

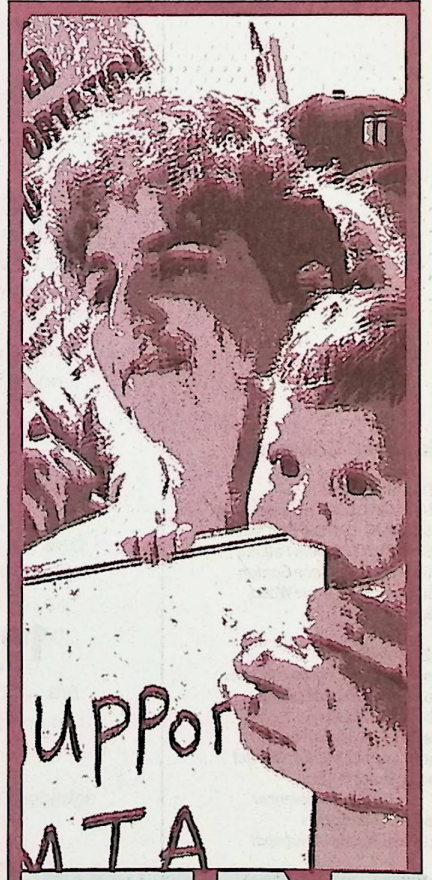
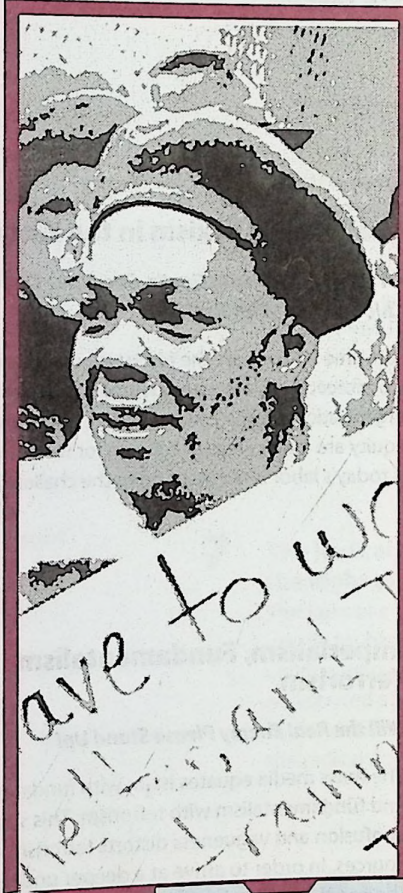
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FIGHTING FOR A BETTER WORLD

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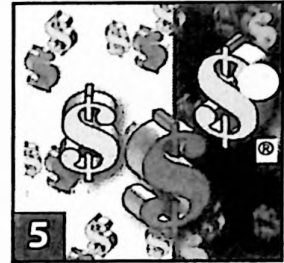
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Manifest Destiny



Tucson, AZ

I enjoyed Don Sloan's article on manifest destiny (PA, December 2001). It expanded my concept of the issue and started me thinking in broader terms. For example, if one is to interpret manifest destiny as the will of God and/or Providence, then we have to agree that it is not a US invention, but rather a centuries-old extension of ruling-class ideology.

I have always related the issue of the Spanish/Mexican/American War with the oppression of Mexican-Americans and American Indians, and with US attempts to control the whole of the Western Hemisphere. But I also have several criticisms. First I believe the opening statement is a misprint; this year marks the 156th and not the 165th anniversary of the war. Secondly, I question the date 1789 since our country's independence was ratified in 1776, or so I thought.

Lastly, a history buff told me that it was President Polk who led the war against Mexico and not Jackson. Finally, the battle of the Alamo took place in 1846, not 1845. In any case, I am excited about the article. I made copies and distributed them to some of my long time Chicano friends and local progressive people. Thus I want to thank you for your effort.

— Lorenzo Torrez

Sloan Replies:

I thank Lorenzo Torrez for his comments.

The battle of the Alamo occurred on March 6, 1836, and not 1835 as written (nor 1846). The 165th anniversary is correct arithmetic; 2001 (the onset of the millennium) minus 1836 equals 165. The year 1776 merely marks the delivery of the

Declaration of Independence to King George III. The Revolutionary War ended in 1781 and I used the year 1789 as the mark of our victory over England because that was the official ratification of the US Constitution and truly signals the beginning of the USA in history.

Torrez' point over the issue of Presidents Polk and Jackson and the Mexican War is well taken. My comments are a little muddled. I poetically lumped the Texas War for independence in with the Mexican American War a decade later as a part of the same struggle, as history has since demonstrated. Thus, to be a purist, it was indeed on James Polk's watch. But the thrust of this policy was the creation of Andrew Jackson who died in 1845 and never actually watched the culmination of his plans for suzerain America.

As Torrez writes, it is particularly important that my association of the whole concept of manifest destiny with our entire history, up to this very day that includes not only World War II, but the Cold War and our hegemonic foreign policy since, came through. The scorpion has not changed its purpose.

— Don Sloan

Bush vs. Women



New Haven, CT

In 2002, most measures related to the needs of working and poor women and women of color are in danger of being reversed. The Bush administration's policies fail women stuck in poverty-wage jobs with no health care, and mothers who work long hours to make ends meet.

Hundreds of thousands of low-wage jobs were lost after Sept. 11. Housekeepers, custodians and food service workers received no bailouts, no increased unemployment insurance or health care or safety-net protection. Under cover of "fighting terrorism," the largest military buildup in recent history is taking place at fantastic expense. Meanwhile, the burden of the economic recession is being pushed on to the states, where cuts in health care, housing and education are already underway.

It is no wonder women are in the forefront of union organizing, community organizing, and peace and justice movements today. Top legislative priorities for women are pay equity, restoration of the safety net during welfare reauthorization, saving Social Security and electing enough pro-working-family candidates and women to change the political balance of forces in the Senate and the House.

— Joelle Fishman

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Pay Equity Values Families

Pious politicians preach family values but refuse to value families

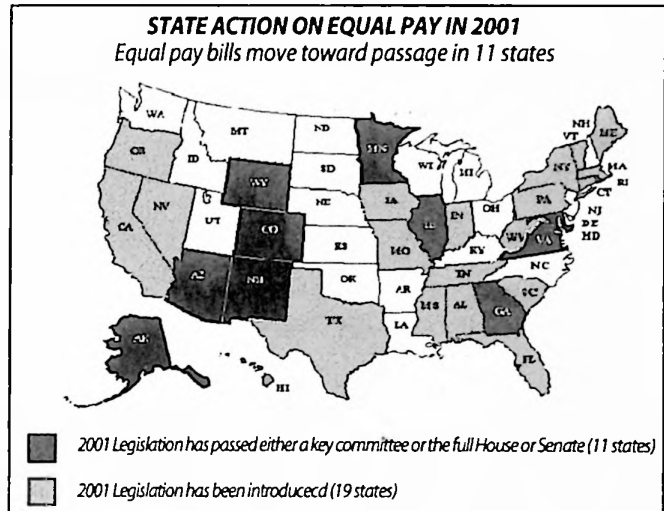
By David Eisenhower

William J. Bennett, the insufferable moralizer who is a fixture on Sunday morning talk shows, claims in his new book, *The Broken Hearth*, that the prosperity of the past few decades has obscured the threat to civilization posed by the decline of the nuclear family. Bennett blames the "stunning rise of divorce, out-of-wedlock births, unwed teen mothers, the number of children living in single-parent homes and the number of cohabiting couples" for most of the ills that beset the nation.

Bennett's "analysis," conspicuously ignores the low wages and lack of benefits available, in particular, to working women. This ignorance of course, endears him to right-wing circles and ensures him financial security as a "Distinguished Fellow" at the Heritage Foundation and a regular guest on *Meet The Press*. Bennett is no fool. He knows his wealthy patrons at the Olin Foundation and the Bradley Foundation support the Bennett family in style because he is too polite to call attention to the many ways his benefactors profit from the super-exploitation of women.

Not that it isn't obvious. According to the National Committee on Pay Equity the median annual income in the year 2000 for all women working full time was 73 percent of what men earned. While this is a slight improvement over the year before (in 1999 it was 72 percent) the narrowing of the wage gap was due to men earning less, not women earning more. The median income of African-American women working full time was 64 percent of what white men earned in 2000, or \$25,117. White women working full time earned 72 percent (\$28,080) of what white men earned. And Hispanic women working full time earned 52 percent (\$20,527) of the income of full-time white male workers. Since nearly two-thirds of working women report that they provide at least half of the household income, the pay gap has a serious effect on total family income.

