedom. Moreover, some of the Republican Party's biggest financial supporters, the so-called "Republican Eagles," are staunch libertarians opposed to gov-

ernment intrusion who believe in the traditionally Republican message of "less government." It is too early to tell if this latest disclosure might cause some of those "Republican Eagles" to start molting, if not bolting.

The problem for Bush, however, is that even with the expansion of intelligence gathering opportunities presented by the amendments to the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, by way of the USA Patriot Act, there still must be an order from the FISC. Because the capabilities of the NSA are so vast and indiscriminate (the NSA has been compared to a vacuum cleaner sucking up all manner of communications), it seems highly doubtful FISC orders could have been formally sought. And as flawed as that is, since due process is not afforded (and generally isn't in the seeking of warrants), it still represents the intent of Congress to provide a measure of Fourth Amendment protection. It might be tempting to view this latest revelation of the Bush administration's fight against civil liberties as anomaly or fluke. Sadly, this is not the case.

The FBI: Cointelpro for the 21st Century?

There have been a number of disclosures in recent months that the FBI, as the investigative arm of the Justice Department, is back to the tricks it honed under the leadership of J. Edgar Hoover. Hoover's sole ambition was to establish the FBI as the nation's foremost crime solving and intelligence gathering organization and, not coincidentally, to insure for himself absolute control over that agency. He attained the latter when President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed

Hoover the director of the FBI for life. Nothing is more indicative of the culture that evolved in the FBI during the Hoover years than the acronym used for the agency's headquarters: SOG which stood for "Seat of Government."

In the wake of Hoover's death in 1972, and the disclosures of FBI abuses in the late 1970s by the Church Committee in 1978, Congress intended to have oversight over the FBI's operations and budget to a degree that proved impossible during Hoover's reign.

Under the leadership of its current director, Robert S. Mueller III, and emboldened by the USA Patriot Act, the FBI seems to have returned to its old style of harassing political opponents, visiting their workplaces, and in the process hurting people who have no connection to terrorist activities or any other crime with which the FBI is charged with investigating.

While maintaining a legal fiction that it has no interest in organizations or in individuals who dissent from government policies, it has recently been disclosed that the FBI has had a file for years on the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and more recently organizations like People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) as well as on vegetarians. Now, the ACLU makes perfect sense. Since the administration is so hostile to the Constitution, it stands to reason that an organization like the ACLU, committed as it is to the protections of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, would be regarded as subversive. Why individuals and organizations who seek to protect animals or who don't eat meat would somehow be a threat necessitating files maintained by the FBI, the administration has thus far failed to say.

A second legal fiction is that the special agents of the FBI are investigators who are simply engaged in the finding of fact and who do not allow personal or political judgments to enter into their thinking. This legal fiction was exposed by the disclosure of FBI monitoring of the Catholic Worker movement which the bureau portrays, according to the media, as a "semi-communistic" movement.

Perhaps the use of the word "Worker" is what led someone at the FBI to assume the Catholic Worker movement was "semi-communistic." A little homework, however, reveals nothing "semi-communistic" about the Catholic Workers. The movement was founded by Dorothy Day, whose orientation toward the Catholic Church led her to a frequently expressed anti-Communism. Day was one of the non-Party members who were invited to attend the party's 16th National Convention held in New York in 1957, and who was one of a group of observers who reported on the democratic nature of the convention. This group also included A.J. Muste and Bayard Rustin, both of whom were staunch anti-Communists. There is certainly a progressive element to the Catholic Worker movement, which has been involved in setting up and running hospitality houses for those who are poor and/or homeless, as well as advocating a more progressive direction from the church's hierarchy in the Vatican.

Defeating the Ultra-Right

It is too soon to tell whether the Bush administration's flagrant disregard of the Fourth Amendment of the Constitution will result in his censure or impeachment. The Republican majority in Congress, as well as the historical fact that no President has been impeached during a time of active military engagement, would seem to make either course a difficult proposition politically.

Still, the importance of a movement to censure or impeach will carry heavy, symbolic weight even if unsuccessful. It would represent a rejection of the Bush administration's contempt for civil liberties and the Bill of Rights.

When Richard Nixon unleashed the "Saturday Night Massacre" and sent FBI agents to seal the offices of the Watergate special prosecutor in October of 1973, office spokesman James Doyle announced his plan to "go home and read about the Reichstag Fire."

Nixon wasn't Hitler of course. Nor, for that matter, is Bush. But the strategic parallels are staggering:

- Hitler was appointed by Chancellor Hindenburg despite lacking plurality at the polls. Bush was, in effect, appointed by the US Supreme Court while losing the popular vote.
- Hitler used the Reichstag fire, which history discloses was probably set by the Nazis, as the pretext to suspend civil liberties in Germany with the consent and active involvement of its Parliament, not without opposition. Bush has used the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington to give the administration broad and sweeping powers contrary to previously existing law, also with the consent and active involvement of the Congress, likewise not without opposition.
- Hitler pursued anti-working-class policies, painted his opponents as unpatriotic, while the policies he did pursue initially benefited Germany's financial barons. The Bush administration is anti-working class, paints its opponents as unpatriotic, and has been oriented toward benefiting monopoly capital.

Notwithstanding the similarities, the United States remains a federal republic, not a fascist one. There remains an active, progressive movement which – while it may or may not be subject to increased surveillance now or in the future – continues to organize and to advocate. The Communist Party, USA is a legal political party and continues to grow and to participate in all of the important arenas of struggle that affect our working class and our people.

Despite the recent, small increase in Bush's approval rating, according to polls, he and his administration continue to be on the offensive. Special Prosecutor Patrick J. Fitzgerald continues his investigation into administration involvement in the leak to the media of former CIA operative Valerie Plame's identity, and opposition to the US military occupation in Iraq, led by organizations like United for Peace and Justice, Veterans for Peace and other groups continues to grow. The Bush administration fears the light that has been focused on them, for they know they haven't a chance to ever win popular support.

They also fear the upcoming midterm elections. On the local level, Republican incumbents are being soundly thrashed. In New York, Senator Hillary Clinton's would-be Republican opponent has dropped out of the race. GOP candidates are becoming increasingly hesitant to tie themselves to the president's political coattails. For all their bluster and machinations, many Republicans are scared. The intent of the administration's increased surveillance policies and programs are geared toward frightening people and squelching opposition.

These policies are benchmarks not of political strength, but insecurity. The ultra-right fears opposition and they particularly are afraid of unity shown by their opposition. While they might deny it, they know the truth in the chanting of thousands and millions of voices: "The people, united, will never be defeated." □

IMPERIAL FAULTLINES

By Gerald Horne

With every passing day it becomes ever clearer that the regime of George W. Bush has been wounded severely both domestically as a result of his criminal negligence in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and globally, as a result of the illegal invasion of Iraq. Simultaneously, the left continues to surge in Latin America while China continues to take gigantic strides, which has become increasingly worrisome to Washington. In sum, the crisis of US imperialism shows few signs of abating.

When the otherwise conservative Representative John Murtha of Pennsylvania, endorsed a US troop withdrawal from Iraq, one more signal was provided that this war might turn out to be the most significant blunder by US imperialism in decades. Murtha, the leather-necked former Marine, crystallized a growing sentiment in his own Democratic Party and amongst independents. Perhaps Murtha has been following various trends, for it is apparent that leading indicators spell doom for the US occupation of Iraq. For exam-



4 Ongoing opposition to the illegal war in Iraq at home and abroad continues to plague and hinder the Bush agenda.

David McNew/Getty Images

ple, the military is falling far behind in its effort to recruit and re-enlist soldiers for some of the most vital combat positions. According to the Government Accountability Office, the Army, National Guard and Marines signed up as few as a third of the Special Forces soldiers, intelligence specialists and translators that they had aimed for in the last year.

African Americans have made up a shrinking share of enlisted troops since 2000, declining by 15 percent in the Army, 23 percent in the Marines and 11 percent in the Air Force. These drop-offs are largely attributable to the war. But African Americans are not alone. Last year only three residents in Manhattan's posh Upper East Side – the city's richest area – joined the Army, Air Force or Navy.

The war has also become a public relations disaster for US imperialism with the stomach-turning reports of torture, secret prisons, illegal kidnappings, etc. Italian prosecutors have requested the extradition of 22 US nationals believed to be CIA operatives on charges that they abducted an Egyptian Islamic cleric off the streets of Milan in early 2003, then flew him to Cairo where he later said he was tortured. Presumably he was treated so harshly because of his alleged knowledge about the "terrorism" that we are told caused the US to invade Iraq and Afghanistan. During the storm-tossed December 2005 visit to Europe of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, she was bombarded with questions concerning alleged secret prisons established by US imperialism in Romania and Poland – an ironic coda given that supposedly these nations had been "liberated" from the specter of the so-called Soviet "gulag."

There have been credible charges that US forces in Iraq have used ghastly weapons called white phosphorous. According to Italian television, US forces used this chemical in Falluja in 2004. Packed into an artillery shell it explodes over a battlefield in a white glare that can illuminate an enemy's positions. It also rains balls of flaming chemicals, which cling to anything they touch and burn until their oxygen supply is cut off. They can burn for hours inside a human body. In 1983

an international convention banned its use against civilians, and, like torture, this was one of the many crimes ascribed to the late, unlamented regime of Saddam Hussein, who was accused of dropping white phosphorous on Kurdish rebels and civilians in 1991.

These scandals and war crimes are beginning to harm the bottom line of US based transnational corporations. Tourism, a major industry in the US, especially in New York, Florida and California, is down; inbound travel from other nations is off at least 1.5 percent in terms of market share from 2000 levels. One share point is 7.6 million visits and a hefty \$12 billion in sales. "That's the equivalent of 153,000 jobs and a lot of tax dollars," says Keith Reinhard, who chairs the elite advertising agency DDB Worldwide. He adds that 37 percent of the British intelligentsia say they will avoid buying US brands because of the "cultural identity" of the US. This is hurting

Like the debacle that is the Iraq invasion, the cruelly incompetent handling of Katrina has been a bruising black eye for US imperialism.

Marlboro cigarettes, McDonald's hamburgers and the Barbie doll in particular.

As whatever prestige held by US imperialism continues to decline, an accompanying trend has grown that has outraged conservatives. The Supreme Court is looking more to international law and legal precedents of other nations when ruling on some of the most contentious domestic issues, e.g. the juvenile death penalty and gay rights. Courts are also refusing to stay out of the area that has caused the most outrage in the international community – the treatment of prisoners at Guantánamo, Cuba and elsewhere. Last year the high court ordered the administration to give terrorism suspects the right to dispute their detention in federal court and said that the president had to provide a fair

hearing to US citizens captured as terror suspects broad. This has sparked howls of outrage from the ultra right, which recognizes that its dastardly schemes are supported by only a distinct minority in this nation and opposed by an overwhelming majority abroad, and when the latter weighs in it becomes exceedingly difficult for the White House to move even more to the right. Informed observers recognize, for example, that the international community's opposition to Jim Crow was a major reason why US-style apartheid began to crumble.

This confluence of the courts, the global and the White House came to an abrupt collision when Bush administration official David H. Safavian was arrested for transgressions committed in conjunction with lobbying work he did with Jack Abramoff, whose specialty has been looting Native American nations of their casino profits and funneling his ill-gotten gains to Israeli extremists. Safavian was arrested for lying and obstructing an investigation into Abramoff's dealings with the federal government but what captured the attention of many was Safavian's alleged lobbying for Muslim leader, Abdurahman Alamoudi, who is known to have close ties to both Hamas and Hezbollah. Safavian's firm also did lobbying work for Jamal Barzinji who, according to the US Customs Service, was the "officer or director" of entities in northern Virginia "controlled by individuals who have shown support for terrorists or terrorist fronts."

Thus, two of the factors weakening the Bush regime – the Iraq war and the culture of corruption – both have keen global manifestations. This is why it is worthwhile to pay close attention to the outrage expressed globally in the wake of the inept handling of relief efforts in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The *Zimbabwe Herald* charged that "the fact that New Orleans is a southern town predominantly populated by African-Americans...explains why President George W. Bush did not see the need to cut short his holidays." That nation's ministry of information asserted that "the position of the black people [in the US] has always been a very sad

case." Lest one think that this was merely a case of Zimbabwe scoring points against one of its key antagonists, note that a Rwandan official said, "my initial reaction is that there was a racist element" in the poor relief effort. A Kenyan official said that "given the history of the [US], everything points at racial profiling." Writing in Kenya's *Daily Nation*, another writer said, "the images, and even the disproportionately high number of visibly impoverished blacks among the refugees, could easily have been a re-enactment of a scene from the pigeonholed African continent..." The African Union, the continent's premier body, avowed that "we are not indifferent. Hurricane Katrina struck a ... region which is inhabited by our Diaspora."

But it was not just Africa and Africans who denounced what they saw unfold on the US Gulf Coast. Spain's *Razon* said that "it is clear that the USA's international image is being damaged in a way that it has never known before." France's *Le Progres* observed that "Katrina has shown that the emperor has no clothes." Switzerland's *Le*

Temps, captured the sentiments of legions when it noted that

the sea walls would not have burst in New Orleans if the funds meant for strengthening them had not been cut to help the war effort in Iraq and the war on terror... and would George Bush have left his holiday ranch more quickly if the disaster had not first struck the most disadvantaged populations of the black South?

Thus, like the debacle that is the Iraq invasion, the cruelly incompetent handling of Katrina has been a bruising black eye for US imperialism, weakening allegiances that were thought to be rock-solid. This has been particularly true in the case of Israel, which has been trying to improve relations with China, not least due to the perception that US imperialism is not up to meeting all of its obligations at a time when the most determined Washington hawks are bent on launching a new cold war targeting Beijing. In April 2005, the Pentagon took the unusual step of suspending some

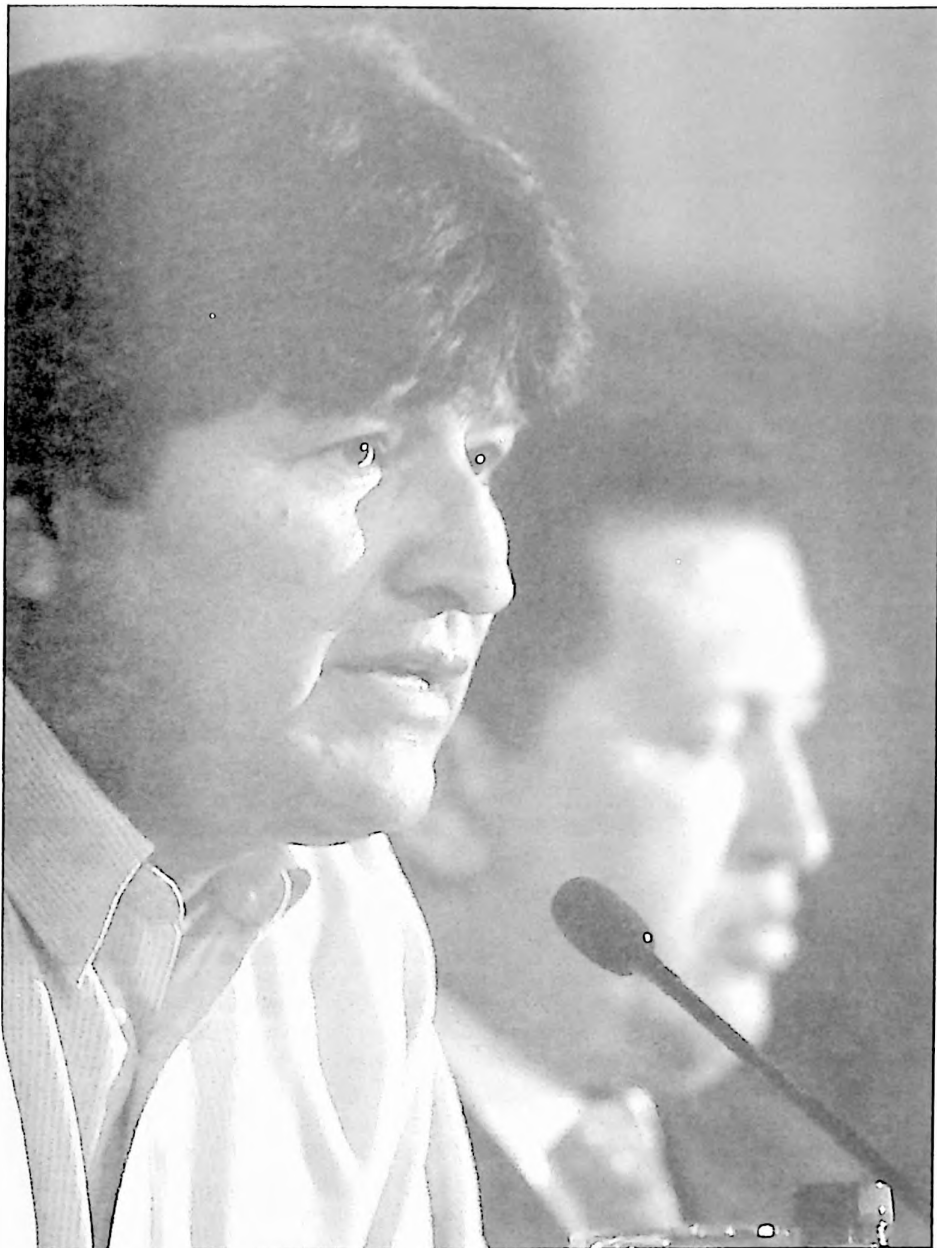
information sharing with Israel on a new fighter-jet until US concerns are allayed over Israeli military technology transfers to China.