According to the Women's Bureau of the US Department of Labor, in 2000 the vast majority of women work in a limited number of low-paying occupations. The median wage in the top occupation for women ("sales worker, retail and personal services") is \$301 a week. In



More information on proposals to reduce the wage gap can be found at www.stateaction.org.

the late 1990's African-American women were most commonly employed as "nursing aides, orderlies and attendants," while Latinas were most commonly employed as cashiers. An AFL-CIO Pay Equity Fact Sheet reveals that the income from jobs available to the majority of women of color do not "pay enough to reach the poverty line for a family of four," which was \$16,036 in 1996.

The Institute For Women's Policy Research (IWPR) reports that while women are 44 percent of the full-time work force, they are 77 percent of all part-time workers. 30 percent of women between the ages of 25 and 54 (the peak earning years) work part time. For many women part-time employment is the only option because of family care (children and/or parents) responsibilities. And for taking this responsibility seriously women pay a significant economic price.

The effects of this political hypocrisy have been discussed by Jody Heymann in a recent study entitled "The Widening Gap: Why American's Working Families Are In Jeopardy and What Can Be Done About It." A key finding by Heymann is that low-income women workers have few job benefits. Nearly 60 percent of employed mothers lack sick leave. Few have paid leave or flexible

◆ (continued on page 18)

International Women's Day 2002

What are the main issues confronting the struggle for women's equality on this International Women's Day?

By Debbie Bell

Women's issues are many of the same issues that affect the quality of life for all working people. However, at the same time, we have to recognize that women's problems have a special character because of gender inequality. In 2002, sexual discrimination is still widespread.

A major assault on women occurs in the job market. Today, significant wage disparity still exists. Women are paid 30 percent less than men for performing the same work. The idea of equal pay for equal work is still not a concept that the corporate world has embraced. Despite all of the advances in women's rights there are still traditional areas of the economy reserved for "women's work." For example, women comprise 81.5 percent of elementary school teachers and 88.2 percent of cashiers. Sales clerks, waitresses, hairdressers, maids and nursing aides comprise the majority of the remaining jobs held by women. Government statistics indicate that women come out on the short end financially in all job categories regardless of race or education level. Not surprisingly a negligible percentage of women have been able to enter traditionally better paying male-dominated work categories. African-American and Hispanic women are overwhelmingly represented in low paying service jobs. In all areas, including teaching, women of color earn less than their white counterparts.

For all women, the lack of adequate and competent daycare is a significant factor in their work life. Over 30 years ago, Senator Daniel Moynihan's attack on the Black family set the political stage for removing the male from the home and breaking up the extended family by forcing the removal of all men from households where women and children were receiving welfare.

Now the problem is far worse. Since the anti-family

welfare reform regulations were instituted five years ago women and children on welfare have become invisible. Schools see the effect: children who can't get to school because they lack transportation, adequate clothing, and supplies. Despite the hardships imposed on families, this Gingrich sponsored and Clinton-backed initiative is highly praised in bourgeois political circles and the press.

Another important issue today for women is the assault on affirmative action programs. This is significant to all women, but especially, women of color. Our "color-blind" society, has ruled, almost without exception, to uphold the "rights" of the white male. The first and most famous anti-affirmative action case of Alan Bakke in the 1970s set the precedent for employers and colleges to consciously eliminate applicants of color and women.

I think the fight for peace is another important women's issue. Women have been the traditional backbone of the US peace movement. Today this movement faces many challenges. Its relationship to the Black community has always been a weakness. As the Bush administration targets Somalia and other African countries, how to involve communities of color in the peace movement is key.

Children's education is a hot-button issue. In poll after poll it is the top concern of Americans. The school system is in a crisis that is particularly acute in urban and rural communities. Almost all major cities are in struggles to save their public school system. Schools are under unprecedented pressure to privatize. Proposals for vouchers and charter schools are rife. All of these options significantly undermine public education. Mothers along with labor unions have been the mainstays of the fight to defeat these corporate alternatives to public education. It is important to support the community and school associations and women's groups that have mobilized to insure smaller class size, safe educational environments, adequate books and technological equipment, and a quality comprehensive, desegregated education.

Having the means to economically sustain our families, live in a peaceful world and ensure our children's cultural and educational lives is crucial. Thus women's concerns while having a unique focus are broad and many-sided. Solving the problem of wage discrimination is key. Eliminating the sexist wage gap must be a major concern for us today. ■



CLUW at a march for women's rights last year in Washington, DC.

PWW/Pete St. Marie

The Radical Right and the Right to Choose

By Carolyn Trowbridge

The right of a woman to decide for herself about child-bearing is under accelerated attack by the Bush administration and the radical right. Choice, a basic human and civil right earned through years of struggle, is being repealed through executive order and by the anti-choice majorities now in existence in Congress and many state legislatures. In the past six years, Congress and the states have enacted 264 anti-choice laws. Many more are in the works.

Biology, the fact that only women become pregnant and bear children, has been used as a justification for the subordination of women's productive, educational, civic and social aspirations to men. This subordination has led to a distortion of the right to self-determination for half the human species and of society itself. A commitment by society to reproductive rights is a means of lessening that distortion.

True reproductive rights represent a whole spectrum of health, justice, and economic issues. These include access to quality and competent abortion services, the availability of safe and effective contraception, gender equity in the payment for contraceptives, and an end to sterilization abuse, access to quality healthcare and childcare, adequate housing, a livable wage, adequate maternity/paternity leave, the legally protected right to shorter working hours for parents without a loss of pay, and the right of a woman to freely express her sexual orientation.

Without the achievement of social, political, and economic security, equality for women will never be attained. Without the political and moral power that full participation in productive social life confers, subordination of women will continue. Full access to reproductive rights preserves the autonomy necessary for full participation in social productive life.

What is the "right to choose" and why is it under attack? It is the right of any woman, regardless of income, marital status, class, social or economic status, belief system, or sexual orientation, to choose when or if she will bear children. It codifies, in law, her right to access contraception and abortion as tools in managing

that choice. It assumes that women are moral, intelligent and fully human and are, therefore, free to exercise that choice. It is an expression of the ethical principle of autonomy, the right to make decisions about one's own life and body. Having control over one's own body and reproductive status means taking a step away from subordination.

The attacks against reproductive rights are broad and unrelenting, the charge being led by fundamentalist religion and the political right.

The goal is to dismantle the political, economic, and social gains that women have earned through decades of struggle.

Since 1973, the best known attacks have been leveled against *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court decision that freed a woman to decide whether to maintain a pregnancy or terminate it. Because poll after poll clearly indicates that a majority in the US support the right to choose, the right to life (or mandatory pregnancy) movement has, for the moment, given up on its demand for an outright ban on abortion. A single Supreme Court nomination of an anti-choice judge by George Bush can change this.

The right has developed other tactics. The most obvious one is terrorist attacks on abortion clinics and physicians. Others include legislative barriers such as parental consent, onerous waiting periods, partial birth abortion bans, and mandated inflammatory education for women seeking abortions that trivialize their intelligence.

Women, apparently, are also too dim to understand or use contraception appropriately. The religious flavor of recent adjustments in the Bush administration's budget that yields funds for "abstinence" education rather than for family planning, sex education, and contraception, highlights the control of the fundamentalist right over this administration. The declaration by Tommy Thompson, Secretary of Health and Human Services, that "unborn children (fetuses) have a right to federally financed health care" brings closer the reality of a declaration that a fetus is a human being and an end of the right to an abortion.

The "right to choose" not only protects the right of a woman to prevent or terminate a pregnancy, but also the right of a woman to become pregnant. The deformation of welfare rights, with child caps, work requirements for mothers, the absence of quality funded childcare, and the limitations of health care under Medicaid, is an attack on the right of poor, working women to bear children.