To be sure, Israel is not the only ally of US imperialism that is being treated shabbily. Representative Henry Hyde (R-IL) is determined to thwart the White House's promises to improve technology cooperation with Great Britain and Australia. The administration did so by blocking a promised waiver of arms trade controls on the grounds of the

US aid to Israel is little more than an American subsidy to US arms manufacturers, considering that the bulk of US military aid to Israel is used to buy weapons from US companies.



△ Employees work on various models of General Motors cars at a plant in Shanghai, China. China expects to be the world's largest automaker by 2020.



△ President Evo Morales of Bolivia meets with President Chávez of Venezuela after his landslide election victory last December.

inadequacy of London's and Canberra's own arms trade controls. Hyde's move presumably could lead Britain and Australia to also turn to Beijing.

Actually, US imperialists fear that its "allies" may be encroaching on one of its prized domains – serving as the preeminent merchants of death. The value of military weapons sales in 2004 globally reached the highest level since 2000 with the US once again dominating weapons sales, signing deals worth \$12.4 billion in 2004, or 33.5 percent of all contracts worldwide. But that was

down from \$15.1 billion in 2003. Russia was second; Britain was third, and Israel was fourth: So handcuffing the latter two can provide a bonanza for US imperialism, the issue of "alliance" notwithstanding.

But Israel may be even more vulnerable to Washington's pressure than Britain or Australia due to its extreme dependence on US imperialism and its general isolation. According to Middle East expert Stephen Zunes, between 1974 and 1989 alone, \$16.4 billion in US military loans to Israel were converted to grants. In fact, he says, Congress

has eventually forgiven all past US loans to Israel. Annually, US nationals make tax-deductible contributions to Israel to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars. Total US aid to Israel is approximately one-third of the US foreign-aid budget. This trans-Atlantic dollar flow was designed to advance US imperialism's interests. "Israel has helped defeat radical nationalist movements" in the region and, Zunes notes, has been a "testing ground for US made weaponry." Besides, Israel, at Washington's behest, has funneled US arms to third parties, e.g. apartheid South Africa, Nicaraguan Contras, etc.

Former Israeli General Matti Pelled says that this US "aid" is "little more than an American subsidy to US arms manufacturers," considering that the bulk of US military aid to Israel is used to buy weapons from US companies. Moreover, arms to Israel creates more demand for weaponry in Arab states. According to Zunes, the "Aerospace Industry Association," which promotes massive arms shipments, is "even more influential" than its better known counterpart lobby, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, in that the former has given twice as much money to political campaigns as the latter. In addition, US arms shipments push Israel toward intransigence and complicate the peace process.

On the other hand, the Iraqi invasion has exposed the glaring weaknesses of the alleged US security blanket that supposedly protects Israel. This fact had a disturbingly contradictory impact on the administration of war criminal, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. Prior to his health problems, Sharon broke with his ultra-right Likud Party in order to form another party just to its left. He engineered a withdrawal from Gaza in order to deepen Israel's grip on the West Bank. And in a maneuver that may serve to paper over the fraying ties between Israel and its patron in Washington, Sharon's government reportedly prepared attack plans for both Iran and Syria.

The regime in Teheran is developing nuclear energy that its opponents fear could be the basis for developing nuclear weapons, which is of concern to both the US and Israel. Damascus is already under US sanctions as a result of the Syria Accountability Act of 2003 and is accused by Washington of providing sanctuary to Iraqi guerrillas. "If one has a problem, expand it," is said to be Rumsfeld's motto. By that illogic, a joint US-Israeli assault on Iran and Syria could at once bring



China Photos/Getty Images

△ China's growing demand for sources of energy has caused it to seek business ties to numerous oil-producing countries from Iran to Venezuela.

Washington and its erstwhile ally closer together, while disabling two of the staunchest opponents of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land and the US occupation of Iraq.

Moreover, such an attack would place both the European Union and Japan in a tight corner. Just recently Brussels sharply criticized Israeli policies in East Jerusalem; at the same time, France has sought to paper over its differences with Washington over the Iraq war by joining enthusiastically with US imperialism in threatening Syria. Japan continues to invest in the bountiful energy industry of Iran. Thus, attacking Syria could possibly bridge a gulf between the EU and Israel and between France and the US, while attacking Iran could hamper Japan in its ongoing competition with US imperialism.

China also has invested heavily in Iranian energy, and given the growing tension between Washington and Beijing, an attack on Teheran would provide an added bonus, it is thought, of hindering the Chinese juggler-

naut. This is not as fanciful as it may sound. In 1997, China negotiated a \$1.3 billion contract with Saddam Hussein to develop the al-Ahdab oil field in central Iraq. By 2001, China was negotiating for rights to develop a much larger Halfayah field. The US invasion wiped out the Chinese stake in Iraq's oil fields, and led China to ink a \$70 billion contract to import Iranian oil. This led in turn to an \$836 million contract for China to help build Teheran's subway system, an expanding Chinese auto manufacturing presence in Iran and a host of other mega-deals.

Unable to assault China directly, the most hawkish acolytes of US imperialism are interested in attacking that which powers the Chinese economy: its sources of energy. Thus, concern is growing over the Saudi-China relationship which blossomed when both joined with Washington in opposing the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. In that context, Beijing secretly sold Riyadh medium-range missiles in the 1980's. More recently,

a Chinese company was one of the first foreigners to gain gas exploration rights in the kingdom. It is hard to say if the deteriorating US-Saudi relationship is a cause or effect of this escalating China-Saudi tie. In any case, China became the world's third largest importer of oil in 2003 and has brokered deals with regimes despised by US imperialism, especially energy-rich Venezuela.

In fact, it is easy to assert that the old cold war between Moscow and Washington has been replaced by a new one between Beijing and Washington, though US imperialism is not as united nowadays as it was in the past, especially since the financial tie between these two giant nations is so profound.

One major component of this financial tie is the movement of US-based manufacturing to China. Thus, when auto supplier Delphi declared bankruptcy in order to void union contracts, the *Wall Street Journal* almost joyfully reported last October that this company "pays its US unionized workers \$27 an hour.

Throw in health and retirement benefits, and the cost is more like \$65. In China," it gleefully noted, "Delphi pays its workers roughly \$3 an hour, about a third of which goes to medical and pension benefits." Delphi has poured \$500 million in investments into China since 1993, where it has joined General Motors in assisting Beijing in its stated goal of becoming the world's number one automaker by 2020. Reputedly, GM is considering following Delphi into bankruptcy court in order to negate its own union contracts.

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the tie between the US and China is replete with concord. A recent shocking speech by the newly installed head of the US Security and Exchange Commission, former conservative GOP Congressman, Christopher Cox, is suggestive of the contrary. Cox told a room packed with Chinese regulators and politicians that their country's "capitalism" was in danger of

China is presenting a challenge the likes of which the US has not faced in some decades.

meeting the same fate as the Qing dynasty, which ended in a tidal wave of bloodshed in 1911. As the *Financial Times* put it,

Mr. Cox's remarks laid bare an anger among the US financial elite at China's determination to shield its capital markets and companies from foreign influence. Noting a "significant drop in the amount of money Chinese companies have raised" in the US this year, he accused them of "seeking to avoid higher regulatory standards."

In other words, Cox expressed the alarm of US-based financial interests that investment appeared to be shifting away from New York. Increasingly, Chinese companies are turning to Hong Kong and London in order to raise capital.

Likewise, many US consumer products are struggling in the Chinese market where they have trouble measuring up to European brands and even some Chinese brands (not to mention those of South Korea and Japan).

This contributes to a staggering trade deficit in China's favor. Outgoing Federal Reserve Chair Alan Greenspan has suggested that a steep decline in the value of the dollar was the most likely way that the overall US trade deficit would narrow, by making US imports more expensive and its exports less costly. Few nations in world history, however, have skyrocketed to prosperity by debasing its currency.

In November 2005, the US Treasury Department chose not to increase pressure on China to revalue its currency upwards, provoking an angry reaction from US manufacturers and some lawmakers. Meanwhile, during this same month the influential Washington-sponsored US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, sharply criticized China's trade practices and endorsed sanctions including a tariff on imports unless Beijing takes forceful steps to allow its currency to move in line with "market forces."

China is presenting a challenge the likes of which the US has not faced in some decades. According to economist Richard Freeman, cochair of the Harvard Trade Union Program, the collapse of the USSR has contributed to an "effective doubling of the global labor force" as Russian, Chinese, Indian and other workers have made an "entry...into the global economy," while "the effective supply of capital, on the other hand, has virtually remained unchanged. With such a massive increase in the supply of labor, its relative share of the returns from production inevitably decline." The "entry of "China, India and the former Soviet bloc to the global capitalist economy is a turning point in economic history," he says.

Now whether one accepts Freeman's analysis or not, it is apparent that the rise of China is bound to have a significant impact on the fortunes of US imperialism and those who have supported it. Certainly Donald Rumsfeld seems to think so. That is why he negotiated the "Joint Statement of the US-Japan Security Consultative Committee" in February 2005, which highlighted the status of Taiwan, the mention of which China considered an unacceptable interference in their internal affairs. Then, in a major policy address in June in Singapore, Rumsfeld alleged a Chinese military buildup reminiscent of Reagan-era accusations against the Soviet Union. Interestingly, last August China and Russia held their first joint military exercises.

Tensions were ratcheted up further when alleged Chinese spies were arrested in Los Angeles last November. They were accused of snatching sensitive data on Aegis battle management systems that are at the core of US Navy destroyers and cruisers – vessels that would be essential if Washington sought to aid Taiwan in a conflict with Beijing.

China is also outpacing the US in gaining access to Africa's labor and resources. Since 2000, Chinese trade with Africa has more than tripled, reaching nearly \$30 billion in 2004. Beijing has signed at least 40 oil agreements with various African nations. Medical teams from China are training counterparts in numerous African countries and providing free equipment and drugs to help fight AIDS, malaria and other scourges. Demand from China has led to record-high prices of copper, thus benefiting Zambia. As gold reaches similar record-high prices, South Africa is bound to benefit. China's African dealings have prompted some US companies to step up business there. Hence, last November, ExxonMobil announced that it will spend \$24 billion in Africa over the next decade to boost production. The focus will be on Nigeria and Angola.

In a similar fashion, the rise in the price of oil has benefited Venezuela, a nation that is leading a remarkable resurgence of the left in South America. Chile elected another Socialist leader, while Evo Morales, the militant leftist, won handily in Bolivia. But it is Hugo Chávez of Caracas who is stirring concern in Washington, with his provision of subsidized heating oil to poor and working-class families in the Bronx, Massachusetts and Maine, and subsidized barrels of oil to struggling Caribbean states like Jamaica. Particularly noteworthy was his October decision to transfer about half of the nation's \$30.4 billion in foreign reserves out of US Treasuries and US banks into European banks. Venezuela's open economic and political friendship with Cuba has also helped dent the US attempt to impose complete isolation on that island country and has strengthened Latin America's shift to the left.

Nevertheless, despite such acts of aggression, US imperialism faces an unprecedented crisis, bogged down in Iraq, exposed domestically as a result of Katrina and corruption scandals, challenged vigorously by China, Cuba and Venezuela, among many on a growing list. In short, the crisis of US imperialism continues unabated. □



Roslan Rahman/AFP/Getty Images

◀ The revolution may not be televised but there are some who think it could be downloadable.

VENEZUELA'S **CYBER** REVOLUTION

By David Sugar

The third International Forum on Free Knowledge brought together many groups and individuals interested in the development of free software worldwide to the city of Maracaibo, Venezuela. One reason Venezuela choose to host this event is because starting in January (2006), their new free software law, directive 3.390, came into effect, which mandates all government agencies to migrate to free software over a two-year period.

I was invited to speak about the use of free software in telecommunications. I accepted this invitation because the event was open to the general public for free and because I was

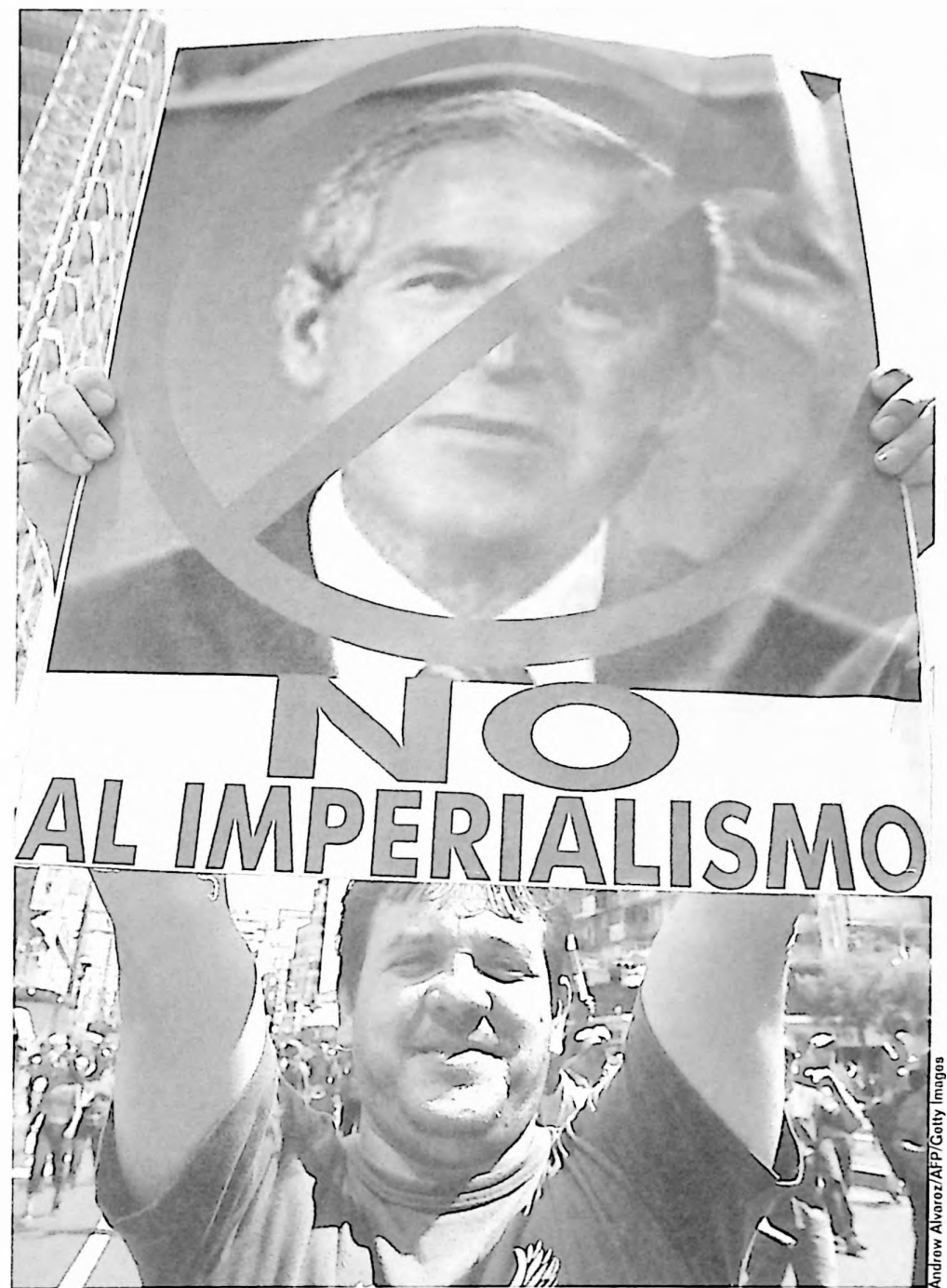
The consequence of treating ideas and thoughts as if they are tangible property are the very destruction of science and education and the elimination of individual rights and freedoms.

also immensely curious about Venezuela. While there I had the extremely lucky chance fortune to speak with directors in many of the organizations charged with carrying out Chávez's vision of a "Bolivarian revolution", all of whom were present because of their software migration plans for 2006.

The People's Ministry of Economics

Venezuela is blessed with not one, but two economic ministries. There is the old ministry of economics, which deals with the traditional capitalist economy. It is worth noting that capitalism continues in Venezuela and will likely continue to do so for some time. While lands are at times redistributed to landless laborers, for the most part existing industries and businesses are left alone, and left to the old ministry of economics. Instead, they have a different idea of how to transform society here, and this brings us to the second ministry.

The Ministerio Para La Economia Popular (Minep), or roughly, the People's Economic Ministry, is tasked with transforming



△ An activist carrying a placard against US President George W. Bush which reads "NO TO IMPERIALISM" takes part in a march in support of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez.

Venezuela into a socialist society. Minep is a quirky institution of very recent origin. Here we find all manner of bright and intelligent left thinking people, some from around the world who came to Venezuela to work for Minep. My impression is that Minep includes people from a very broad mix of socialist backgrounds, including traditional Marxists and Communists, as well as those who practice other forms of socialism. There are libertarian socialists also represented among the

ranks of Minep, although I believe they are still considered the more radical group within it.

The ministry does a number of important tasks. First they provide the educational support and program management for co-management projects, such as was done with the state-owned oil company. However, I believe the most important task they perform is to train and educate ordinary Venezuelans who volunteer on how to run a socialist worker cooperative. This is done not by political indoc-

tration, which is probably fortunate given the wide range of different socialist thinking within the ministry, as it would no doubt spark a war, but rather by providing co-ops the tools, financing, and practical training they will need in operating a socialist enterprise.

The ministry is in some ways like the socialist version of a "Small Business Administration." However, rather than teaching people who wish to start small businesses how to put up their homes as collateral or otherwise become indentured to a capitalist owner, the ministry provides real financial resources to help those who wish to help themselves in the socialist economy.

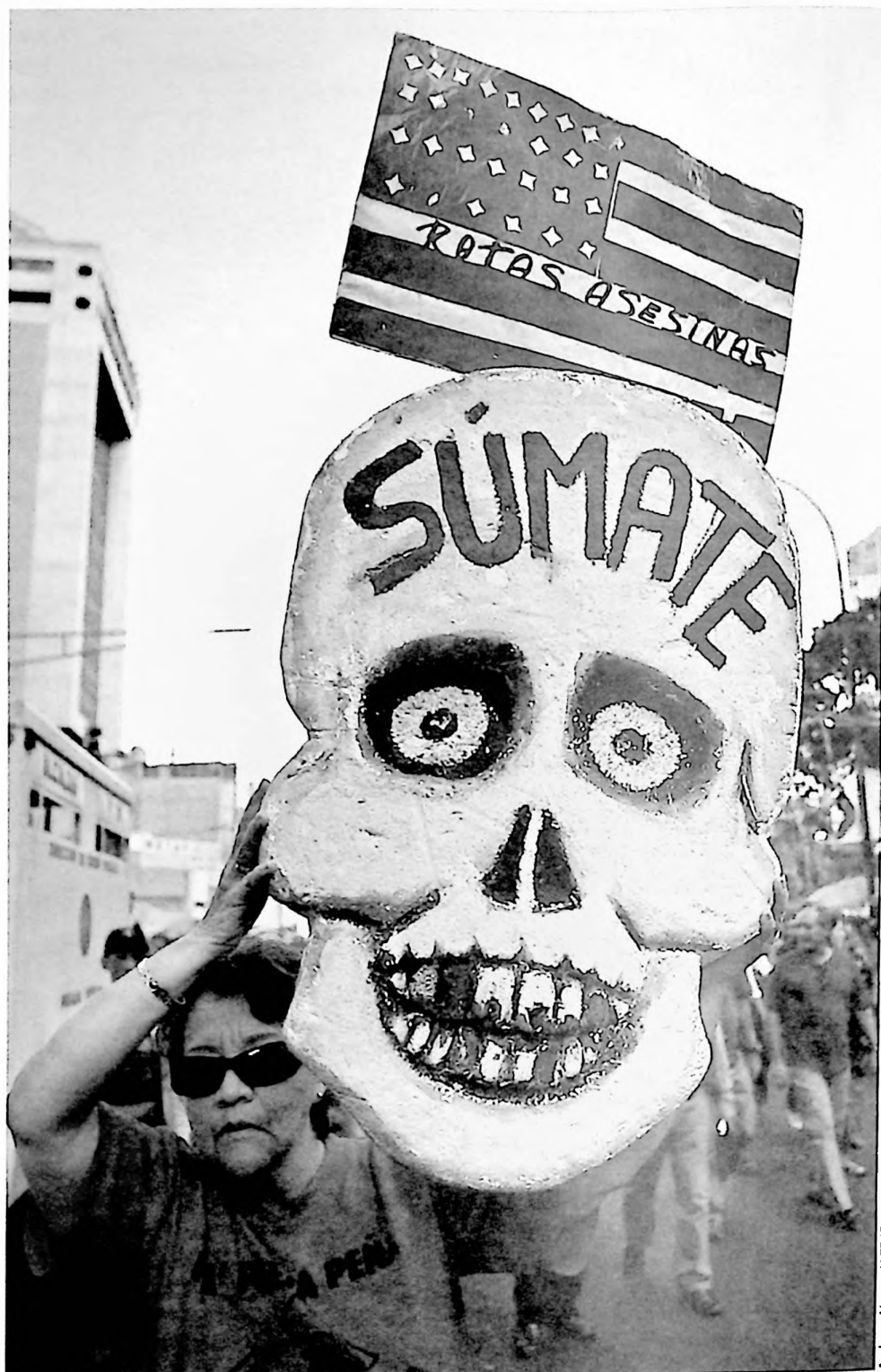
My interest in this aspect of Minep came in part from their interest in providing Voice Over Internet Protocols (VOIP) services with the computers they are offering to their worker managed co-ops. This was a rather specific technical issue, and one they were very interested in discussing with me.

Many of these worker co-ops are composed of very small startups that typically have 10 people or less. Minep offers training and support, as well as financing, to allow co-ops to purchase computing systems for their business needs. These systems use entirely free software, starting with the Debian GNU/Linux operating system, along with Open Office for general business use, and web hosting under Apache. Co-ops that go through the Minep program also have the ability to host Web sites with their own content, and these usually feature the products or services a given co-op wishes to offer.

The Minep co-op training program was piloted in 2004, with some 3,000 such worker-managed co-ops formed. By November of this year (2005), they had already formed over 45,000 such co-ops nationwide, and they expect to train over 700,000 Venezuelans in how to form and be part of a socialist economy by the end of the year. This also suggests to me that perhaps as many as 40 percent of those that go through the Minep program eventually do form a socialist enterprise.

The use of free software and offering of computer systems for business use as part of the co-op program is actually relatively new. This year, they have only trained a few thousand of the co-ops in the use of free software through an initial pilot program. Next year, however, that program, and free software training should be available to all.

Capitalism, I suspect, at best directly



△ Sumate is the name of an organization funded by the Bush administration that tried to unseat Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez. In the 2004 referendum, its efforts were reportedly blocked in part by computer hackers who crashed Sumate computers.

benefits at most maybe 100,000 Venezuelans today. Many are reduced to wage slavery or otherwise indentured through it. While the exact number of those that benefit from capitalism in any given country varies, this basic principle that some

few truly benefit while many do not remains universal. In the ideal of a socialist economy, all the participants benefit.

I think there are already more people who directly benefit from the socialist economy than the capitalist one in Venezuela

today, and this will grow over time. Capitalism may not disappear entirely in Venezuela, it is certainly not being threatened or forced to change by the government, but it seems to me that it will be submersed in the rising tide of the new socialist economy. This then is the future of the Bolivarian Revolution.

The Ministry of Intellectual Prosperity

The *Independent Service Ministry of Propiedad Intelectual* (SAPI) is the ministry that used to define Venezuela's so-called "Intellectual Property" laws. I understand SAPI also at one time concerned itself with the issue of "piracy". I would have thought, however, that controlling murderous gangs

The Venezuelan revolution is perhaps the first revolution in history saved by computer hackers and is one of the reasons the government is so very strong on promoting the use of free software.

of anarcho-capitalist "gentlemen of fortune" who raid ships would be the job of the navy, or perhaps the interior ministry.

The term "intellectual property" itself is of course a newspeak propaganda word that did not even exist 20 years ago. First, the topic it covers varies from copyright, patents, trade secrets, trademarks, to a variety of other things, all of which are in reality very different and unrelated. Second, it is based on the premise that you can give something intangible to someone else and yet control it and what other people do as if it or they were your physical property. This applies even to the ideas they may have in their mind. Intellectual property amounts in part to thought control through legal fiction. Some may say it amounts to intellectual slavery.

The consequence of treating ideas and thoughts as if they are tangible property is the very destruction of science and educa-

tion and the elimination of individual rights and freedoms. Science is in part built upon the idea that new knowledge is created by incrementally improving ideas. Education is based on the idea that one can learn from existing things and then use that knowledge to create new works. The idea behind "intellectual property" interferes with both. It is barbarism, and could well lead to a new dark ages, where only a privileged few are allowed to learn, under the exclusive control of greedy intellectual monopolies.

Since "intellectual property" involves exclusive licensing, when public universities do this and then let others license their discoveries, the public is made to fund research that only benefits a small number of people. Even worse, those companies which receive such funding can then use this exclusive grant to sell back to society the fruits of what society already paid for. This can be thought of as paying for something twice. This could also be thought of as public welfare for private capitalism, or more simply, exploitation.

I had the good fortune to meet the current director general of SAPI, Eduardo Samain, while I was in Maracaibo. He has very different ideas for the purpose of SAPI. He is a well-known internationalist, and had been a key person in establishing the program for promoting a developing nation's agenda within WIPO. Rather than creating new intellectual restrictions, Eduardo proposes that the mission of SAPI should instead become that of promoting "intellectual prosperity" by creating laws and services that promote the ability to share knowledge as the common heritage of all mankind rather than hoard it to make a few people wealthier.

Assuming that private interests in the developed world today do succeed in the great capitalist program of owning what people are allowed to think, it is very possible that places like Venezuela will become the new leading nation in science and technology.

How Oil Fuels Bolivarian Revolution

Maracaibo is also the heartland of the oil industry, and the state run oil company, Petroleos de Venezuela SA (Pdvsa). I had met a number of Pdvsa oil workers, who seemed well represented among the ranks of Pdvsa management. I also had the chance to talk with one of their directors, Socorro Hernandez, over lunch, as well as Jose Luis Rey, who's renown is both as a skilled hack-

er and financial genius who was involved in helping rebuild the financial trading systems when they were sabotaged in 2003.

Today, the state-run oil company is a major backer of the free software movement (software *libre*) in Venezuela and is a major sponsor of the third International Forum on Free Knowledge. Every question related to the use of free software in Venezuela, and to how the Bolivarian revolution started, seems to come back to Pdvsa and the worker lock-out in 2002.

Before the oil worker lockout, the administration of the state oil company was strongly connected to the wealthy elite. Many of the wealthiest people in Venezuela had been getting much richer thanks to the oil company, in part through contracts and corruption, not unlike what has been happening here in the US with politically-connected companies like Halliburton.

President Hugo Chávez was originally elected on a platform to use the oil wealth to help pay the poor through education and health programs, rather than simply making the wealthy even wealthier. Many of Venezuela's wealthier citizens, used to having money from the state oil company under their control, would not tolerate this, and so they decided Chávez had to go at any cost, even if it meant sabotaging their own nation to do it.

They tried to close the oil company in December of 2002, by locking out the workers, and holding the oil resources of the nation as a whole hostage by having the entire information technology (IT) infrastructure under their control. If the data and systems present then had been destroyed, it would have been years before another drop of oil could have been produced. Out of 4800 managers, about 200 chose to stay behind, and together, with the help of many by then retired former managers who were less corrupt than the ones who left, the workers tried to save the oil company. But the biggest challenge was the computer infrastructure.

Management of IT was at the time contracted to SAIC (Science Applications International Corp.), which has well known political and business connections to Cheney's office, to the US DOD, and the CIA. At first, the Venezuelan army was called out to secure the oil facilities during the lock-out, the SAIC staff created videos of the troops securing the facilities to claim they were under attack. They then tried to per-



▲ A Venezuelan casts his vote for the country's National Assembly at a polling station in Caracas.

suaude the US Congress to give Bush war powers to seize the oil fields. When this scheme failed, the SAIC workers fled the country, but changed all the passwords and kept remote control of all the computer servers of Pdvsa. They choose not to destroy the data on them because they thought they

would be back in a few months when they expected the government of President Chavez would finally capitulate.

Much of the infrastructure of Pdvsa was under Microsoft Windows-based servers, and used proprietary database software such as Microsoft SQL. The old managers and pri-

vate IT contractors did not expect a bunch of oil workers to be able to thwart their plans. Those same oil workers, working together with local computer hackers, were able to secure control of vital computer servers, and in doing so save the oil infrastructure.

The Venezuelan revolution is perhaps the first revolution in history saved by computer hackers and is one of the reasons the government is so very strong on promoting the use of free software, particularly in public administration. The Venezuelan government wishes never again to have vital infrastructure held hostage or sabotaged by agents of foreign nations. This cannot be accomplished by source secret proprietary software, such as Microsoft Windows, with its infamous backdoor National Security Agency (NSA) key which some experts believe allows the NSA to break into secure systems. Even proprietary software from a trustworthy source has to be suspect for possible tampering, and so must be rejected, not just by Venezuela, but by any nation that wishes to protect and maintain its sovereignty against sabotage.

Today, everyone I had met from Pdvsa appears completely committed at all levels to the basic idea of converting Venezuela's oil resources into long-term and self-sustaining wealth for the nation as a whole. This is done in part through the development of a new socialist economy, as planned for through Minep.

Capturing this wealth is viewed as an urgent matter because, even though Venezuela possesses one of the largest known reserves of oil, they expect world oil production to begin declining and see this wealth as very temporary. Socorro Hernandez said Pdvsa believes that nobody will "burn" oil (as for example in automobiles) in as little as 20 years. He also said they believe that while oil will remain important in the many other industries it is used in, the price will settle to \$5 a barrel, so now is not only the best, but also the last, chance to create something useful from this wealth.

Conatel and conclusions

I flew from Maracaibo to Caracas on Saturday (November 27th). Even in Venezuela's revolutionary republic, custom officials are still custom officials, and airports are still like airports everywhere. Given the lack of revolutionary posters, pictures of

Chávez, or those military checkpoints promised by the State Department, what is worth noting is the rather ordinary way society and most institutions operate in Venezuela.

There are also many ministries and government institutions which are not connected ideologically with the revolution, yet many of the civil service I met from these other ministries in their own way do seem to support it. Usually this is because of the kind of programs these different agencies have been able to do with funding provided by the Chávez government.

Venezuelan socialism is not socialism by decree, nor driven by state or single party ideology. It is rather socialism by experimentation and education.

One example, is the Comision Nacional de Telecomunicaciones Infraestructura (Conatel), Venezuela's regulatory agency for telephone and broadcast services, something a bit like the Federal Communications Commission in the United State. However, this agency also helps sponsor a national telecenter project, to bring telephone and internet services to poor communities across the country.

Many of the people I met from Conatel came themselves from poor families. While they live something of what we might call "middle class" lifestyles, they are very proud of being able to bring projects like telecenters forward. They do not see it as a matter of any ideology, but simply as something that is right to do. For this reason, I believe the civil servants as a whole, even those in very traditional government institutions like Conatel, also strongly support Chávez.

I saw their model telecenter at the Conatel building while I was in Caracas. A typical community telecenter comes with up to a dozen PC workstations, and a server. Connectivity is offered through a telecom carrier for both Internet data and for voice. These systems also entirely use free software, and each telecenter includes a staff of two people.