We cannot cede the battle for reproductive rights and women's equality to the radical right. We must join with other justice minded people in forming a mass, political movement. We will never go back. ■

Welfare REFORM As We Know it

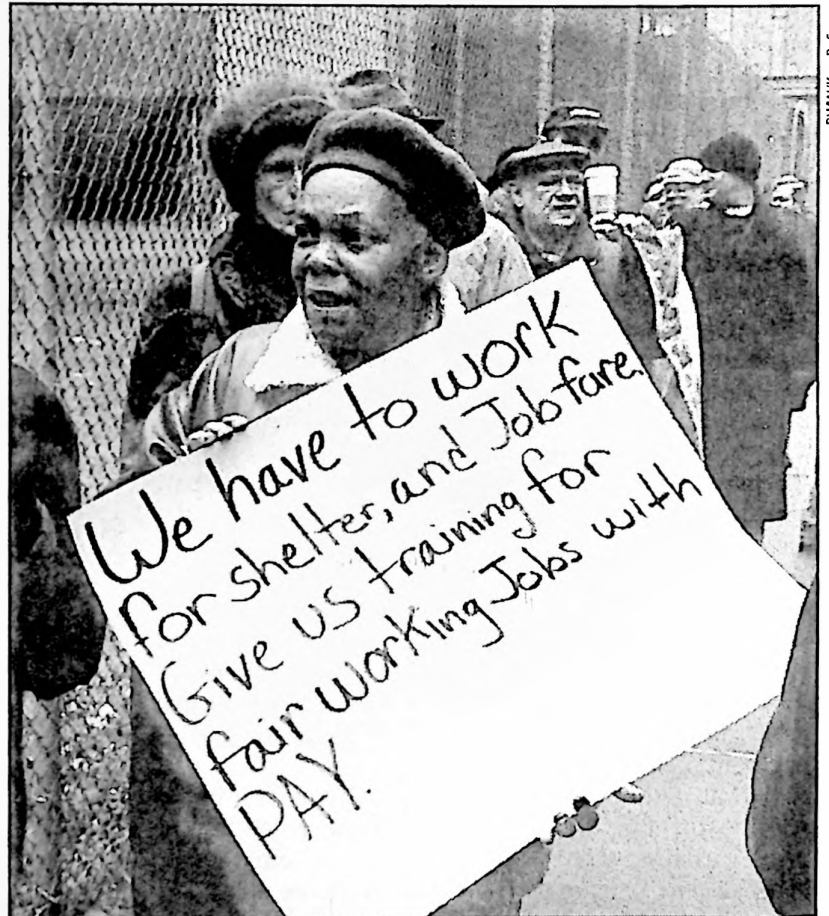
By Marie LaMae

"By what it says and what it fails to say, the dominant culture lies when it claims the poverty of the poor is not a result of the wealth of the wealthy, but rather the daughter of no one..."

Eduardo Galeano, Uruguayan poet

On March 25, 1911, 146 women died in the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire, while the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory owner raced to save his best material from the fire. Relegated to working in sweatshop conditions, the women died because the locked doors of the factory blocked their escape.

In the same time period, socialist women around the world began calling for an International Women's Day to be celebrated each year on March 8. They demanded economic and political rights for working women, including livable wages, an end to sweatshop working conditions, maternity benefits, and an end to child labor. Today 90 percent of sweatshop workers, both here in the US and internationally, are women.



Public housing residents picket in New York City, Jan. 2001 to protest a federal law forcing them to do unpaid labor in order to keep their apartments.

Marie LaMae is a contributor to PA.

The conditions that underlie the tragedy of the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire persist, and are exacerbated by the dismantling of welfare, the indentured servitude of recipients who must now enter workfare programs for little or no wages or benefits, and the expunging of tens of thousands of recipient families from welfare rolls as their five-year lifetime limits expire.

The Social Security Act of 1935 included Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) as well as unemployment insurance. While unemployment was originally intended as a social insurance, welfare was distinguished from social insurance and designed as a

on TANF nationwide. With massive layoffs continuing at a rapid pace the number of unemployed and those needing services from what is left of a shredded social safety net continues to swell.

In 1996, "welfare" went from being guaranteed to all those who qualified, with the federal government providing states what they needed to pay each recipient, to a benefit funded state by state in the form of a fixed block grant. When the block grant money runs out, states can choose to continue to fund on their own or not. States forced recipients to work for "Workfare" programs for little or no wages in order to receive benefits. The law

With massive layoffs continuing at a rapid pace the number of unemployed and those needing services from what is left of a shredded social safety net continues to swell.

way to prevent single motherhood by providing incentives for proper and stable families. In the beginning, those who most needed the benefits were denied access to them, namely the very poor, people of color and unmarried single mothers. Through a series of reforms from 1939 to the 1970s, these groups won inclusion and eligibility to receive benefits.

From the very beginning, aid to single mothers sought to prevent recipients from becoming "too comfortable" and benefit levels remained artificially low.

Before 1996, 14 million people were on AFDC. Of that 14 million, nine million were children and half of them were under the age of six. Between 1980 and 1996, as welfare budgets were cut and benefit levels dropped to a paltry 36 percent of the federal poverty level, poverty, hunger and homelessness grew among the nation's women and children. One in 10 children went hungry each night and one in five were growing up in poverty. Millions went without health care and as a result, once-eradicated childhood illnesses began to reappear.

At the first anniversary of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, the act that "ended welfare as we know it," more than 1.4 million had been dropped from the welfare rolls nationwide. AFDC was changed to Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF), with the emphasis on temporary. Last year only 5.4 million people remained

places a five-year lifetime limit on recipients who could never be eligible for benefits again, whether or not they were able to secure livable wages. Keep in mind that well over two-thirds of recipients are children, half of whom are under the age of six. For many that lifetime limit is drawing near.

The "reforms" of 1996 definitely increased poverty as we know it. New welfare programs denied education and training opportunities to recipients and ignored childcare and transportation needs. Under the new legis-



Protesting welfare reform in Pittsburgh, March 1999.

AP/Kelth Srakocic

Coupled with simultaneous attacks on women's right to choose, child caps came into vogue as yet another method by which the ultra-right attempted to control and regulate the reproductive rights of poor women.

lation, workfare participants were denied social security credit, Earned Income Tax Credit, unemployment insurance, worker's compensation and collective bargaining rights. State workfare requirements forced tens of thousands of recipients to work in unsafe, dangerous conditions for sub-minimum wages.

Welfare "reform" offered poor families little hope of finding full-time, permanent, family supporting jobs. At the first anniversary of "welfare reform," statistics from the General Accounting Office indicated that the majority of people dropped from the rolls did not find work. In 1998, 1.3 million people, mostly women and children, were forced off of the welfare rolls. During that time, only 704,100 jobs were created, representing only 54 percent of the jobs that were necessary to employ welfare recipients leaving the rolls, provided there were no other new entrants competing for the same jobs. Factor these workers into the equation and the ratio of job seekers to available jobs goes up to 3:1 nationally. To bring a family of three up to the federal poverty level, or about \$12,278 a year, the ratio of job seekers to available jobs that pay at least that amount rises to 22:1. To bring that family up to 150 percent of the federal poverty level, the ratio jumps to 64:1, and to provide that family with a living wage job would send the ratio to 97:1.

"Reform" increases racism and sexism

The so-called reforms of 1996 exacerbated racial and gender stereotyping of the worst kind. Right-wing reformers portrayed single mothers and their children, and in particular single mothers of color, as immoral, lazy and undeserving. Such representations were initiated under the economic reign of terror known as the Contract on America, under the rubric of which, the ultra-right attacked and rolled back the gains of working people, trade unions, the civil rights movement and the gains of the women's equality movement.

The welfare reform provisions of the Contract on America, authored by the Heritage Foundation's Robert Rector, gave birth to the Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Act of 1996. Rector built his career on the argument that poverty is not so bad after all, and that the underlying cause of poverty is the result of misguided government generosity. According to Rector:

Poverty is not bad for kids. Most of us had grandparents who were poor. The real problem is illegitimacy which has a decisive bad effect on kids ... For a child, 13 years on Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) is 13 years of child abuse.

Rector thinks the purpose of welfare reform is not only to redirect aid from the poor to the corporate elite but also to save the nation from sin – according to Rector, the sins of sloth, lust, and the resulting epidemic of "illegitimacy." Rector and Newt Gingrich along with other right-wing supporters of welfare reform weren't too concerned about the sin of corporate greed, in fact they encouraged it.

Wrapped in the rhetoric of personal responsibility and family values, these provisions declared war on the poor while abandoning the war on poverty.

In 1996, it became a crime against capitalism to be a poor single mother. It also became a crime to be born poor. Through the thin veil of welfare reform, many states enacted caps that made children born to mothers receiving welfare benefits at the time of the child's birth ineligible for benefits. Coupled with simultaneous attacks on women's right to choose, child caps came into vogue as yet another method by which the ultra-right attempted to control and regulate the reproductive rights of poor women. The Arizona State legislature went so far as to introduce legislation that would have required welfare recipients to attend attitude adjustment classes to assist them in acquiring the attitudes and skills they would need to find a husband.

These draconian welfare measures, whose purpose is to regulate and limit women's reproductive choices, including the choice to bear children, must be taken up by the women's equality movement with the same passion and dedication as the issue of the right to choose an abortion. The issues are two sides of the same coin. To do anything less will foster longstanding divisions within the movement along class and racial lines.