One of the people is trained to manage and teach how to use the computers and resources of the telecenter, and charged with maintaining the equipment. The second person is someone trained in the social needs of a given community. For example, for a telecenter that is deployed in an agricultural town, the second person would likely be someone who was educated in agriculture. In a mining town, it would likely be a miner.

I believe telecenters will become the public libraries of the new millennium. Unfortunately, most existing libraries today elsewhere in the world, while they often include computers, do not understand how they should be used. For example, many libraries in the US have computers, but they are really only used for web browsing, and come "attached" with nutty politicians, along with laws requiring that library content be filtered. They seem far more deeply concerned that library patrons might actually read about sex rather than promoting knowledge.

Venezuelan socialism is not socialism by decree, nor driven by state or single party ideology. It is rather socialism by experimentation and education. Venezuelan socialists instead are deeply tied to the basic principles of social justice, solidarity, and equality as inspired from Simon Bolivar's vision of a Latin community stretching from the Río Grande to the southern tip of Chile, living in peace, independence from colonial masters, equality, and able to determine their own destiny. Many actual policies are open for thought and discussion, and there is a willingness to try new and original solutions. However, rather ironically, none of this would have even been possible without the direct help of the wealthy of Venezuela.

Rather than bringing down the government of Hugo Chávez, by working together with foreign interests to directly sabotage the country's most vital industry, the wealthy elite of Venezuela instead radicalized the oil workers in a way no other action could. The workers of Pdvsa are now fully committed to creating the new economy, and will remain so regardless of who is in power. When the rich of Venezuela ponder who it was that made Venezuela become a revolutionary socialist nation, they should not look at President Hugo Chávez, who may not even have been thinking of this then, and certainly had no means to accomplish it at the time if he had, but rather in the mirror. □

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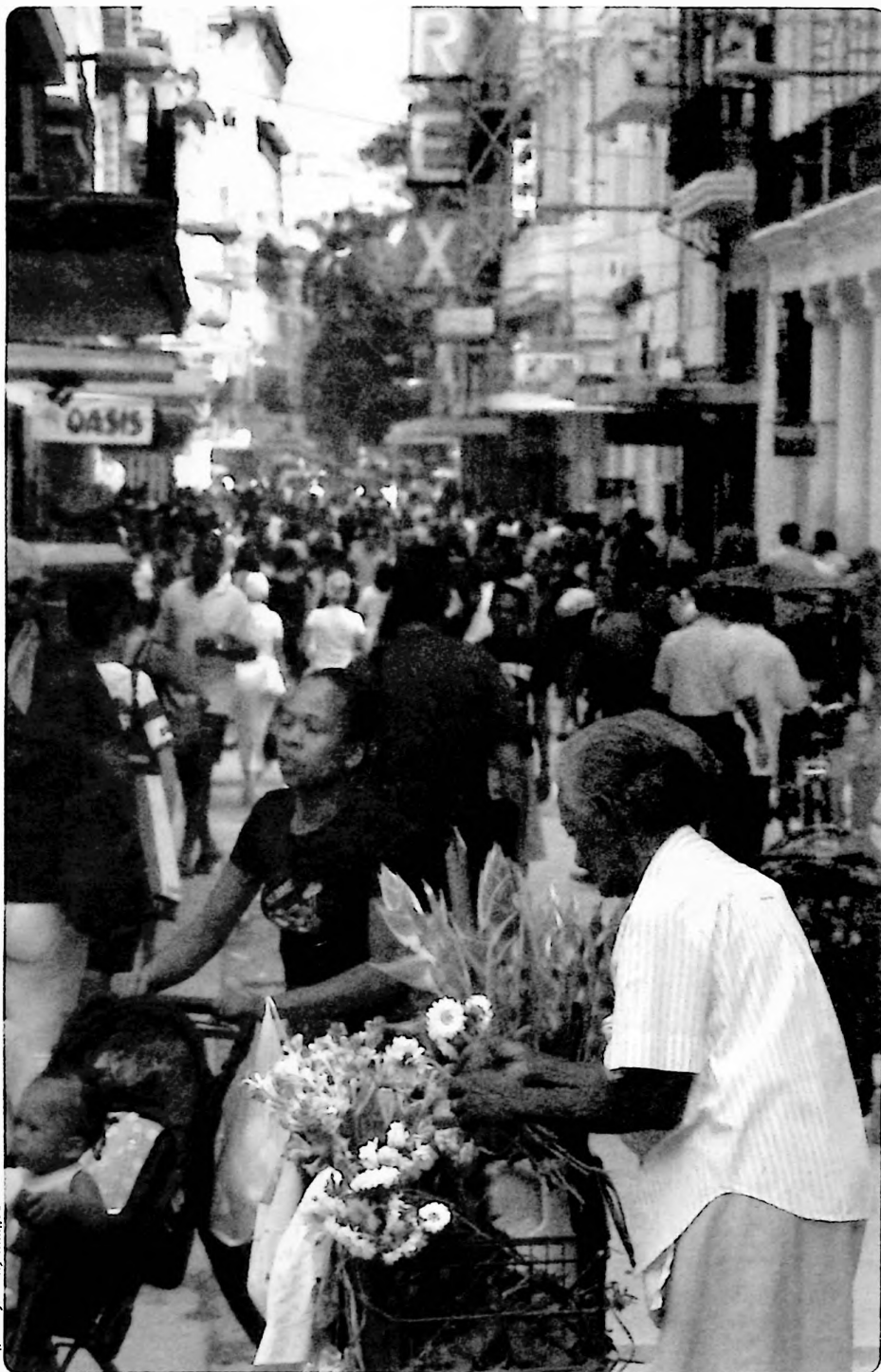
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NOT YOUR USUAL SUSPECTS:

Cuba's
Mystery
Writer
Talks
to PA



Jorge Roy/Gotly Images

Editor's Note: Leonardo Padura Fuentes is the internationally acclaimed author of several novels including the "Havana Quartet", a series of detective novels featuring *Havana* police Inspector Mario Conde. The latest installment in that series is *Havana Red*. *Havana Red* was awarded the Dashiell Hammett prize for detective fiction in Spain in 2004. Padura lives in Havana, Cuba.

PA: Do you favor the detective/crime fiction genre? If so, why?

LP: I remember that back in 1977, when I wrote the first book review that I had published in a magazine, it was a commentary on a crime novel. Since that time, when I was a liberal arts student at the University of Havana and wasn't even dreaming of being a fiction writer, I was already very close to the crime novel, dark, detectivesque, or whatever you want to call it, but at the same time I was developing my preferences for the approaches of authors such as Hammett and Chandler. Then, in the 80's, I was the critic "par excellence" of the Cuban-authored crime novel, and was also sketching out my interests. I did not like the majority of those Cuban crime or spy novels, but what was lacking was "literature," perhaps because there were too many very obvious political intentions, almost typical of socialist realism. For this reason, back in 1990, when I

4 Cubans walk in the street February 24, 2004 in Havana, Cuba. The US's top diplomat in Cuba said February 23, 2004 there were no plans to restart formal US-Cuba migration talks that the United States suspended in January.

emerged from a period of six years during which I did practically nothing but journalism—I had written my first novel in 1984, *Horse Fever (Fiebre de caballos)*, a story of love and initiation – I had decided to write a crime novel and I had several objectives. Among these were, it had to be very Cuban, but not resembling those crime novels that I had criticized; that it should be a crime novel, but only in appearance, because I was more interested in the literary aspect than in any kind of mystery; that it should have Hammett and Chandler as models, but also authors who I had been reading in those years, such as Vazques Montalban, Chester Himes, Jean Patrick Manchette and many other non-crime-novel authors.

My decision to write that novel, which I titled *Past Perfect (Pasado Perfecto)* and which was first published in 1991 had several purposes, but the greatest was that, being a crime novel, it should also be a social novel, because I believe that one of the virtues of this genre is that one can utilize it in any way one wishes, as long as it [does not] violate the known rules of what one is doing. The "dark" novel can take one directly to the darkest corners of a reality, of a society, while always maintaining something that is very important to me: the possibility of communicating with readers. That is why I like the police-type novel so much – I call my novels "false crime novels," because the crime novel structure is only a pretext to get to other places – and being that I have practiced it so much: of my eight novels, six are police-type, even though I must recognize that my most ambitious book, *The Novel of my Life*, is a novel of intrigue in which there are no cadavers, even though there are some mysteries.

PA: Is there a fictional or real life inspiration for Inspector Conde, the main character of your "Havana Quartet" series?

LP: Mario Conde was born of necessity. I had to have an investigator, a protagonist for *Past Perfect*, and this character would be, in the novel, my eyes, my voice, my way of seeing and understanding reality and many things about life. For this reason, he had to be something more than a police officer – and of course, he had to be a different kind of police agent than those in those politicized Cuban crime novels that I mentioned

earlier. Thus, Mario Conde had to have a series of personal characteristics, but his sensitivity and intelligence had to shine above all else when it came to interpreting reality. It is for this reason that, even when I knew practically nothing about criminal investigation, he was a man who showed great sensitivity. For him, literature, music, relationships with friends, a vision of the Cuban present and past, were all realities that he participated in because of his sensitivity and intelligence. The result is a man who is a bit disenchanted, skeptical, who defends himself with irony, and who has great loyalties and great phobias. The bottom line was that for Cuban orthodoxy he was a very politically incorrect sort of guy, and for this reason the novel received no prize in a Cuban contest that I sent it to, and it had to be published in Mexico. In any case, the Conde of the first novel was like a dress rehearsal for a character who, starting with the second installment of the "Quartet," became fully fleshed out and had his own psychology. Already in that installment, *Lenten Winds*, (*Vientos de cuaresma*) is the original title – he is revealed in all his sadness, his pessimism, his painful feelings about life and his merciless examination of the reality in which he lives. Conde is thus

The "dark" novel can take one directly to the darkest corners of a reality, of a society, while always maintaining something that is very important to me: the possibility of communicating with readers.

totally politically incorrect, but the novel, nonetheless, won the national prize in Cuba and was published immediately. Thus I see *Lenten Winds* as Conde's step toward disenchantment, in which he lives in the rest of the "Quartet" novels, and in the other two books which have followed it: *Adios, Hemmingway* (published in English by Canongate) and *Yesterday's Fog (La neblina de ayer)* which came out this year in Spain and which will begin to be translated next year. In these two later novels Conde is not even a police agent any more, since after the "Quartet" he decides to leave the force to feel more free, because he has become sick of his work as a criminal investigator and because his sensitivity has reached its limit and he has to look for some other meaning in his life. (Now he makes a living buying and

selling old books, according to him because that way he is closer to literature but not too far from the street...)

PA: Can you describe your background, growing up, early career? How did you come to writing? To fiction?

LP: I am a typical Cuban of my generation. I was born in '55, so I've passed my whole conscious lifetime under the system of the Revolution. I was born and grew up (and still live) in a working-class neighborhood on the outskirts of Havana, where I lived with great freedom, dedicating the majority of my time to that which is still my greatest passion: baseball. Since I'm a lefthander, I played first base and outfield, but I didn't have enough strength at bat to be a good hitter. And for that reason, when I finished high school I decided to study liberal arts at the University, and shortly thereafter, I figured that if I would not be a baseball player, I would be a writer... Thus I began to write literary criticism and my first short stories, until in 1984 I completed my first novel, after lots and lots of sweat. At that moment I was going in three directions: journalism, literary essays and fiction were all debating inside

me. And by one of life's accidents I went to work at a newspaper where I could do long investigative reports, which were almost literature, almost socio-literary investigations. This went on until I decided that the important thing was to create fiction, and with *Past Perfect* I began my work as a "professional" novelist, if you can call it that. Nonetheless, I haven't stopped being a journalist and because of this I have four published books on journalism and a fifth on the way. Nor have I stopped being an essayist, and I have five books published in this field (one of them dedicated to the crime novel). And, at the same time, since 1990 I have written seven novels, six of them with the character of Mario Conde.

I always say that perhaps I'm far from being Cuba's most talented writer... but one



Jaume Roy/Getty Images

△ A group of tourists sit at a cafe table February 24, 2004 in Havana, Cuba. The US's top diplomat in Cuba said February 23 there were no plans to restart formal US-Cuba migration talks that the United States suspended in January.

thing I'm sure of is that I'm the hardest working one, because in these years I have also written several movie scripts, two books of short stories, and I've given I don't know how many conferences and published dozens of articles. I feel good when I write, I like to do it, and for this reason I not only live in literature but also for literature. And, I have been

very lucky, because my books are published in Spanish by a magnificent publisher (Tusquets, of Barcelona), and they have now been translated into 10 languages, which allows me to devote myself full time to the profession of literature. But even now, when I see a good game of baseball I think that I would have liked even better to be a great

baseball player like el Duque Hernandez, for example: a man whom I admire for his passion and discipline, which in some way resemble what I have when I create literature.

PA: True to the genre of detective/crime fiction, in *Havana Red*, the urban setting, the city,

plays a role in the story, almost as if it were a living character. If you had to write a character description or summary for Havana, what would you say?

LP: As I told you, I'm a Habanero [a resident of Havana], but a marginal Habanero. I live on the outskirts, and the rest of the city has always been kind of a discovery for me. And, there is something of this in my novels. Havana is an enormous city full of contrasts, of beauty and misery, of music and laments. Remember that Havana is a cosmopolitan city, which in certain moments of its history accumulated great economic power (as can be seen in its buildings), and in recent times, a political connotation. It is also a city of music, of painting, of literature, and of dance. Culture has always flourished in this city, just like baseball. What has emerged from all this is a city with many faces, very diverse, a city that cannot be summed up in a single glance. It is a city that many Cuban writers (Carpentier, Cabrera Infante) have seen as a true labyrinth.

But today's Havana is also a city of ruins – and this is very important in my most recent novel. It is a city that has suffered from great physical neglect and its deterioration is obvious and sad. But it also an environment that in recent years, with the great economic crisis of the 90's (post-Soviet Union), has seen the rebirth of old ills that we once believed

Havana is a city of music, of painting, of literature, and of dance. Culture has always flourished in this city, just like baseball.

were cured, such as prostitution, drugs, and all kinds of trafficking, all of which had practically disappeared at the beginning of the revolutionary period. For me, Havana is a great love and a great heartache. It is my city, I write about her, about the people who live in her, and with the words that are heard in her. And it makes me feel frustrated to see how the city has been deteriorating, both physically and morally, that many people have become much cruder, and many others want to leave her forever. Her beauty is falling to earth like a house of cards.

PA: *Havana Red* addresses the very sensitive issue of gay and lesbian and transgendered rights

in Cuba. How would you describe attitudes on this subject in Cuba today? Based on your travels and knowledge of other countries, how do attitudes in Cuba compare to international sentiments on this matter?

LP: Fortunately, in today's Cuba the problem of homosexuality has stopped being a social "illness" and has remained only as a problem of a family nature, being that the Cuban family, by tradition, is very machista and homosexuality has always been badly regarded. But even so, many families accept it as something normal, even though it's not exactly celebrated. Gays and lesbians always had full civil rights in Cuba, but the pre- and post-revolutionary morality condemned them as sick, as perverts, and even as political enemies. The harshest time was in the 70's, which *Havana Red* talks about, when being gay was something close to a crime, and it could get you expelled from the university or from a work center. What was applied to them was a Stalinist policy, and many notable artists were marginalized for many years just for being homosexuals (and this tragedy of the marginalized artist, is, in the novel, more important than the marginalization of gays, since for me the frustration of artistic freedom is something more essential, deeper, and more dramatic than the simple sexual problem).

In the 80's things began to go a different, more permissible way, and in the 90's when the crisis hit, priorities were elsewhere, and the government had to admit that circumstances were different, and for this reason homosexuals were given greater freedom (and – what a surprise! – artists gained greater freedom as well). This has allowed us to see a greater number of people who exhibit their homosexuality, a greater number of gay and lesbian couples who live together without anyone questioning them, a presence visible in the reflection of this world in cinema, literature, sculpture, and dance. To sum up, I think that today in Cuba the homosexual lives more or less with the same freedom and the same prejudices as in the rest

of the Western world, including Spain, where gay marriage has been legalized but not the prejudices that many people still have toward homosexuality. Meanwhile, the intellectuals have gained much more space for reflection and criticism, and nobody makes you write politically correct socialist-realism novels, like happened in the 70's. And, as is my case, you can even create a literature that is critical of reality and of some aspects (not all, for sure) of the system and live on the island, get published and recognized in Cuba.

PA: Who are your favorite current and past Cuban fiction writers? International authors? Why?

LP: The list of my favorite authors would be endless, because all the good novels, books of short stories or poetry that I have ever read have left something in me, as a reader and as a writer. But if you make me give names, I'll give you a few: Among the Cubans my preferences hang around Alejo Carpentier, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Lino Novas Calvo... Among the international authors I would make three distinctions: 1. Authors of crime novels; 2. Authors in my language, Spanish; and 3. Authors in other languages... And I make this distinction because my learning from each group has been complementary. For example, from those in my language I have gotten a lesson in how to write well in Spanish, which is something absolutely necessary for any writer in my culture. Then I would locate Hammett, Chandler, Vazquez Montalban, Himes, Manchette (who I have already mentioned) in group one, along with writers like Charym, the Brazilian Fonseca, and Durremant, among others. In group two, I would include Vargas Llosa, Cortazar, Garcia Marquez, Fernando de Paso, Bryce Echenique, and of course the Cubans as well. In group three, North American authors stand out, with whom I have a great affinity because from them I learned how to put together a good story. Here I would include Hemmingway, with whom I have an ongoing love-hate relationship, Salinger, of whom I am a dedicated follower, Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Carson McCullers, and many others, to whom I recently added Paul Auster. And outside of North America, there are Kafka, Thomas Mann, Sartre and Camus, Kundera... To sum up, there would be hundreds. □

IT'S A LONG WAY FROM COLUMBINE TO HAVANA

By Brian Fitzpatrick, M.S.

WHEN THE SMOKE from the Columbine High School massacre cleared, 14 students and one teacher in my school district were dead, and dozens were wounded. Fortunately, two huge bombs that had been planted in the building didn't explode. Shock waves rippled through the culture and our educational establishment. How had American education gotten to such a terrible and tragic turn? In the wake of Columbine, all of us teachers, veteran and novice alike, were forced to make brutally painful evaluations of our educational goals and means.

I write this essay now from the perspective of my own 50-year odyssey in American education, which began as a student in strict parochial schools and passed through my first teaching job at PS 118 in New York City. There one February I became the 14th teacher that school year of a ghetto fourth-grade class. Thirteen teachers had already been "knocked out of the box"; I barely hung on till June.

I have experienced the gamut of US educational systems. For 16 years, I studied a parochial curriculum. Nuns, Jesuits and military high school branded me for life. Upon graduating I taught junior high social studies, math and physical education. Later, I taught high school business and history and coached football and basketball. Over the years, I increasingly found that standardized testing and technology had replaced the human spirit. Educational policy had lost its heart. The conventional public school system plopped 30 students in front of me every 45 minutes, and it became my job to "fill 'em up" with information. Eventually I began to feel like Lucille Ball in her famous scene at the bonbon factory. The conveyor belt kept moving; the bonbons kept charging and Lucy adapted. She stuffed bonbons in her mouth, she tossed them over her shoulder, jammed them in her cleavage and, ultimately, she threw them back at the machine. When the kids started looking like bonbons, I gave up factory education for a human approach.



■ The poor have been fighting for a bigger slice of pie ever since Cortes told Montezuma that the white man has a sickness and the only cure for it is gold.

I jumped at the opportunity to teach at Jefferson County Open School, a K-12 alternative school, where I went on to teach for 18 years. Ironically, the open school and its students flourish in the very same district as Columbine High School, in suburban Denver, Colorado.

The backbone of the school is its advising system, and the heart of its methodology is individual passion. Caring and engagement serve as the bread and butter of our pedagogy. Individual adult attention and friendship nourish the students' hearts, and freedom and passion propel their intellectual ascent. Each student writes an Individual educational plan and follows its beacon. I believe deeply in the etymology of the word education. It originates in the Latin verb *educare*, "to lead out of." *Educare* tells us two fundamental truths about the learning process: 1) Curriculum is individual. It grows out of the human heart the way an oak grows from an acorn. 2) *Educare* honors diversity and therefore promotes societal health. Energy in education flows, not from the teacher to the student, but from the student to the teacher. It grows upward like grass. Students are not vases to be filled with irrelevant and disconnected information. They will acquire and use information appropriately when they know who they are, what they want, and where they are going. Our onus as educators is to help individuals identify the songs in their hearts and then support them in finding the courage to sing them.

In the Open School I officially taught social studies and Spanish. The history and Spanish classes I taught were peppered with peace and justice issues. Five Fulbright awards and dozens of trips to Latin America enhanced my eclectic pursuits. When I wasn't reading about Latin America, I was planning to go there. My Fulbrights led me to Pakistan, Argentina, Colombia, Brazil and Mexico. These experiences spiced up my classes and led me to establish a third-world campus in Teacapan, Mexico, for Jefferson County Open School.

As I traveled throughout Latin America, I

observed it with an educator's eye. I saw endless human potential crushed beneath poverty, and I wept at the waste. Thousands of third-world encounters made me a more critical thinker. My firsthand experience frequently didn't jibe with the official stories I read in our popular press. In Bogotá, for example, at four in the morning, I saw a Marlboro salesman get hit by a car. The salesman was five years old. Throughout Latin America school-age kids sell chiclets, pencils and their futures for a few pesos. Talking with coffee bean pickers in Guatemala, I observed a woman, filthy, on a scalding coffee slope picking beans, her three children hanging from her like rotting papayas. It changed forever the taste of my latte. At the mouth of the Amazon, in Belém, Brazil, at noon in a crowded market, five shirtless, shoeless men robbed me, rupturing a cervical disk. Enduring neck pain reminds me of the economic misery of millions. In our busy lives, we Americans are generally unaware that the socioeconomic and educational reality of most Latin countries condemns close to seventy percent of their populations to poverty. People are either unemployed or earn the minimum wage, which averages between \$80 to \$100 per month. Most individuals in that socioeconomic bracket drop out of school early, usually in primary school. In Cuba, however, the scene looked totally different, and the differences are thought provoking.

Cuba's immediate neighbors are Haiti, Dominican Republic and Jamaica. These Caribbean islands' histories spring from the same roots of slavery and colonialism. Most Americans don't realize that almost 70 percent of Cubans are either Black or mulatto. Most Miami Cubans are white. I have never read an article on the racial component of the Cuban Revolution, but just walk through Miami and then stroll through Santiago de Cuba or Old Havana and you'll realize that race plays a huge role in Miami's antipathy. At the time Martin Luther King Jr. was fighting

for Blacks to ride at the front of the bus, Fidel Castro was extending dignity to the sons and daughters of slaves. I remember from those years various articles in the US press denouncing Martin Luther King as a Communist. I guess we've grown beyond that phobia because now we celebrate his courage with a national holiday.

Gabriela, a 45-year-old Afro-Cuban explained to me the different lives her mother and daughter have lived. She understood how much Blacks have benefited from the revolution. Her mother was an illiterate servant; her daughter lives with the dignity of higher education and a government-supported safety net. Gabriela is well aware of how Black women live 40 miles away in Jamaica and Haiti.

Cuba is the only country in the western hemisphere and probably the world that has closed the literacy and longevity gaps between Blacks and whites. Just think what a remarkable accomplishment that is. Freddy, a Congolese immigrant who had arrived in Cuba illiterate and who is now a brain surgeon, insisted that postrevolutionary Cuba has done more for Blacks than any country in the history of the world. I spoke with many ordinary Afro-Cubans who changed gears easily among Neruda, Pythagoras, Lincoln, Shakespeare, Picasso and Joltin' Joe Di Maggio.

The heart of my feelings about Cuba result from one special trip. I am retired now, but in my last year of teaching, I decided to take my students to Cuba. My initial plan was to have the Colorado students interact with local students, as they had done in previous trips to Mexico. We applied for and received a license to travel to Cuba from the US Treasury Department; it was the first permission for a high school so granted.

For six months, we beat the bushes raising donations toward our expenses and to buy gifts and supplies for our host school. The students mooched from relatives and begged at businesses. Beyond fund-raising, the students' trip preparation included arranging logistics, learning Spanish, reading

Cuba is the only country in the western hemisphere and probably the world that has closed the literacy and longevity gaps between Blacks and whites.

different versions of Cuban history and group building. Before Christmas we bought the air tickets, and the trip became very real.

Unfortunately for us, it was also the time of Elian Gonzalez and the Miami siege. Elian and his subsequent custody issues dominated the news. One boy, one big hoopla. Had Elian been Haitian, Dominican, Mexican, or any other nationality, he would have been whisked back home faster than overnight mail. But Elian happened to be Cuban and hence the rub.

The US and Cuban government haven't agreed on any issue in the last 45 years. They can't agree on trade, travel, or immigration, but they did agree that Elian Gonzalez should be immediately returned to his father and his extended family. The only fly in the ointment with this historic agreement became the noisy and powerful Miami Cuban community. They held Elian hostage against the will of two governments and the international community. They never relented and kept Elian until US troops, in a predawn raid, sprung Elian from his Miami "hosts." Little Elian strained governmental relations and, as a result, put the spotlight on our school trip. Hearing of our proposed adventure, NBC wanted to interview me on a nationwide broadcast. I refused because I didn't want my students' experience to be warped by publicity.

Finally D-Day arrived. Two teachers, 13 students, and 40 huge bags rendezvoused at Denver International Airport. After six months of preparation, I felt like General Dwight D. Eisenhower heading for the Normandy beaches.

Poetry has always captured my interest. Robert Frost and W. B. Yeats are my constant back-pocket companions. During my life, I've walked through many doors, but when the doorman at our Havana hotel opened the door and quoted Pablo Neruda, I stopped in my tracks. Immediately I knew that I was in a special place. Most Latin American laborers must drop out of school in the first few years. Never before had I met a blue-collar worker with such erudition. I was amazed. After dropping my bags and my jaw, I volleyed verses with the doorman. It was a battle of

Babel. He rified lyrics in his thick Cuban accent, and I shot back with my New York City schticklah. Twenty minutes later he brought out his own poetry and dazzled me. Then the night janitor brought out bongo drums, and two Afro-Cubans opened the Havana night like a ripe papaya. What had been an intimidating arrival into a canyon of tenements and shadows turned into an all-night revelry. The friendships forged that night still endure.

At first, Cuba's capital, Havana, looked like it was crossbred between Moscow and Harlem. The predominantly African population and the absence of advertising startled me. I knew both facts via readings, but the reality smacked me in the face. People dotted ubiquitous balconies and gossiped with their neighbors; laundry waved above their heads like Buddhist prayer flags. Old Russian trucks carried tons of bananas and dropped them at dispensary outlets. What a difference from our commercial-pocked cities back home! At first, the only printed signs I saw were educational slogans encouraging people to continue studying. I felt both dumbfounded and titillated by this noncommercial environment; however I was trying to hold the reins on thirteen well-fed American kids, so at first, I gave it little shrift.

Our group's initial objective was to visit Cathedral Plaza. The 15-minute walk to the cathedral turned out to be a five-hour Gestalt gauntlet. Knowing our objective, I tried to herd my sheep in the right direction. But Havana offers more distractions than a five-ring circus. The students had to touch, see, taste, listen and chat. Finally I dropped the reins and compulsive teaching habits; I took a deep breath and followed the kids. The day went much better after that. I listened to and served them.

Havana stunned us. Colonial architecture and throbbing African drums set the tone.

Baseball, boxing and ballet added flavor. *Mañana* and *mañana* and *mañana* sped on our hectic pace from day to day. We became so enamored with Cubans we almost forgot our purpose.

The school we hoped to visit was in Guira de Melena about two hours south of Havana. So near and yet so far. Forty miles and a marathon of government red tape separated us; in the era of Elian, the travel time became the least of our problems. I had never had trouble visiting schools in Mexico, Colombia or Argentina. In Cuba things were different. During that highly politicized time, the ministry of education refused to let us enter the school. Perhaps it was the Elian crisis, or the US blockade, or the fear of bad publicity or any number of other issues, but there we stood with a ton of donations and no one to give them to. As feelings fluctuated among frustration, anger and hopelessness, we went to Cuba's Museum of Humor to laugh. Somewhere between French and Chinese jokes, Alejandro, our Cuban friend, dashed in and yelled, "The Ministry of Education has given us the green light." I thought it was another joke. But, not so. After 10 days and contacts from ex-Senator Gary Hart, we were cleared. We dashed back to the hotel, gathered our gear and sped off to one of the most memorable days of our lives.

Juan Pablo Duarte School looked like a flying saucer that had crash-landed in a cane field. For miles around, no other building blemished the red soil and green Cuban countryside. Castro's revolutionary government had constructed the school to serve agricultural workers. Their sons and daughters attended this school, which specialized in the performing arts. When our van pulled up, our hearts leapt. Outside the school the students had formed a choral gauntlet. Clad in white shirts and gold skirts or pants, 200 smiling students sang our welcome. They clapped and smiled and ached to close the distance between us. Their eyes greedily took us in. They were as aghast as I had been at my students who were "saggin'." (For some reason, it's the style for US teens to let

their jeans sag down their backside till adults feel compelled to dash over and pull up their pants. Fortunately the antidote is boxer shorts pulled up to the sternum.) So with saggin' jeans and high-ridin' boxers, the students entered the school and shook hands with a cement Che Guevara. Then, the principal walked up to me, stared deep into my eyes, and said, "Bienvenidos a Juan Pablo Duarte." I was electric. We were the first American high school delegation to be admitted into a Cuban school since the revolution.

Students and staff beamed at us. Soon we were swallowed into 15 clumps and peppered with questions. The students communicated in a mixture of Spanglish, smiles, hugs, music, baseball, stickball and dance. Introverts became extroverts and extroverts became exhausted. We had met our match. Well-fed, well-educated, well-cared-for Cuban students reveled in their systemic blessings and the musical instruments and tennis, soccer and basket balls we had brought.

When the chaos settled, we were shuffled to the auditorium for a school talent show. The facility lacked everything except talent. I could see the sky through the roof, the walls flaked like dandruff and the tattered costumes needed replacing. It felt as if we had wandered into a cane-field Juilliard. Russian influence had added Bolshoi training to African exuberance. The combination proved to be an artistic Molotov cocktail. Young boys and girls flitted, pirouetted and leapt across the stage. We were to hear it a thousand times afterwards, but it was the first time we heard the popular Cuban tune "Carnival": "One shouldn't cry; life is a carnival." A wispy 13-year-old girl led the swaying, clapping, singing student body. The auditorium rocked and sizzled. And then, as a gesture of gratitude, three girls appeared with the tap shoes we had donated. The girls had no tap dance training but that was no problem for their ebony feet. They tapped out their thanks and punctuated each "gracias" with a snap of their heels.

After the talent show everybody went out to play basketball, volleyball, stickball and to

hit fungo. Kids were spiking, shagging flies, whacking curve balls and drilling jumpers. I challenged the Cuban principal to a game of stickball. The fans cheered at every pitch. Luckily my days of cutting off my mother's broom handles had stayed with me. My wrists still held their New York education. Cubans have radar in their bats; it's hard to blow a pitch by them. They hit any pitch I threw. They clobbered my spitter. We ended the game in a diplomatic tie and headed to the cafeteria for a feast of beans and rice.

To say the least, I was astonished when I met Cuban students face to face. They blew me away. Cuban teenagers understood social studies better than US students. Their curiosity, vivaciousness and acumen stunned us. Third graders rattled off times tables like Catholic parrots. Their understanding of geopolitical and economic realities was superior to US students'. They understood that 85 percent of humanity lives in squalor, and they wanted to correct it. Their global awareness extended well beyond suburban malls. Mind you now, I'm talking about Cuba, a third-world Afro nation, dwarfing any academic performance I'd seen in Latin America and rivaling first-world performance.

While I watched the caring, vitality and engagement in that Cuban school, my mind flashed back to the American tragedy of the Columbine High School massacre. In the depth of my heart I knew that an act of such violence and desperation could and would never occur in Cuba. The despairing alienation that festers in US communities just doesn't exist in Cuba.

If education is not a confluence of mind and heart, it's a Faustian exchange, and it can't really be called education. Unless the heart is engaged, education is incomplete. My hero W. B. Yeats said that "education is not the filling of a vase but the lighting of a fire." The two shooters at Columbine High School were academic whiz kids, but their school system failed to touch their hearts.

I heard that one of the young killers, after he had begun his rampage in Columbine's parking lot and had already shot a number of

students, met another student coming out of the school. The shooter looked the kid in the eye and said, "I like you. Get out of here." Because one boy had touched another boy's heart, he was spared. Perhaps if Columbine had touched the killers' hearts, Columbine would have been spared.