Welfare "reforms" have also had a dramatic effect on the fight against domestic violence. As meager as welfare benefits were before 1996, they still afforded an open door through which women trapped in abusive relationships and marriages could escape. Before 1996, over 60 percent of welfare recipients suffered from some form of domestic violence. Prior to 1996 welfare afforded the victims/survivors of domestic violence a modicum of

independence, a lifeline that saved many. Time limits on benefits, residency requirements that penalize victims of domestic violence who flee to another state to ensure their safety, and rules that require welfare recipients to identify their children's father – all put women who are survivors of domestic violence in great danger.

Domestic violence has a clear negative impact on employability and outcomes in the workplace. 74 percent of employed battered women were harassed at work. Domestic violence caused 56 percent of these women to be late for work at least five times a month and 54 percent missed at least three full days of work a month.

Under the new regulations, many women have been forced to drop out of school in order to fulfill work requirements and retain benefits. The federal government now only allows 20 percent of a state's welfare caseload to be attending school or vocational training. Juggling childcare and work requirements while the mom is attending school has become nearly impossible. And childcare may no longer be subsidized. Eliminating educational opportunities ensures that welfare recipients, most of them women, will be placed in low-skill, low-wage, traditionally female-held, dead-end jobs. The future of young women without a college degree is bleak and getting worse. Meanwhile, the economic future of young women with college degrees is not all that promising. Women under the age of 25 face an overall underemployment rate of 19.8 percent.

The chances for finding employment for the population targeted by welfare reform drops precipitously when looking at educational levels. Nearly half have less than a high school education. Women in this position face an unemployment rate of 24.3 percent. This situation is much worse for women of color without high school diplomas. African-American women without high school diplomas face an unemployment rate of 20.9 percent and an underemployment rate of 35 percent. Latinas without high school diplomas face an unemployment rate of 15.9 percent and an underemployment rate of 28.8 percent.

The fight to restore welfare as an entitlement and to increase benefit levels must also be coupled with the fight to save public education. The impact of the attacks on public education coupled with drastic cuts

in funding both on a state and federal level, have had a disastrous impact on low-income communities of color.

For example, in Arizona, one of the first states to enact welfare reform measures, high school dropout rates in low-income communities have risen to crisis levels. One in four students will drop out of school before receiving a diploma.

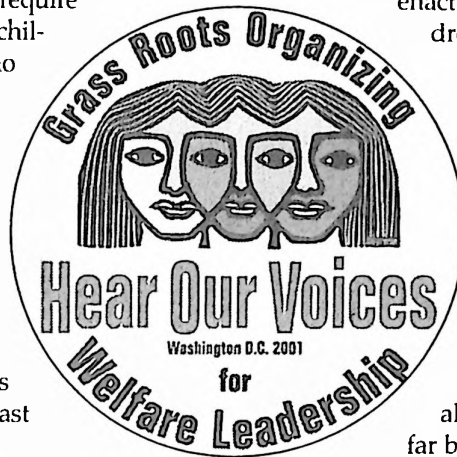
Perhaps the most devastating impact of welfare reform has been the impact it has had on the economic and workplace rights of women. Wages for single mothers have declined, including a 25 percent drop in wages for women between the ages of 25 and 34. This has already pushed many working mothers far below the poverty line among both welfare recipients and the working poor. A single

mother with two kids working a 25-hour per week job at \$6 per hour will earn too much to remain eligible for welfare, yet this annual income of \$7,800 is far below the poverty level. As a result, women who leave welfare for work can be expected to earn wages far below the federal poverty level and continue to do so even after five years of employment.

Saturating the job market with former welfare recipients depresses wages in the low-wage sector, 58.2 percent of which is composed of women.

Under federal and state welfare laws, workfare workers rights on the job are not protected. They are not guaranteed the right to organize unions, the right to a livable wage or the right to a workplace free of discrimination. Workfare workers are not even paid in wages but in benefits.

Workfare also deals a serious blow to the fight against sexual harassment as women, forced to choose between keeping their job assignment or losing their benefits, become easy, silent targets, enduring the bosses' abuses rather than risking the loss of benefits for themselves and their children.



Under a privatized welfare system, there can be little accountability. The system is fragmented, contracted and sub-contracted.

Welfare reform and privatization

While the rhetoric of welfare reform may have been cloaked in so-called family values and personal responsibility, a much more sinister motivation underlies the shredding of the social safety net: corporate profit and privatization. Multinational corporations such as Lockheed Martin lobbied hard in the summer of 1996 to ensure a five-year lifetime limit on benefits and to allocate more money for information technologies, a spe-

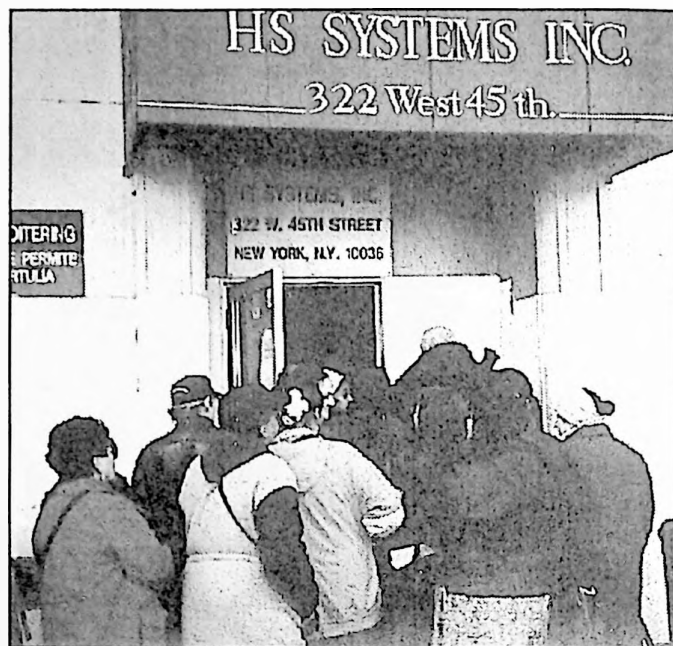
Privatization has opened the door to discrimination in the allocation of services and to the practice of "application dissuasion" – make the process so difficult, people won't want to apply for the benefits.

cialty of high-tech defense contractors like Lockheed. This opens the door to privatization as states move to enforce the five-year time limits. This will require an enormous investment in technology to track individuals through name changes and geographical moves for decades on end, creating a vast system of surveillance and a growth industry for fingerprinting and information technologies. With contracts in several states, Lockheed is already in the business of fingerprinting recipients and collecting child support.

Corporations involved in welfare privatization take profits out of the services and allotments intended for the poor, especially if the corporations are paid only for case-load reduction. Another profit maximizer utilized in privatization of welfare is the elimination of wages and benefits paid to tens of thousands of mainly unionized public sector employees many of whom are women and/or people of color. Public workers are laid off and replaced by workfare employees who are sub-contracted out by private firms.

Public employees represent the largest number of unionized employees in the labor movement today. AFSCME, the public employees union, is 1.8 million members strong, making it the largest union in the AFL-CIO. The rightwing has recognized this for quite some time and have used attacks on welfare as a vehicle to push their anti-union agenda. Newt Gingrich, once said in reference to welfare reform and privatization that fewer public employees equals fewer union members.

Privatization also spells disaster for recipients. Under a privatized welfare system, there can be little accountability. The system is fragmented, contracted and sub-contracted. Private corporations are not subject to the same rules of disclosure or procedures for grievance. Secret deals and diffused responsibility have a devastating impact. Privatization has opened the door to discrimination in the allocation of services and to the practice of "application dissuasion" – make the process so difficult, people won't want to apply for the benefits.



New York City welfare participants wait for review by a medical service contractor.

Ultimately, the administration of welfare must remain accountable. In order to do that, it must remain public.

An AFL-CIO survey of 50,000 working women in 1997 found that their top concerns included pay equity, child care, paid sick leave, health care coverage and a safe and healthy workplace. The gender pay gap is still 26 cents an hour, down from 31 cents an hour. This is not due to the rise of women's wages but rather a result of falling wages for men. Even still, this gap costs the nation's working families an average of \$200 billion a year.

The dismantling of welfare as an entitlement and the criminalization of welfare recipients is a women's issue. It rolls back many of the gains of the women's liberation movement and creates a sub-class of workers, most of whom are women, who are denied the most basic of workplace rights.

The dismantling of welfare is also a labor issue. The destruction of the social safety net, including the dismantling of welfare, undermines the collective bargaining rights and power of unions.

Welfare could and should be considered similar to all other services provided by the government to improve the standard and quality of life of working people, including streets and sidewalks, garbage collection, public transportation, public schools, public parks, firefighting, pollution regulation, etc. The fight to restore welfare as an entitlement and to raise benefit levels must be elevated within the women's equality movement and across a range of other movements. ■

Challenging Sexism in the Workplace



Sarita Gupta, Executive Director of Chicago Jobs With Justice, was interviewed for *PA* by contributing editor Dee Myles.

Myles: What do you think are the main challenges facing women today?

Gupta: That is a huge question! I think there are a number of major challenges facing women today – the first being the social roles that are still forced upon them. We live in an economy where women have to work. But we also live in a society where women are expected to work a second shift when they go home, which includes feeding the family, raising the kids, cleaning the house, etc. There is a lack of recognition that work within a household is a job in itself. As a result, many women workers struggle with finding the balance between being a worker, being politically involved in work and then going home to play the role of mother, wife or partner responsible for the household. These social roles create a whole new set of problems in terms of the roles women can play in the workplace, the leadership roles they can play in their lives, the ability to have access to an education and the types of jobs available to them.

Commentator George F. Will argues that because women are employed, the home has fallen apart, children are not being taken care of and therefore social illnesses and problems are increasing. What do you think of this?

It is really repugnant to blame woman for the social ills that exist today. The structure of women being at home and raising families has changed over the years;



PWW/John Bachtel

Carousel Linen workers, mostly Mexican immigrants and young women, have endured four months on strike against Carousel for the right to join a union, livable wages, safe working conditions and health benefits.

that is certainly true. Various forces have moved women outside of the home and into the workplace: access to education, the women's movement opening doors to employment that were once closed, and sheer economic necessity. The economy does not provide jobs that allow individuals, women or men, to support their families. And this is not something that can be blamed on women. Women clearly do not run the economy!

There is a lack of services that support working women. But who in the first place claimed that women have to be the ones working in the home instead of men? Having children and supporting a family is a shared responsibility between partners.

There is no discussion of the lack of daycare. In Chicago alone, we are watching budget cuts in the Park District, where women depend on daycare. Do we blame women for not being able to afford childcare? Or, do we blame the city for not prioritizing services that really benefit its communities?

As a Jobs with Justice organizer, what would you say is the biggest issue facing women workers?

Low wages. There is a real discrepancy between wages of men and women, but in particular we see most low-wage jobs going to women. Gender discrimination is taking place. I especially see it in the work I do with our day-labor organizing project [with]temporary or part-time workers. Signs are literally outside of day labor agencies saying, "only women apply." It is no surprise then to hear that women are paid significantly lower wages than their male counterparts at other agencies. In addition, more "fees" are taken out of their checks than men's. If a woman needs to use the rest room, they will actually take \$3 out of her paycheck!

Gender discrimination occurs, as does discrimination because of language, race and ethnicity. It is often done on the assumption that women will not speak up. We have seen instances where more Latinas were being sent out on jobs than African American women, and this has everything to do with companies specifically requesting non-English speaking workers. [This is] because they assume these workers don't know the law.

What are unions doing to confront these practices?

The reality is women work at unorganized sites. Overtime is often forced, and women are being cheated out of pay by being told that they will be fired if they don't stay. Yet they have kids, families and other obligations.

Unions recognize that there are more women in today's workforce than in the past. However, I feel there is still a lack of strategy as to how they can be more accessible to women members, not only at work sites as stewards and leaders, but also making sure that issues impacting women workers are addressed in contracts. In addition, there are not enough women in leadership.

What would your strategy be?

Sometimes it's as simple as having a woman organizer approach women workers on a work site.

The demographics of a work site need to be taken into consideration when developing an organizing strategy – with respect to both gender and race. Union staff need to know the limitations and obstacles that exist for particular groups of workers, such as immigrant women

"Unions recognize that there are more women in today's workforce than in the past. However, I feel there is still a lack of strategy as to how they can be more accessible to women."

and women of color. For example, it could be as simple as figuring out when meetings are held. Or asking, does an organizing committee provide childcare?

We also see women dealing with issues beyond childcare, like healthcare and other benefits.

Do the day laborers you spoke about earlier have benefits?

No healthcare, no anything. One of the things our project has done is to make sure they know their kids can access healthcare through state programs. It's a horrible situation. Sometimes the day laborer is the sole provider. Beyond that, if they do have healthcare it is so limited. For example, reproductive healthcare does not necessarily fall under healthcare plans. That is a huge problem for a lot of women.

If women want to access birth control, often it's not covered. For example, my insurance plan does not cover birth control.

Often a woman is required to visit an Ob/Gyn, in order to get birth control of any sort. Therefore, if your health care plan does not cover Ob/Gyn, you do not get birth control. Even if your plan does cover this type of specialist, who's to say your drug plan will cover it.

You work with women of different nationalities. How does discrimination impact on organizing?

Employers and most union-busting law firms today really play up the racial discrimination in the workplace. If there is an organizing effort, or even if there is not, they play upon discrimination to cause disunity.

A perfect example was when a few years ago we were organizing workers at Art Institute of Chicago. The women were telling us that in the kitchen there were a group of Asian workers, specifically Chinese, along with African-American women, and Latinas. The Latinas were told they were not allowed to speak. Yet the Asian women were allowed to speak in their language. So the boss played this game of creating obvious friction between Latinas and Asian women.

What's the basis of this friction?

There is a real lack of communication among workers themselves. There is a lack of space where workers are getting to know each other on a personal as well as on a work level. They may work side by side, but it does not mean they necessarily have a relationship. This is where unions become important, because they create the space for people to work together and think through how to improve a work site. But even in union settings, there needs to be more discussion of how we overcome cultural, racial, and linguistic differences.

Could you give us a feel for the conditions sweatshop workers face?

Sweatshop workers work in conditions that are really unsafe and deny basic rights, like the right to use the restroom. In one of the laundries organized by UNITE, they actually saw workers with heavy electrical machinery stepping in a foot of water. In other places, you see blocked fire exits. Sweatshop workers are denied vacation time, sick days and any meaningful benefits. Some may get basic healthcare coverage if they are lucky. Often pregnant women face a tremendous amount of abuse. They will be denied the use of the restroom because they are only allowed a limited number of breaks per shift.

“There is a real lack of communication among workers themselves ... a lack of space where workers are getting to know each other. Unions ... create the space for people to work together and think through how to improve a work site.”

What categories of work are we talking about? You mentioned laundry. What others?

Laundry is a huge sweatshop industry. In California as well as nationally, the garment industry is another. Here in Chicago, bottling companies and tortilla factories are places where we have seen real sweatshop conditions.

Another thing I would add is the issue of sexual harassment. Women have said they have been sexually harassed by their boss or, if not by the owner, by the supervisor or assistant supervisor. We have seen horrific cases, like at the bottling company I mentioned, where women were actually forced to sleep with the boss in order to get their paychecks.

Is the feminization of poverty a real phenomenon and, if so, why has it developed?

It has developed as a result of a number of things, all of which we have talked about: lack of education, [lack of] daycare unsafe working conditions, etc. All have had a significant and disproportionate impact on women. That is the reality of what we see in terms of poverty today. It is not just women, but also children. I do a lot of work for the Coalition for the Homeless here, and

"...unions will support TANF re-authorization, and ... the analysis and recommendations of welfare rights organizations. But the trade union movement needs to go beyond that ... to take the lead on issues like welfare."

they say the largest population of homeless people in the United States is children under the age of 10. This says a lot about our society and its priorities.

What are the steps necessary to resolve these problems?

For me it is always about organizing. We get out there and we talk to people. It is about educating folks. It is about making the links between various issues. We can no longer look at these types of things from a single-issue perspective. We have to be looking at multiple levels. When I was younger I was very involved with the student and women's movements. What I witnessed was that a significant component – the class dynamic – was kept out of both movements. If you don't address class within the context of race, and if you don't address class within the context of gender discrimination, then we never get at the heart of the problem in terms of really addressing poverty.

How will organizing women workers address the issue of poverty?

It will help by organizing women workers and having them take the lead on issues. I think that we can no longer afford to have people who aren't directly impacted speaking out on these issues. It is just not effective in the same way as when women who have personal experiences with these things are the ones leading the way, developing strategy and building allies.

What is the status of women in the trade union movement? Is their room for improvement?