I assure you that there were and are more than two alienated students at Columbine or any other conventional high school. Our schools breed alienation. A number of my students have told me throughout the years that the reason they transferred to the Open School was that they felt enraged and isolated, and that they had perseverated on violence like the Columbine attackers had. The advising system at Jefferson County Open School defused their rage and allowed them to feel included. It wasn't for a lack of caring teachers at Columbine that the shooters felt so alienated. It was the fact that the teachers had too many students and too many other tasks, and that the personal and social curriculum are not valued in our impersonal educational factories. A large percentage of American high school students just go through the motions; they are alienated and disengaged. We should be thankful that they don't speak out as violently as the two boys at Columbine High School did.

In faculty lounges, I've heard teachers complain, "They sent us the wrong kids." The kids aren't the wrong kids. Public school education is just that, public. "Give us your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free. The wretched refuse of your teeming streets." We send these, "the tempest tossed," to public schools. Public schools have been the foundation of our democracy. It is the place where every new wave of immigrants established a foothold on literacy and a new language. It is the place where the dispossessed learned citizenship. As the American family disintegrates and our sense of values and community dissolves into consumerism, our school systems become further challenged. If education becomes solely a consumer product, then the rich will buy the best, and the poor will swallow the

If education becomes solely a consumer product, then the rich will buy the best, and the poor will swallow the dregs.

dregs. Although capability is evenly and randomly spread throughout our gene pool, the opportunities will go to the wealthiest. The proposed voucher system is bogus because it drains funds from public schools, further undermining them and paving the way for them to be privatized. The voucher system is designed to create a consumer product, not to answer educational need. Fat educational contracts will go to those with the right "contacts." Personally, I don't want my children or grandchildren in a for-profit classroom.

Jose Marti, the father of Cuban independence and Cuba's greatest intellectual, educator, and author insisted that "only the educated are free." If that is true, and I believe that it is, most of Latin America and the rest of the world are not free.

Cuba puts her money where Marti's mouth is. It offers ubiquitous institutional support for children, knowing that they are Cuba's future. *Cariño*, which means caring, permeates Cuban schools. Government-supported day care centers help working mothers with their responsibilities. I saw kindergarten students nestled on cots enjoying a siesta. Their teacher sat in the shade and read aloud until the kids dozed off. Every morning and afternoon the parade of neatly uniformed students to and from school heralded the day's passage. After high school, all students are encouraged to continue studying. University costs them nothing. On the contrary, the government pays students a stipend to attend. I blanched when I thought of how many students, in the richest nation on earth, I have heard say, "I can't go to college. I can't afford it. I've got to work." I believe that we can do much more for our children. In fact, Cuba treats her children as well or better than any nation I've ever seen. Elian doesn't have to worry about underfunding or alienation or violence, and his schools don't waste money on armed guards.

In Cuba, education transcends the school; it has become the *raison d'être* of Cuban society. It's enough to make a committed teacher faint with envy. Perhaps this priority is inherent in the name of the sys-

tems. Cuba values people, social...ism; the US values money, capital...ism. As I think about it, the US tends to practice socialism for the rich and capitalism for the poor. Judging from the recent tax cut for the upper 2 percent income bracket and increases in corporate welfare, it seems apparent that only the rich truly benefit from our system. The rest of us are too busy paying our bills. As I age, I begin to despair for our society. I see profit motive and its excess greed everywhere. Commercial television has even invaded public schools. Cafeterias offer Coke machines and corporate food. School districts are so underfunded that they must turn to corporations to build their sports facilities. In exchange, the corporation has an exclusive right to supply the food and drink to our kids, who in turn then choose Coca-Cola over more wholesome milk or juice. In some classrooms, corporate advertising has become part of the curriculum!

In my Cuban wanderings, I bumped into Jasmine, a black woman from Grenada, West Indies. Cuba was paying for her biochemistry degree as long as she agreed to serve the Grenadian poor. During my time in Cuba I met dozens of foreigners studying for free. Fidel Castro even gave the US 500 medical school scholarships. Most of the US students are African American and have agreed to return to their communities in Harlem, rural Mississippi, and Watts to serve the needy. Cuba trains more than double the number of doctors that the US trains per capita. Because of its plethora of doctors, Cuba exports them to areas of need. What is more peaceful and generous than providing health care? After the apocalyptic Hurricane Mitch ripped open Honduras and Nicaragua, Cuba sent doctors to serve the survivors. The following year when torrential rains decimated Venezuela, Cuban doctors volunteered their services. When a friend of mine went on a medical service trip to the mountains of Haiti, the only doctors he saw working there were Cubans. The Haitian doc-

tors lived in the cities and served the rich. Cuban doctors traveled toward need, not toward dollars; they cross borders to hold neglected hands. It seems to me that the market is not the omniscient distributor that many tout it to be.

The history of Latin America is the history of class struggle. The poor have been fighting for a bigger slice of pie ever since Cortes told Montezuma that the white man has a sickness and the only cure for it is gold. Today, that brutal but prophetic conquistador's words ring truer than ever. How could Cortes predict the Enron, Tyco, WorldCom and the savings and loan scandals? Yes, the gilded sickness still plagues us, but if a society values money over its children, that society is steering toward strife. If American education continues to ignore students' hearts, then it will create a heartless society, which will be a cold and scary place.

When people at home first heard about our trip to Cuba, they reacted with alarm. Some wondered how I could take precious American teenagers to such a dangerous place. I discovered in Cuba that buildings are shabby, street lighting doesn't exist, and the people are neither rich nor white, but women can safely stroll the streets at midnight. It's not the street lighting that guarantees safety; it's the light in Cuban hearts.

Why can't the US put our obsolete cold war animosities behind us and embrace what's remarkable and good about our nearest neighbor – a neighbor that seems to have solved, even in its poverty, social problems that continue to plague us? We are a nation of astronomical wealth and power, yet we pay only lip service to our children. We need to offer our children the *cariño* and resources to prevent Columbine massacres. Isn't it time to open our minds and hearts to the miraculous accomplishments our island neighbor has achieved for its citizens? American education doesn't need more standardized testing, technology or bigger schools, and it certainly doesn't need corporate marketers foisting products on our kids. American education could use a dose of Cuban heart. □

Extinguished Lights

By Janet Page-Reeves

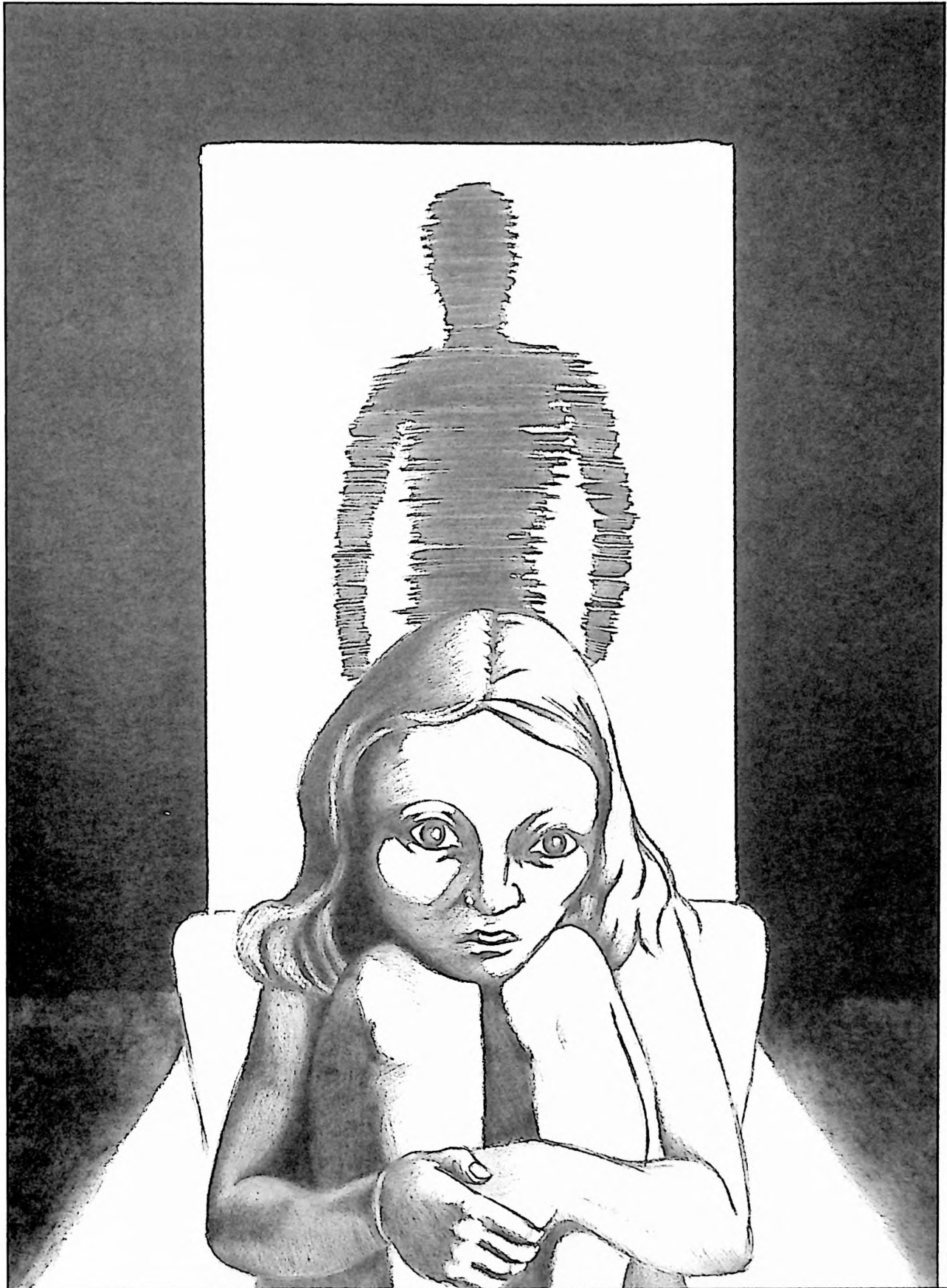


Illustration by Victor Velez

A car horn sounded a few blocks away and seemed to linger a moment in the humid night air. As if out of no where, a weather-beaten low rider rounded the corner with a screech and fish-tailed out of sight down a dark side street, leaving behind a trail of exhaust. In the obscurity, the cloud of dust and smoke dissipated into an eerie haze, floating mistily upward in pooling cones of light which poured from the hooded silhouettes of street lights. There was no trace of a breeze and it was as if the lamps themselves were drawing a breath. The leaves were still and green, yet in the summer darkness, the trees seemed somehow blacker than the night. From doorways and porches, dripped the murmur of anonymous voices, intruding into the thick stillness. The persistent hum of insects, the distant laughter of children, an occasional yell or whistle, all padded the emptiness. It was easy to feel alone.

The dry, flat sound of strappy sandals, clapping rhythmically on the pavement reverberated in her ears with a hypnotizing regularity as Cira made her way along the cracked, uneven sidewalk in the gathering darkness. She evaded the seduction of importuning promises exuding from empty doorways as she passed. Rows of dilapidated houses beckoned to her with an imploring silence. From a few lighted windows fell bits and phrases of people's lives – familiar, yet tentative, enigmatic. But Cira felt no desire to accept these intoxicating entreaties, to enter in upon these worlds. She had lived through each of these scenes innumerable times, if only in her mind's eye, and without a pause or a thought, she knew how each began and how each would end. It didn't really matter, she thought. It was always the same anyway. Day after day, night after night, week after week. There was no perceivable beginning. No end...only the continuous echo of her footsteps pounding along on the cement.

Life had always been just as it was under the glare of the street lights that night. Ahead in her apartment, the once-white, dirt-streaked walls yellowed and grew darker with each passing year. Yet, underneath they were the same bleak, barren walls that swallowed up the detritus of shattered dreams, only to breed nightmarish cockroaches and rats from forgotten corners. There always seemed to be a strong-smelling, sullen man with a glazed stare and more than a hint of stubble growth sitting in front of the television, morosely mesmerized by the incessant drone of afternoon game shows or reality TV. Belly protruding in an unhealthy mound over the straining edge of his belt, he would guzzle the warm dregs of a Miller Lite and squeeze the can with one hand until it crushed in upon itself with hollow, rasping groans. As the can clattered to the floor, he would emit a moist-sounding belch into the already sour-smelling air, where it mingled with the unrelenting, stale odor of cigarettes.

At night, there was always a man behind the closed door to her mother's room. It had always been so. When Cira was younger, she would try to escape the ugly significance of the dull sounds which made their way to her ears from behind the cheap, wooden barrier by turning up the sound on the television. She would watch in the dark while the staccato flickering light leapt into the room, dancing on the walls and in the shadowy corners of the apartment. Her eyes were abstract reflections of the movement on the screen. Those chameleon eyes, feigning blindness and death, shone with a brilliant blankness as a few noises from the street below managed to pierce the exaggerated, canned laughter pretending to fill the room.

Of course, the man who belched at Jeopardy and the man behind the door were not necessarily the same man. And the man who sat before the TV one day was not the same one who had been there a year before or even a few months earlier. But the faces changed so often that to Cira, it no longer mattered that one differed from the next. They were all the same to her. Her eyes, all too familiar with chameleon virtues, regarded the procession of men as one faceless

man, with ever-mutable features. And within the undulating parade of faceless faces, Cira perceived the monumental monotony of their lives.

But her mother seemed to need these men. She basked in their fawning, if brief, attentions with a facade of self-importance. Cira and her needs were never at issue. Her mother was like some aloof stranger with whom Cira just happened to share an apartment. The affection she so desperately wanted from her mother was ostentatiously lavished on her "fellows" in self-aggrandizing displays of ardor worthy of a silent film star. Cira was never the honored recipient. Motherly virtue had absented itself. But as Cira grew older, she began to understand her mother's reticence to forge genuine relationships. Acknowledging emotional connections, even to her daughter, would expose vulnerability, weaken the fortress of experience-hardened grit that kept the world at bay. In fact, Cira, herself, had now begun to cultivate these same attributes.

Cira clutched her purse as she rounded the corner. Suddenly, looming above her in silent tribute to the triumph of human ingenuity over the recalcitrance of nature, was an urban apartment complex. In a bath of shadow and light, a series of huge, monstrous structures now rose above the 19th century row houses she had passed on neighboring streets. The trees flanking the older houses came to an abrupt end at the foot of the behemoth. Blacktop, chain-link fence, cement and brick – the vegetation of an urban jungle – engulfed the remainders of once aesthetic, Victorian yards. From a distance, the textured red brick surface gave the illusion of a jewel-studded mosaic, sparkling in the harsh, yellow glare. The stark ugliness of the buildings was briefly transformed by the luminous quality of the night. But Cira was not to be fooled. Beneath the glittering disguise was the austere reality of her life there. As she drew nearer, the lying masquerade dissolved into an orgy of cigarette butts, graffiti and filth. Cira looked away. More real was the movement of her thin, tanned legs in opposition as her steps plodded onward toward the entrance.

At 13, Cira had already developed into one of those women who unwittingly elicit licentious, caressing stares. Possibly her seeming obliviousness to her own charms both enhanced the pleasure experienced by her would-be admirers and allowed them to feel the liberty to peruse freely. It had not taken long for her mother's devotees to make note. The reflection of death that her child's eyes had assumed those nights in front of the TV became a more permanent state as she came to know the rough, eager hands that pawed her. Heavy, rancid, beer-tainted breath would overwhelm her before the thick, coarse tongues that tasted of old cigarettes forced their way between her lips and moved on, leaving a cold, slimy trail that led down the side of her neck.

But Cira had pretended that none of it was real. She saw those men and experienced their gropes with the same chameleon eyes that had provided her refuge, forever, or so it seemed. Her mother's voice continued to have the same demanding, unfeeling quality it always had possessed, yet Cira knew that awareness had been born. Although those clandestine, skulking encounters remained unutterable secrets, everything between them, every trivial interaction, had taken on exaggerated significance and generated heightened levels of tension. And still, the faceless, nameless men proceeded in their lives as if nothing had changed. Cira guessed that nothing had really. What did it matter whether it was a drunken, wrinkled, balding man, or a young, cocky street jerk? When they touched her, or when she knew that her mother apparently let them touch her, she hated them. They all melded into one great contemptible beast, and in her dreams, she cast them, mother and all, into a yawning abyss. None of them were any different. She cared about none of them, and her life dragged on through the labor of time.