I think that it can and should be improved. I think there is a lot more to be done to ensure that the trade union movement is really addressing issues impacting women today. Issues that impact women specifically are still not at the forefront. We can talk about ergonomics, and all of these various issues, and never get deep enough to really talk about how women are being impacted. For example, unions will come out and support TANF [Temporary Assistance for Needy Families] re-authorization, and most likely will support the analysis and recommendations of welfare rights organizations. But the trade union movement needs to go beyond that. Unions need to take the lead on issues like welfare, but unfortunately, I don't think that women are involved enough in the decision-making process to make that happen.

What special problems are faced by young working-class women?

The lack of reproductive healthcare is a huge issue for young women, especially among working-class women. When I was growing up, there was this understanding among young women that they could access reproductive health care at community clinics, which are in extinction today. It always leaves me wondering where women are going. In the city of Chicago, most community clinics have shut down in working-class neighborhoods. They are building new clinics in gentrified neighborhoods, but they are totally privatized and inaccessible. So what happens?

Welfare (TANF) is up for reauthorization in Congress this year. What is the status of the legislative battle over this law?

Within the legislative process itself, it is in subcommittee where it is being analyzed. We have to reexamine the whole issue of time limits – of how long people can be on welfare. It's a very arbitrary number. Work requirements are another issue. As I said, we need to make sure that education counts as a work-related activity. Child-care is another one. How do we ensure that there are affordable support services like childcare made available to women on welfare?

What about the amount of money that is allocated for the program?

In light of the recession, we need to fight to make sure adequate funding levels are recommended within the act. We already know there are plans to increase the military budget, which results in cuts to social programs like welfare. If the levels are cut in the reauthorization process (which stipulates the highest possible level of funding for TANF), it will be that much harder to prevent further cuts in the actual budget process itself.

Let's take a broader view for a moment. What impact has globalization had on women?

Globalization has been impacting women in different ways depending on if a woman is from a country that is in severe debt to the IMF or World Bank or if she is from a wealthier country. Women in the US have experienced job losses due to plant closings as industries have moved abroad. They have also been witnessing trade policies that are used by employers to undermine, weaken or fight unions in the workplace. Both job losses and a lack of unions protecting workers' rights has had a devastating impact on working-class communities in the US. Without jobs that provide a living wage and benefits, more workers today are threatened with living in poverty.

In developing countries, women are often working for the very companies that have left the US in search of cheaper labor. They are paid significantly lower wages with no benefits, in comparison to women in the US and in comparison to their male counterparts. There are some great documentaries that have been done on women working in sweatshop conditions in developing countries that expose some of the many abuses that women are experiencing, from sexual harassment to forced contraception, to being fired for being pregnant, etc. In addition, women in developing countries are also often fighting for access to water, housing, food, medicines and some other basic necessities that I think we take for granted. For example, women in Bolivia [are] fighting the privatization of water. Or women in India [are] fighting the construction of dams that will displace their homes and their communities. They are fighting (largely US) corporate greed on a different level than we have yet experienced here.

How do the policies of IMF and the World Bank affect women?

Essentially when countries are in need of money, they will take a loan from the World Bank and remain in debt until the loan is paid off. In order to actually get the money, financial institutions like the IMF and WB set up requirements. These requirements are referred to as structural adjustment programs. These programs will for example – and this is definitely a grossly simplified version – encourage the privatization of public services, or demand that the country put resources in infrastructure building rather than its education system, etc. Why? Because this makes it easier for corporations to come in. So these institutions really represent the interests of corporations more than they do of the people. An example of how these programs impact women is seen in countries where they are not putting resources into building sustainable agricultural communities. Thus, they do not have enough food for their population. So, the solution is to sterilize the women in order to control the population versus develop sustainable agricultural systems. I think the other point to be made is that there is a lack of women in decision-making positions within these institutions.

As we celebrate International Women's Day this year, what should be emphasized?

There is a lot of opportunity to educate, challenge and build solidarity on a much deeper level among women in different countries, because of the nature of the political climate that we are in right now. It has been really positive to see how much people want to understand the conflict in the Middle East and South Asia, and develop conclusions on their own. And as people become more aware of the impact of the global economy, there is more opportunity to build solidarity between different struggles and different cultures. I think we need to further deepen people's understanding of how inter-linked women's issues are around the globe, and how in particular working-class women's experiences are very similar from country to country. I am really hopeful that despite the conflicts and the hard times that we are facing, we will actively learn how to build deeper and broader relationships that will allow us to win. ■

schedules. 45 percent have no vacation time. And more than 50 percent cannot take time off to care for sick children. This is particularly the case for part-time women workers. Part-time workers are not covered by the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which, in any case only requires employers to provide unpaid time off to tend to a family sickness. Furthermore, according to the Institute for Women's Policy Research, "FMLA does not cover the common illnesses of young children that cause most parents and guardians to miss work." Considering that two out of three mothers have some kind of paid job outside the home (and that many are single-mothers) the limitations of the FMLA are a legislative crime.

Part-time workers are generally not eligible for unemployment insur-



ance (UI). In fact only 23 percent of unemployed women receive UI because of income thresholds. In addition, taking time off to care for seriously ill children, spouses and parents isn't considered a sufficient reason to qualify for unemployment. When the lack of affordable child care, inadequate education (especially for low-income children), the cost of health care and housing are thrown into the mix it is easy to understand the real forces behind the "Broken Hearth."

The lifetime effects of low pay and part-time work for women extend into retirement. According to the Social Security Administration only 27 percent of women have a private or public pension. With a work history of low-paying jobs a disproportionate number of women are relegated to a retirement of poverty. According to the IWPR the median

income of single women 65 or older was \$11,382 in 1998, and lower social security benefits for women significantly reduce the joint income of retired couples. While social security income for women is currently inadequate, consider the impact on women's retirement income if those who want to privatize social security get their way.

Market mechanisms can't be relied on to secure a decent living for working women and their families. The government must chart a new course. What needs to be done is obvious: equal pay for women; paid family leave; a minimum wage that is a living wage; universal health-care; affordable day care for children; and a social security income that provides for a dignified retirement. If talk about family values is to be more than a diversion, then the necessary resources should be mobilized to provide for the real needs of working families, not squandered on more tax cuts that only benefit the families of millionaires. ■

Letters ♦ (continued from page 4)

Fundamentalism



Buffalo, NY

The November 2001 article "Sources Of Terror" was thought provoking indeed. I suggest, however, that the term "fundamentalism" has not been clearly defined.

It is important that we make the distinction between a fundamentalist and an extremist. That which is fundamental forms the foundation or the base – the essentials. In this sense a fundamentalist is an adherent to the basic principles of one's faith, doctrine or ideology. One may be a fundamentalist when it comes to the scientific method, Einstein's Theory of Relativity, the *Koran* or even Marxism.

The term "fundamentalist" is often misused, its meaning misrepresented. Perhaps our analysis of the sources of terror should assess the role of extremism – domestic as well as foreign. An extremist is one who co-

opts, or distorts, what is fundamental in order to advance an agenda that constitutes a clear threat to the lives of working people.

If Osama bin Laden is responsible for the attacks on the World Trade Center, his actions constitute extremism rather than fundamentalism. To use the label "fundamentalist" in this situation would lead one to the ludicrous assumption that the fundamentals of Islam were somehow bent on the destruction of human lives. Properly using the term "extremist" better allows us to engage in an analysis of the agenda that led to the actions that occurred on Sept. 11. This analysis should not be limited to foreign extremists. Neither should it ignore a class analysis of extremism.

– Gabriel Smith

Imperialism Fundamentalism Terrorism

Will the Real Enemy Please Stand Up?

What allows the ultra-right to distort the true essence of the demand for justice is the confusion that prevails in the minds of a great many people about who the enemy is.



By Bahman Azad

The criminal attacks of September 11, 2001, which took the lives of thousands of people, provided right-wing war hawks in the Bush Administration and the headquarters of transnational corporations with a long-awaited excuse for dragging the nation into yet another destructive war. This war, according to its planners, may not end for many years to come.

The Bush administration claims to have the approval of the majority of Americans for their military assault on Afghanistan. But this is a gross oversimplification of facts.

It is true that the American people are deeply saddened and angered. It is also true that they expect, and even demand, that the leadership of the country do its utmost to bring those responsible for these acts to justice and to guarantee that no such acts be repeated in the future. However, a vast ocean divides the demands of our people and the administration's declaration

of an all-out war against a small, defenseless nation. People's call for justice should not be construed as a call for declaration of war against victims of injustice.

What allows the ultra-right to distort the demand for justice is the confusion that prevails about who and what the enemy is. This confusion is intentionally perpetuated in an attempt to use the American people's anger to advance narrow, profit-driven, economic and geopolitical objectives.