As always, many of the windows that stared out from the height of the apartment complex were scarred by bullet holes and cracks that stretched into web-like patterns on the dusty panes. Cardboard had been used to patch some of the

worst spots, behind which draped makeshift curtains – a thin veil separating the sadness outside from the despair within. A few displayed tidy conscientiousness, but even in those, the material was old and worn. Although the wind was a stranger in those months, most of the windows were left open to entice the torrid night air to enter – an invitation that the heavy humidity rarely ventured to accept.

Often, just before entering the empty stairwell that led up to their third floor apartment, Cira would stop and glance upward. The patchwork of windows alternated randomly from darkness, to the inevitable fluttering glow of TV images playing upon the walls and curtains, to illuminations of real life and its dramas. The janused interplay was one between escape into the oblivion of passive viewer, and the drudgery of continued conscious existence – mere chimera, all.

Cira was always filled with a bit of wonder to see a few stars managing to sparkle out of the black void above the ugly red brick, despite the blaze of city lights from below. They produced in her a calm that she little understood, but enjoyed experiencing. Of course, stars endure the sweep of history, and to Cira, they seemed immutable and constant. They were free from the oppressive tedium that she had always felt with the slow passage of time. If only she had known that some of those stars to which she looked for comfort had long since burnt out and died an unknown, solitary death in the vast loneliness of the universe, leaving only ghosts of light to travel over the years and the distances. Perhaps then she would have focused more on the potentialities in her own life to overcome limitations and fatalities in the present – or perhaps she would only have been drawn further toward embracing nothingness, an end to her repetitious existence, toward the smoldering ash from the fire that was merely a snuffed-out star.

That night, the stars seemed to be calling out to her more urgently than usual. The silent shriek from the vast depths of the sky was, however, nothing more than an echo of something she felt welling-up within her. Inside her was a tiny new light which had unexpectedly implanted itself in the sinews and cavities of her being. The creature that she knew was hiding and growing there, deriving sustenance from her, giving her hope, draining from her the last vestiges of strength, was rapidly expanding to fill the soft folds of her woman's body. But she herself had yet to experience the lovely tranquility of childhood and its curiosities. Her life had been hard and after only 13 years, she already felt spent and exhausted. As she walked along, she could hear the blood pounding in her ears – the same blood that was now coursing through her body, sharing and sustaining that other life.

She had known it was there for some time, but had only confirmed her suspicions that evening. A formal acknowledgement had, for some reason, made it seem more unreal, as if it were happening to someone else while she watched from a distance. When she left the clinic, she had moved along in a dream-like state, feeling more alone than ever. Yet, there was the strange, new knowledge deceptively undermining her solitude. Enticing and beguiling was the feeling of belonging to someone, of someone belonging to her. It made her heart leap, if only a little. She would be a mother. Someone would be her child. Life would no longer be just the same.

But almost as soon as this hope drew shape, it was overshadowed by the dark realization that this new life would be no different than her own had been. For her child, life would be the same monotonous sadness that she had always known. There was nothing to suggest that in having each other, they would be able to escape the apparent inevitability of life in the dank apartment complex. And with this understanding, came an even darker thought – she must not give birth to another life as miserable as her own. She decided almost as soon as she had been touched by those rays of hope, that she would have to extinguish the light that had unexpectedly begun to illuminate her soul, that had so unexpectedly offered a spark of unattainable happiness in the future.

And for this, even more than for the dirty, sweaty, humiliating and vapid encounters, even more than for the nights spent imagining what was going on behind the wooden door, even more than for the years of yearning for motherly caresses, she hated them all. The faceless men, her mother with her perpetually emotionless voice—she wished nothing more than that they would simply cease to exist. She dreamed of being left completely and utterly alone to bask in the warmth of icy solitude. But wishing and dreaming were empty and meaningless endeavors that had long since betrayed her. She knew, beyond hope, that the others would still be there when she eventually reached the apartment.

A rush of warm air escaped through her nostrils in the form of an undefined sigh. She sighed for nothing; she sighed for it all. Turning away from the immensity of the universe above and returning to the finite tangibility awaiting her, Cira's footsteps entered into the glass and metal doorway of the apartment building. The sound of her sandals against the metal stairs resonated with a ring that was noticeably different from the sound produced on the sidewalk and on the cement hallways of the building. But as she climbed the three stories to the apartment, Cira failed to notice the interesting acoustical contrast. Her gait maintained the same controlled, yet languid pace, and the rhythm continued unabated.

As always, when Cira entered the room, she was greeted by the disorder and ugliness that surrounded her. Out of the corner of her eye, she was aware of the numerous black-bodied splotches that scurried for cover when she switched on the light. Tonight the enveloping humidity seemed more oppressive than usual, and there was a bitter stench about the place that made her crinkle her nose and turn her head in disgust, as if by not meeting it head-on, one could evade its unpleasant reception. Tossing her keys onto the table, pockmarked with cigarette burns, scratches, and sticky rings, Cira glanced from the closed door of her mother's room to the empty beer cans that littered the floor. In the semi-shadow offered by the overstuffed TV chair, a mangled can lay on its side. The remains had drained into a mirrored puddle that was slowly oozing and spreading over the dirty, cracked linoleum.

Setting her purse on the table with a dull thud, she thrust her hand inside and extracted an almost spent pack of Marlboro's. She had to rummage a bit through the contents until her fingers lit upon the green, plastic body of her lighter. The purse had been a gift from her aunt for Christmas two years earlier and she had gotten good use out of it. It's tawny faux leather resisted the visible signs of everyday use. Always practical, her aunt had chosen a purse with the capacity to carry a great deal. Tonight, a dark, heavy object had mysteriously found its way inside. But when Cira reached in to search for her lighter, she had only to push this aside.

Rather unconsciously, Cira lit up one of the three remaining cigarettes in the pack and savored a long, deep drag, exhaling slowly through her nose. For a moment she stared absently at the smoldering tip and thought of the stars outside in the night sky. Swinging one of the kitchen chairs around to face the closed wooden door, Cira sat decisively onto the brittle plastic seat from which tufts of dirty cotton had erupted from ragged cracks. Her feet remained firmly on either side of the chair as if to brace herself. With her free hand, she thrust the lighter back into her purse. Letting her arm rest on the table, her hand remained hidden by the opening of the faux fabric bag. With the other hand, she continued the sporadic, habitual motions of smoking. Yet, now her attention was fixed squarely on the door, waiting.

The summer heat was sweltering, soporific. It could have been midday, if it were not for the darkness, which penetrated into her thoughts as she waited. Tiny beads of sweat had begun to appear on her upper lip and a shiny path had formed down her left cheek, as tears of sweat made their way down her smooth, tanned forehead. Every few minutes, a small drop would roll down the path, either to fling itself onto the shoulder of her blouse, or to gather with its pre-

cursors below her ear and run off slowly to be absorbed by the already damp collar at her neck.

Smoke from her cigarette curled upward and dissolved into an amorphous presence that hung anxiously in the stuffy room. Unnoticed, tails of powdery, gray-white ash broke loose and fluttered silently to the floor. Cira took one last puff, momentarily intensifying the red glow at the tip, as if it were being infused with a jolt of electricity. Then, into the midst of an already overflowing pink plastic ash-tray, Cira plunged the tiny red light and pounded it out among butts and singed ends of partially smoked joints: one less light to shine out from the night. As she sat and waited, moments drooled by, slowly and dark like molasses. Who can say whether minutes or hours passed? Cira endured the weight of the lugubrious passage of time, that always strives for the future but never achieves anything except the present. Who knew what the future would bring? She waited without anticipation and was conscious of living only for that future. In fact, she felt herself inexorably bound to the path destiny had carved for her. She was frightfully aware that the future was as much determined by the past as by the present.

Suddenly, a thin band of light appeared from the crack beneath the door and she heard the low, garbled voices that she had known would eventually hatch from the intrepid quiet abandon of the apartment. Cira clutched the cold, dark object laying heavily in wait in the viscera of her bag. With a creak, the door opened and empty words and laughter spewed forth. Cira stiffened and her hand contracted imperceptibly, producing a barely audible click, whose meaning was lost in the muffled confines of faux material. The outer room was flooded by light from the recently opened door and silhouettes of two phantasmagoric figures emerged into her view. Slowly, as if drifting on a current of tepid air, Cira's hand withdrew from the purse. In the shadowy dampness, the faux phantoms were unable to adjust their eyes enough to discern the black metal shape Cira held firmly in front of her. In their pursuit of exit from the room, they expected to ignore her presence, as was their wont. As fortune would have it, however, this was not now to be the case.

There was an eternity in which no one seemed to move and nothing actually happened. For Cira, that was how life had always been and she felt nothing unusual or out of the ordinary as this instance hung in the balance. She lived in a state of perpetuity in which things were always unbearably constant, and nothing ever changed or broke in upon the density of time. It is difficult to say whether her breathing gave away some hint of anxiety. She respired only once, if that, before the eternity of the moment was played out. If she had been allowed to continue, it is possible to imagine that her breathing pattern would have quickened. But like the death of a star, her breathing went unnoticed. In the wake of the loud, sharp, metallic noise that shattered the melancholy silence, all else became secondary.

In the glare from the doorway, the male figure jerked and fell, slowly reeling with magical circular motions into a dead heap on the floor. The immediate silence that followed the loudness was grating. That silence, however, was instantly broken by the ear-piercing, exaggeratedly passionate and human voice of her mother, carrying into the night air like the waves from a child's boat on the surface of a pond. Over and over, it seemed, Cira saw her mother's fear-stricken face contract into the grimace of a blood-curdling scream. Somehow that scream had the quality of seeming to be constantly beginning, although at the same time, it hung in the air as if it would never cease until its last echos were lost into the darkened comers of the room or of Cira's mind.

The pile on the floor was featureless beneath the splatter of blood that decorated what should have been a face. One of the faceless men. Warm, scarlet syrup dribbled out onto the linoleum in rivers which drained into the pool of warm beer by the TV. The mixture faded into a disgusting burnished orange that glistened in the light spilling out from her mother's room. In it, was reflected

the dark outline of her mother, who stood in the doorway by the heap on the floor, still screaming.

It is a dream, thought Cira, as the heavy metal object fell from her hand and clattered to the floor with much more force than those crushed, empty beer cans had ever produced. In the distance, a shrill siren sang out and on the opposite side of the door, she could hear banging and pounding and loud, distraught voices. But inside the apartment nothing seemed to change. Her mother was as if frozen into an infinite parody of a scream, and life continued for Cira in slow motion. It occurred to her, strangely, that it was much more controllable that way.

Cira's camouflage eyes were wide and empty. She sank back onto the dingy, cracked, tufty chair. She hugged her stomach and began to rock methodically back and forth, as if in a trance. She imagined that she could feel the warmth of the light that continued to burn inside her belly. She convinced herself of the sensation that she could feel it growing and wondered wistfully, if when they put out that little light, a rose-colored pool would bathe the white of the sheets and the shining, sterile metal instruments, like the expanding stain rapidly engulfing the space around the faceless figure.

As the excited pounding on the door and in her head increased, Cira felt the oppressive foreboding that had been pursuing her all evening, if not forever, disintegrate into the night. From the open window, oblivious stars twinkled in the sky like beautiful sequins. With reality squeezing in upon her, and with her breath now coming in short, shallow spasms, she focused her concentration upon the exquisite resplendence of the brightest star in the square opening of the window. Her eyes deceptively appeared to watch that star, giving her furtive inner self an opportunity to escape, entrenching itself deeper and deeper in the safeholds of the mind. Her swaying continued. Then, in one split second, that point of light her eyes had been focused on outside in the sky unexpectedly disappeared. One minute it was there, sparkling. The next it was gone. Unknowingly, she had witnessed a moment from the past as it manifested its fatality in the present – the long-delayed realization of the death of a star. It had flickered and gone out as easily as a candle in the breeze. And it was then that she knew.

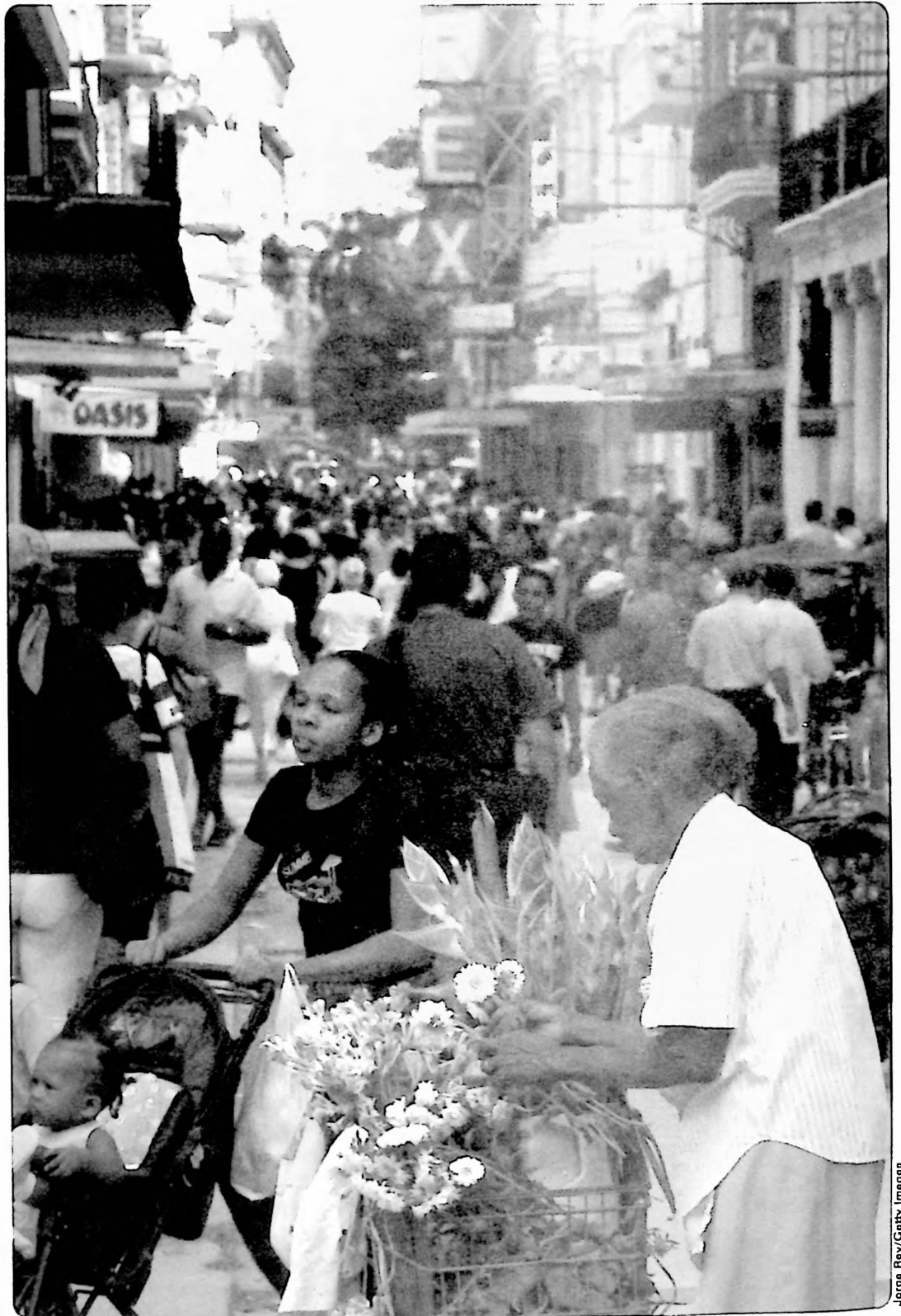
Time erupted. The door burst open. Her mother rushed forward, released from the transfixity of her scream, and Cira felt the whole of the world crumbling around her. Cira turned her face back toward the window and the false permanence of the remaining stars in the sky. Like a child blowing out birthday candles on a cake, she pursed her lips and blew with all of the strength she could muster, hoping to extinguish those lying, charading shimmers in the summer sky in a last, futile effort to exert a modicum of control over the omnipotent forces of the universe. But, even as she did so, she realized what the stars already knew – that the lights of her own future had died long ago and that her life was nothing but an empty shell, a residue of what might have been. She closed her eyes to shut out the irritating glare of reality, and still rocking, she clutched her head between her hands and began to hum with low, broken tones. Salty tears fell to the floor, but were too weak to flow to meet the sticky wetness that eddied by the heap that lay by the can on the floor by the TV.

Outside, everything continued as if before, but now somehow inherently different. The stars flickered, mockingly, tantalizingly. The streetlights beamed, and the indirect flutter of television screen images bobbed in the windows of the ugly red brick behemoth of a building. Overpowering the rest, however, were the revolving, flashing red and blue lights of the ambulance and of the police cars parked haphazardly on the street below, rhapsodically illuminating the underside of life in the apartment complex. But in the stagnant summer darkness, it was impossible to know which lights represented the living rays of hope and which were only fossilized remnant images of lights that had prematurely been extinguished. □

No son los sospechosos habituales

El Autor de novelas de misterio conversa con *PA*

► Cubanos caminan por las calles de la Habana el 24 de febrero de 2004. El encargado de la Sección de Intereses Norteamericana en Cuba afirmó el 23 de febrero que no habían planes para reanudar discusiones formales sobre la emigración de cubanos a EEUU que fueron suspendidas por Estados Unidos en enero.



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PA: ¿Favorece ud. al género detective/crimen de la ficción? Si es que sí, ¿porqué?

LP: Recuerdo que en 1977, cuando escribí la primera crítica que publiqué en una revista, se trataba de un comentario de una novela policial. Desde esa época, cuando yo era estudiante de letras en la Universidad de La Habana y no soñaba siquiera con que sería escritor de ficciones, ya estaba muy cercano al género policial, negro, detectivesco o como quiera llamársele, pero a la vez fui decantando mis preferencias por el modo de hacer de escritores como Hammett y Chandler. Luego, en los años 80, casi fui el crítico "por excelencia" de la novela policial que se escribía en Cuba y, también, fui perfilando mis intereses: no me gustaba la mayoría de aquellas novelas Cubanas en las que había una historia criminal o de espionaje, pero faltaba "literatura," quizás porque sobaban intenciones políticas muy evidentes, casi típicas del realismo socialista. Por eso, hacia 1990, cuando salí de una etapa de seis años en la que prácticamente solo hice periodismo – había escrito en 1984 mi primera novela, *Fiebre de caballos*, una historia de amor e iniciación – estaba decidido a escribir una novela policial y tenía varios objetivos, entre ellos: que fuera muy cubana, pero que no se pareciera a aquellas novelas policiales cubanas que yo había criticado; que fuera policial, pero solo en su apariencia, pues me interesaba más lo literario que cualquier tipo de enigma; que tuviera como modelos a Hammett y a Chandler, pero también a autores que había ido leyendo en esos años, como Vázquez Montalbán, Chester Himes, Jean Patrick Manchette y muchos otros autores no policiales.

Mi decisión de escribir aquella novela, que titulé *Pasado perfecto* y que tuvo su primera edición en 1991 tenía varias intenciones, pero la primera de todas era que, siendo una novela policial, fuera también una novela social, pues creo que una de las virtudes de este género es que uno puede utilizarlo del modo que desee, siempre y cuando viole las reglas que ya conoce con conciencia artística de lo que está haciendo. La novela negra te puede conducir directamente a los lados más oscuros de una realidad, de una sociedad, y siempre conservando algo que para mí es muy importante: la posibilidad de comunicarme con los lectores. Es por eso que me gusta tanto la novela de carácter policial –yo llamo a mis novelas "falsos policiacos," pues

la estructura policial es sólo un pretexto para llegar a otros terrenos – y por lo que la he practicado tanto: de mis ocho novelas, seis son de carácter policial, aunque debo reconocer que mi libro más ambicioso, *La novela de mi vida*, es una novela de intriga en la que no hay cadáveres, aunque sí misterios.

PA: ¿Surgió el carácter del Inspector Conde, figura central de su serie "Havana Quartet," de alguna inspiración específica, sea literaria o sea de la vida real?

LP: Mario Conde nació de una necesidad: yo debía tener un investigador, un protagonista para *Pasado perfecto*, y ese personaje sería, en la novela, mis ojos, mi voz, mi modo de ver y entender la realidad y muchas cosas de la vida. Por lo tanto debía ser algo más que un policía – y, por supuesto, debía ser un policía

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diferente a los de esa novela policial Cubana politizada de que antes te hablé. Mario Conde entonces debía tener una serie de características personales, pero la primera de todas debía ser su sensibilidad e inteligencia a la hora de interpretar su realidad. Es por eso que, aun cuando no conoce prácticamente nada de investigación criminal, es un hombre que se manifiesta con gran sensibilidad: para él la literatura, la música, la relación con sus amigos, la visión del presente y el pasado cubano son realidades de las que participa desde esa sensibilidad e inteligencia. El resultado fue un hombre un poco desencantado, exceptivo, que se defiende con la ironía, y que tiene grandes fidelidades y grandes fobias. En fin, para la ortodoxia Cubana era un tipo políticamente muy incorrecto, y por eso la novela no fue premiada en un concurso cubano al que

la envíe y debió salir publicada en México. De todas maneras, el Conde de la primera novela fue como un ensayo general del personaje que, a partir de la segunda entrega del "Cuartero," cobra toda su corporeidad y su psicología. Ya en esa entrega – *Vientos de cuaresma*, es el título original– se revela toda su tristeza, su pesimismo, su sentido doloroso de la vida y su mirada despiadada sobre la realidad en que vive. Conde es entonces totalmente incorrecto políticamente, pero la novela, sin embargo, ganó el premio nacional en Cuba y se publicó de inmediato. De este modo yo veo *Vientos de cuaresma* como el paso del Conde hacia el desencanto, en el cual vive en el resto de las novelas del "Cuartero" y en las otras dos que le han seguido, *Adiós, Hemingway* (publicada en inglés por Canongate) y *La neblina del ayer*, que salió este año en España y que empezará a ser traducida el año próximo. En estas dos últimas novelas, incluso, ya Conde no es policía, pues al finalizar el "Cuartero" decide dejar el cuerpo para sentirse más libre, porque se ha asqueado de su trabajo como investigador de crímenes y porque su sensibilidad ha llegado al límite y debe buscarle otro sentido a su vida. (Ahora se dedica a comprar y a vender libros viejos, según él, porque así está más cerca de la literatura pero no demasiado lejos de la calle...)

PA: ¿Puede decirnos algo sobre su vida, su juventud, el comienzo de su carrera? ¿Cómo es que llegó a ser escritor? ¿Cómo llegó a escribir ficción?

LP: Soy un cubano típico de mi generación. Yo nací en el año 55, por lo que he pasado toda mi vida consciente bajo el sistema de la revolución. Nací y crecí (y todavía vivo) en un barrio popular de la periferia de La Habana, donde viví con gran libertad, dedicado la mayor parte del tiempo a lo que sigue siendo mi mayor pasión: el beisbol. Como soy zurdo, jugaba primera base y los jardines, pero no tenía suficiente fuerza al bate como para ser un buen pelotero, pero eso, al terminar los estudios preuniversitarios, decidí estudiar letras en la universidad y, poco después, pensé que si no sería pelotero, sería escritor... Así comencé a escribir crítica literaria y mis primeros relatos cortos, hasta que en 1984 terminé mi primera novela, después de sudar mucho, pero mucho. En esos momentos yo estaba dividido en tres: el pen-



Δ Un grupo de turistas sentados en un café el 24 de febrero de 2004 en la Habana, Cuba. El encargado de la Sección de Intereses Norteamericana en Cuba afirmó el 23 de febrero que no habían planes para reanudar discusiones formales sobre la emigración de cubanos a EEUU que fueron suspendidas por Estados Unidos en enero.

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odismo, el ensayo literario y la ficción se debatían dentro de mí, y por casualidades de la vida fui a trabajar a un periódico donde pude hacer reportajes largos, de investigación, que eran casi literatura, casi investigaciones socio-literarias... Hasta que decidí que lo importante era hacer ficción y comencé con *Pasado perfecto* mi trabajo de novelista "profesional," por llamarlo de alguna manera. Sin embargo, no he dejado de ser periodista y por eso tengo ya publicados cuatro libros de periodismo y un quinto viene en camino; tampoco he deja-

do de ser ensayista, y tengo publicados cinco libros de ese género (uno de ellos dedicado a la novela policial), y, a la vez, he escrito entre 1990 y hoy siete novelas, seis de ellas con el personaje de Mario Conde.

Yo siempre digo que quizás esté muy lejos de ser el escritor cubano de más talento... pero de lo que estoy seguro es que soy el más trabajador, pues en esos años, además, he escrito varios guiones para cine, dos libros de relatos y he dado no sé cuántas conferencias y publicado decenas de artículos. Soy una persona que me sien-

to bien escribiendo, me gusta hacerlo, y por eso no sólo vivo de la literatura, sino también para la literatura. Y he tenido mucha suerte, porque mis libros son publicados en español por una editorial magnífica (Tusquets, de Barcelona) y han sido traducidos ya a 10 idiomas y eso me permite dedicarme a tiempo completo al oficio de la literatura... Pero todavía hoy, cuando veo un buen juego de beisbol, pienso que me hubiera gustado más ser un gran jugador, como el Duque Hernández, por ejemplo, un hombre al que admiro por su

pasión y disciplina, que de alguna forma deben parecerse a las que yo tengo cuando hago literatura.

PA: Fiel al género de la ficción de detectives y crimen, en *Havana Red* el escenario urbano, la ciudad, tiene un papel importante dentro de la historia, como si fuera casi un carácter vivo en sí mismo. Si tuviera que escribir una caracterización o resumen de La Habana, ¿qué diría?

LP: Ya te dije que soy habanero, pero un habanero marginal: vivo en la periferia, y el resto de la ciudad siempre ha sido para mi parte de un descubrimiento, y algo de eso hay en mis novelas: La Habana es una ciudad enorme, llena de contrastes, de belleza y miseria, de música y lamentos. La Habana, recuerda, es una ciudad cosmopolita, que en determinados momentos de su historia acumuló gran poder económico (se ve en sus edificaciones) y, en los últimos tiempos, una connotación política. Es una ciudad, también, de música, de pintura, de literatura, de baile. La cultura siempre floreció en esta ciudad. Igual

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que el beisbol. De todo eso ha surgido una ciudad con muchos rostros, muy diversa, inabarcable en una sola mirada, una ciudad que ha sido vista por algunos escritores cubanos como un verdadero laberinto (Carpentier, Cabrera Infante). Pero La Habana de hoy es, además, una ciudad de ruinas – y esto es muy importante en mi más reciente novela. Es una ciudad que ha sufrido un gran abandono físico y su deterioro es patente y lamentable. Pero también es un ámbito donde en los últimos años, con la gran crisis económica de los 90 (post-Unión Soviética) ha

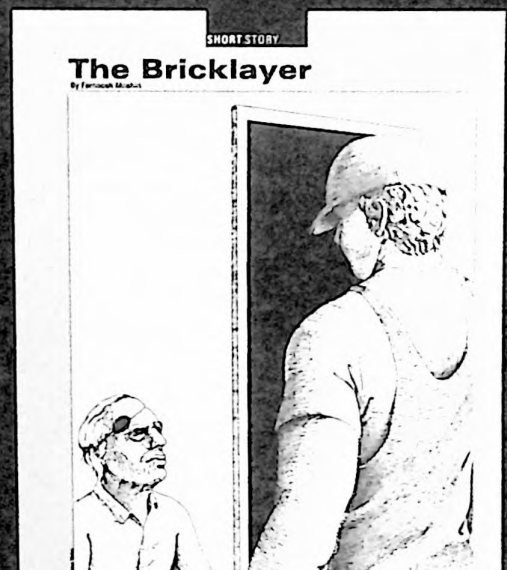
visto renacer enfermedades que se creían curadas, como la prostitución, la droga, los tráficos más diversos, que prácticamente desaparecieron en los primeros tiempos del período revolucionario. Para mi La Habana es un gran amor y un gran dolor. Es mi ciudad, escribo sobre ella, sobre la gente que vive en ella, y con las palabras que se escuchan en ella y me produce un sentimiento de frustración ver cómo la ciudad ha ido deteriorándose, física y moralmente, que mucha gente se ha ido envileciendo, que muchas otras quieren irse de aquí para siempre, que su belleza va desmoronándose, como un castillo de naipes.

PA: *Havana Red* se dirige a la cuestión muy delicada de los derechos de gays y lesbianas y de los que cruzan líneas de identidad sexual en Cuba. ¿Como quisiera caracterizar a las actitudes actuales sobre esta cuestión en Cuba? Basado en sus viajes y en lo que sabe de otros países, ¿como se comparan las actitudes en Cuba con los sentimientos internacionales sobre este asunto?

LP: Afortunadamente en la Cuba de hoy el problema de la homosexualidad ha dejado de ser un "mal" social y sólo ha quedado como un problema en el ámbito familiar, pues la familia cubana, por tradición, es muy machista y la homosexualidad siempre ha sido mal vista. Pero aun así, muchas familias ya lo aceptan como algo normal, aunque no sea precisamente una fiesta. Los gays y lesbianas siempre tuvieron plenos derechos civiles en Cuba, pero la moral pre y post revolucionaria los condenó como enfermos, pervertidos y hasta como

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enemigos políticos. El momento más duro fue esa década del 70 a la que se refiere *Havana Red*, cuando ser gay era casi un delito y te podía costar, por ejemplo, la expulsión de la universidad o de un centro de trabajo. Fue una política stalinista la que se les aplicó, y muchos artistas notables, solo por ser homosexuales, fueron marginados durante muchos años (y esta tragedia, la del artista marginado, es más importante en la novela que la marginación de los gays, pues la frustración de la libertad artística es para mí algo más esencial, más profundo y dramático que el simple problema sexual).

En los años 80 las cosas comenzaron a tomar otro camino más permisible y en los 90, cuando se produce la crisis, las prioridades son otras, el gobierno tiene que admitir que las circunstancias son diferentes y por eso se les da mayor libertad a los homosexuales (y, mira qué casualidad, también a los artistas). Esto ha permitido que se vea hoy un mayor número de personas que exhibe su homosexualidad, un mayor número de parejas gays y lesbianas que viven juntos sin que nadie se lo cuestione, una presencia visible de la reflexión sobre ese mundo en el cine, la literatura, el teatro, las artes plásticas, la danza. En fin, creo que hoy, en Cuba, el homosexual vive más o menos con la misma libertad y con los mismos prejuicios que en el resto del mundo occidental, incluida España, donde se legalizó el matrimonio gay, pero no los prejuicios que muchas personas todavía poseen hacia la homosexualidad. Los intelectuales, mientras tanto, han ganado un espacio de reflexión y crítica mucho mayor, y nadie te obliga a escribir novelas realista-socialistas y políticamente correctas, como ocurrió en los años 70. Incluso, como es mi caso, puedes hacer una literatura crítica de la realidad y de algunos aspectos (no todos, claro), del sistema, y vivir en la isla, ser publicado y reconocido en Cuba.

PA: ¿Cuales son sus ficcionistas Cubanos favoritos de ayer y de hoy? ¿Autores internacionales? ¿Porqué?

LP: La lista de mis autores favoritos sería interminable, porque todas las buenas novelas, libros de relatos o de poesía que he leído, han dejado algo en mí, como lec-



▲ Estudiantes de bellas artes en La Habana crean un mural público.

Adalberto Roque/ASP/Getty Images

tor y como escritor. Pero si me obligas a mencionar nombre te diré unos cuantos: entre los cubanos mis preferencias andan por Alejo Carpentier, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Lino Novás Calvo... entre los internacionales haría tres distinciones: 1. Los autores de novela policial; 2. Los autores de mi lengua, el español; 3. Los autores de otros idiomas... Y si hago esa distinción es porque de cada grupo he recibido enseñanzas complementarias. Por ejemplo, entre los de mi idioma he recibido la lección de cómo se escribe bien en español, que es algo imprescindible para cualquier escritor de mi cultura. Entonces ubicaría en el grupo uno a los ya mencionados Hammett, Chandler, Vázquez Montalbán, Himes, Manchette y

agregaría a escritores como Charym, el brasileño Fonseca, a Dürremant, entre otros. En el grupo dos pondría a Vargas Llosa, Cortázar, García Márquez, Fernando del Paso, Bryce Echenique y, claro, también a los cubanos. En el grupo tres se destacan los autores norteamericanos, con los que tengo gran afinidad, pues con ellos aprendí cómo se arma una buena historia. Y ahí incluiría a Hemingway, con quien sostengo una relación de amor-odio, a Salinger, de quien soy devoto, a Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Carson McCullers, y muchos otros, a los que sumé, recientemente, a Paul Auster. Y fuera del ámbito norteamericano a Kafka, Thomas Mann, Sartre y Camus, Kundera... en fin, serían cientos. □

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