At the core of this strategy of distortion and confusion lies the conceptual identification of Islam with fundamentalism and fundamentalism with terrorism. Thus, every Muslim is assumed to be a fundamentalist and, hence, a terrorist, unless proven otherwise. This convoluted formula not only allows the ultra-right to substitute the "threat of Muslim fundamentalism" and "terrorism" for the defunct Cold War concept of "the threat of Com-

munism," but also allows attaching the label of terrorism to any individual, group, organization, state and even nation that opposes US foreign policy. Such arbitrariness allows people like bin Laden to be considered freedom fighters and heroes when they burn down girls' schools and assassinate teachers as a part of Cold War efforts against Afghanistan and the Soviet Union, but to become fundamentalists and terrorists so as soon as they use the same skills learned from the CIA against their masters.

Vagueness has always opened the doors for double standards and deception, especially at the hands of the ruling classes. Thus, the first order of business for clarifying existing confusion is to present concepts that correspond to objective reality. The concept of "fundamentalism" must be analyzed along with its relationship not only to religious extremism and terrorism, but also to globalization, neo-colonialism and

Bahman Azad is a contributor to PA.

Religion, fundamentalism and terrorism may appear together ... and combine with each other ... But this does not mean that they are one and the same thing, or ... related to one another.

imperialism. Only in this way can the task of identifying the real enemies of the people be achieved.

Islam, Fundamentalism and Terrorism

In the most general sense, accepted definitions of fundamentalism describe it as a belief in a "selective revival of the past," an effort to "return to roots," or "finding inspiration in a Golden Age" of past traditions and principles. Considered as such, therefore, fundamentalism has never been limited to Islam alone. Historically there are various strands of Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, and other forms of religious fundamentalism. In the US the Moral Majority and the Christian Coalition, the Mormons and some sections of Judaism; in Israel, certain interpretations of Zionism including that of the present government; in Afghanistan both the *Taliban* and the Mujahedin; in Saudi Arabia the Wahabis and the Saudi royal family; in Egypt the Muslim Brotherhood, etc., are all examples of religious fundamentalism.

Nor has fundamentalism been limited to the realm of religion. The most striking example of secular fundamentalism in recent years has been what might be called *capitalist* fundamentalism, embodied in Reaganism and Thatcherism, which advocates a return to the "Golden Age" of free enterprise, in Adam Smith's "invisible hand" version of early capitalism, and in a trickle-down economy.

This capitalist form of fundamentalism also advocated the destruction of the Soviet Union as an

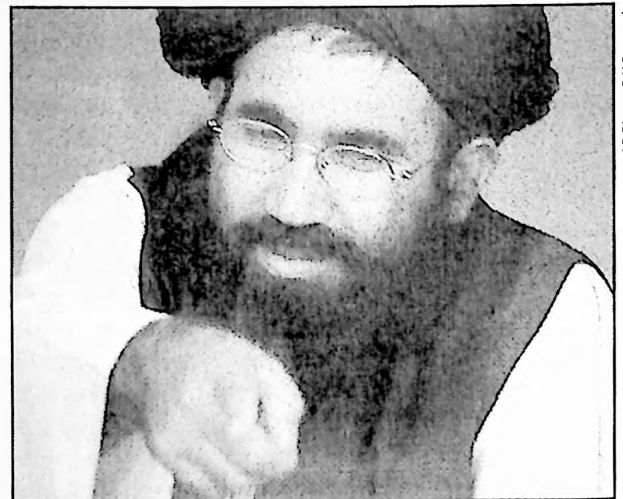
"evil empire" that stood in opposition to their beliefs. Today, the Bush Administration and its ultra-right supporters (not to mention the IMF) are the main embodiment of this kind of secular capitalist fundamentalism. Like bin Laden and many other fundamentalists, capitalist fundamentalists, too, have been trying hard to roll back the wheels of history – as they did in the case of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

However, given the variety of forms of religious and secular fundamentalism, it is quite clear that one cannot establish a direct, one-to-one relationship between fundamentalism in general or religious fundamentalism in particular, on the one hand, and terrorism and violence, on the other. The great majority of religious people, Muslims in particular, are against terrorism and violence. Of all Muslim nations of the world, only Pakistan – the Bush administration's main ally in its "war against terrorism" – and Saudi Arabia formally recognized the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan.

Nor are all fundamentalists extremists or advocates of violence and terrorism – in fact many of them are pacifist spiritual utopians. On the other hand, not all extremists and terrorists are fundamentalists, either secular or religious. We have seen many terrorist organi-

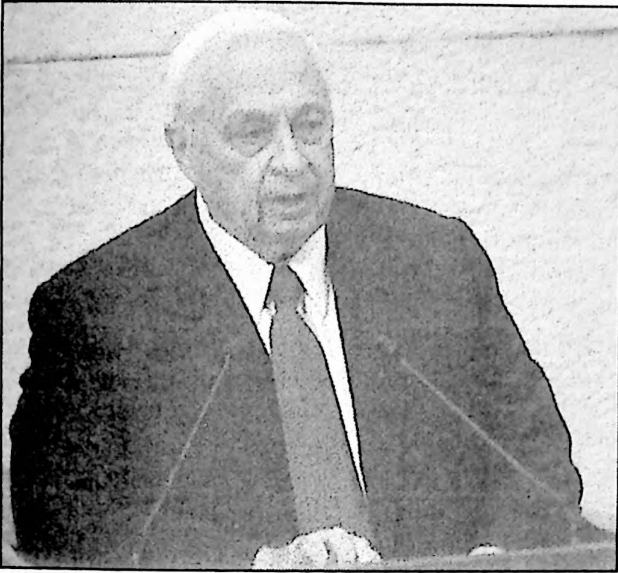
zations holding political positions of the right and left. The fact that some people are prepared to die, or cause others to die, for their beliefs and causes does not necessarily make them religious, or fundamentalist for that matter.

Religion, fundamentalism and terrorism may appear together in certain historical contexts, and combine with each other to form a very potent and explosive mixture. But this does not mean that they are one and the same thing, or that they are necessarily related to one another. Nor does it mean that one is the cause of the other. Religious fundamentalism and terrorism are essentially different phenomena with different root causes. In order to understand and deal with their explosive mixture, however, one must first distinguish and understand the essence and root causes of each of these elements.



Taliban ambassador to Pakistan Abdul Salam Zaef, Oct. 2001. Of all Muslim nations of the world, only Pakistan and Saudi Arabia formally recognized the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan.

AP Photo/B.K. Bangash



There are various strands of fundamentalism in many religions: for example, certain interpretations of Zionism, including that of the present government in Israel, and in the US, the Moral Majority and the Christian Coalition.

Fundamentalism and the Crisis of Capitalism

Most analysts agree that we have been witnessing a sharp growth in religious fundamentalism during the past few decades or so. We have witnessed the ascendance of religious forces to state power in Iran, Afghanistan, Israel and Sudan to name a few; a tense struggle between secular-nationalist and religious forces in such countries as Turkey, Pakistan, Indonesia, Algeria and the Philippines; and a mushrooming of religious organizations – in the form of political parties, mass organizations or terrorist groups – throughout the underdeveloped world. As a result, many are convinced that on a world scale we are dealing with a totally new phenomenon. Others have even gone as far as arguing that the “old theories” of class struggle no longer apply to the present world situation and that a new conceptual apparatus and methodology for dealing with these new phenomena should be developed.

While agreeing with the general argument about the rapid growth of religious and other forms of funda-

mentalism in the world today, this writer does not believe that it is a new *phenomenon* as such. Rather, we are dealing with new *objective conditions* in the world today that make the old phenomena behave somewhat differently. This becomes especially clear if the analytically important distinction is made between the rise of fundamentalism, on the one hand, and the increasing role of religion as the banner and ideology of national liberation and anti-imperialist struggles throughout the underdeveloped world, on the other.

The main reason for the rapid growth of both religious and secular fundamentalism throughout the world, (including in the advanced capitalist countries), has been the deepening crisis of the capitalist system and the human suffering that globalization and neo-liberal economic policies (WTO, NAFTA, IMF privatization decrees, etc.) have caused.

For the first time in the history of modern capitalism, the upcoming generation cannot even hope for a life equal to preceding generations, let alone living better than their par-

Religious fundamentalism and terrorism are essentially different phenomena with different root causes.

ents. Poverty, hunger, malnutrition, homelessness, and disease, including the ravages of AIDS and the reappearance of previously eradicated diseases, are wreaking havoc worldwide, pushing an increasing number of people to desperation with each passing day. It is only natural that, under such conditions, people lose hope in the present and the future of capitalism, and look backward to the “Golden Age” of some pre-capitalist era for material and spiritual solutions to their ever-deepening problems.

Today, even the right-wing of the capitalist ruling class has lost hope in finding new solutions and is frantically digging out old solutions from the “Golden Age” of the *laissez faire*, free-market economy of the 19th Century to solve the deepening crises of the 21st-Century capitalism.

The rapid growth of fundamentalism in the world is just another affirmation of the Communist contention that capitalism is incapable of solving the problems that it has caused for humanity and must therefore be replaced by socialism.



Fundamentalism is not limited to religion. Reaganism and Thatcherism advocated a return to a Golden Age of free enterprise.

Fundamentalism and the Cold War

This leads to the second contributing factor in the rise of religious fundamentalism, namely, the forced dismantling of socialism in the USSR and Eastern Europe. In spite of obvious and in many cases unavoidable shortcomings, these countries were a beacon of hope not only for those that lived under socialism, but also for working people throughout the world. Despite varying opinions, working people looked up to, and continue to look up to, socialist countries as alternatives to the bru-

tality of the capitalist system; alternatives that eliminated poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and homelessness, and provided free healthcare and education for all.

Socialism was seen as taking the side of the working people, the poor and the powerless, and supporting national liberation and anti-imperialist struggles from Palestine to Vietnam, in Afghanistan, Ireland, South Africa, Nicaragua and Cuba.

Therefore the destruction of socialism in Europe has meant the destruction of hope for many millions of the world's people. Never having enjoyed, in a meaningful sense, possession of the present, and having lost the hope for a socialist future, a great many people, especially in underdeveloped countries, have been driven to desperation, which has further facilitated the embracing of religious concepts that negate the value of material life, and fundamentalist ideas that revere and glorify the past. In this sense, capitalism has indeed turned religion into the opiate of the masses, and continues to do so with its ongoing effort to dismantle the remaining socialist systems in the world.

In fact, ever since the victory of the October Revolution, the West constantly tried to encircle the Soviet Union with a belt of pro-Western regimes that would hinder the spread of Communism. This was achieved through a two-pronged

strategy: First, by means of installing puppet and predominately fundamentalist regimes in almost all countries in the Middle East. The task of these governments was to contain the spread of Communism and guarantee the flow of oil to the West. Secondly, the West actively promoted fundamentalist, anti-Communist thinking as a shield against both nationalist and Marxist ideas.

As a result of this strategy, throughout most of the 20th century, every secular, nationalist, democratic, progressive, and communist movement, organization and party that was considered to constitute the smallest threat to this Western-imposed order was brutally suppressed – the most well-known case being the CIA's overthrow of the democratic government of Mossadeg and the mass execution and imprisonment of Communists in Iran in 1953. For many decades, in most of these countries, only mosques and religious institutions were allowed to operate freely. But even here, the progressive, pro-independence and anti-imperialist religious elements suffered the same fate as secular democratic and progressive forces.

The net result of this Cold War policy over the years has been a consistent under-representation of non-religious, nationalist, left and democratic elements, and an over-representation of right-wing reli-

At the core of this strategy of distortion and confusion lies the conceptual identification of Islam with fundamentalism and fundamentalism with terrorism.



Iranian Prime Minister Mossadegh's office after the CIA-led coup, August 1953.

gious forces and institutions in the Middle East. This drastic imbalance in favor of right-wing Muslim fundamentalism has thus been an artificial condition largely created by the imperialist powers themselves, especially the United States.

Further exacerbating this imbalance during the past decade has been a drastic increase in the number and strength of Muslim fundamentalist groups as a direct result of increased funding and support by Western secret services like the CIA, and the Islamic fundamentalist governments of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan in the '80s and '90s. These Western-financed fundamentalist groups were to act as a counter-force to the radical, anti-imperialist Islam of the leadership of the Iranian revolution, and a counter-revolutionary force against the people's democratic government of Afghanistan – both of which were considered to be threats to the American-imposed regional status quo.

This new strand of Muslim fundamentalism, which is a direct offspring of the CIA, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Israel and other reactionary states, is in fact one of the few Muslim fundamentalist trends

that is actually based on the dangerous mixture of Muslim fundamentalism and terrorism.

In Afghanistan, this mixture became even more potent and dangerous after it succeeded – with the help of the CIA and the Pentagon – in driving the Soviet forces out of that country. The criminal attacks on the World Trade Center in 1993 and 2001 were but a logical extension of the false sense of omnipotence that the CIA had created for these criminal elements – if they could defeat one

superpower through terrorist acts, why not try it on the other?

Sam Webb, national chair of the Communist Party USA, was quite right when he recently stated that terrorism needs both an "ideological basis" and an "organizing element." It certainly seems that for the past few decades the deepening crisis of capitalism has been providing the "ideological basis," and the CIA the "organizing element" for the growing wave of world terrorism.

Fundamentalists and Terrorists on Both Sides?

The Bush Administration claims that this is a war against terrorism perpetrated by Muslim fundamentalists. But who are these Muslim fundamentalists? Are they not the same people who were trained and generously financed by the CIA and the Pakistani secret service (ISI) a decade ago to declare *jihad* (holy war) against the "blasphemous" democratic, progressive government of Afghanistan (a government that was carrying out, among other reforms, a massive literacy campaign aimed at that country's women)? In

We are dealing with new objective conditions in the world today that make the old phenomena behave somewhat differently.

this sense, aren't types like bin Laden much the same as the right-wing, pro-life terrorists who bomb abortion clinics and assassinate clinic doctors in this country? Weren't the Taliban themselves a creation of the CIA and the Pakistani government, both of whom now claim to be against Muslim fundamentalism?

The irony is that the ultra-right is fighting its "war against terrorism" with the help of the very same fundamentalist forces and states whose terror and repression is responsible for the present disaster. The Saudi royal family that has terrorized and repressed the Saudi people for several decades, the fanatical Pakistani generals who have seized power through successive military coups, the Sharon government that is gunning down unarmed Palestinian youth everyday, are no less fundamentalist than bin Laden and his cohorts.

With fundamentalists and terrorists fighting on both sides, it is quite apparent that this is not a war of "good against evil," but instead, as Ahmed Rashid has demonstrated so vividly in his book *Taliban*, a war for oil, pipelines, and global hegemony, carried out in the name of fighting fundamentalism and terrorism.

But as past experience has shown, in such wars it is always innocent people on both sides who

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end up paying the ultimate price with their lives. We should not forget the similar case of Iraq a decade ago when Saddam Hussein, an ally of the US ruling class in its war against the Iranian revolution during the 1980s, was suddenly turned, in a matter of few weeks, into America's public enemy number one! A war was declared on Iraq by George Bush, Sr., to save Kuwait, the Middle East, and the world from the Hussein menace. A decade later, what we have ended up with is Saddam Hussein still in power and more than 500,000 Iraqi children dead as a result of the ongoing war and the sanctions against Iraq.

Are we not once again being fooled into accepting a declaration of war against criminals, while actually fighting innocent people? How much longer are we going to allow the right wing to define for us who our friends and enemies are? And how much longer – in human, material and moral terms – are we willing to pay the heavy price for the transnational corporations' policies of globalization, world domination and exploitation?

Isn't it time to ask: will the real enemy of the American people, please stand up? ■

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THE MAJESTIC – A Must See!

Directed by Frank Darabont
Castle Rock Entertainment

Review by Jarvis Tyner

In these times of war hysteria and homeland defense one has to look hard to see signs of hope. The movie *The Majestic* is one such sign. A good piece of cinema for any time, today *The Majestic* packs a real political wallop. It is one of the best treatments of the menace of McCarthyism that has come out of Hollywood, perhaps ever.

The movie is set in the early '50s and stars actor Jim Carey, who plays an apolitical Hollywood screenwriter, Peter Appleton. The setting is real circa 1950's, complete with the cars, clothes, sayings and mannerisms straight out of the era. Appleton stands accused of being a member of the Communist Party because of attending a meeting of the Bread not Bombs Committee when in college. That act alone is enough for the House Un-American Activities Committee to brand him a Communist and threaten his entire career.

During this traumatic period, the screenwriter is involved in an auto accident, loses his memory and wanders into a small California town whose residents are still suffering from the loss of 62 of its sons in the Second World War. Appleton is a dead ringer for Luke, one of the town's lost sons and receives a hero's welcome. With the help of a loving girlfriend and a great desire to be a father, Luke helps to revive the spirit of the town, in part by reopening its only movie house, "The Majestic."

Enter the FBI, which is portrayed as frighteningly repressive. Agents take pictures and spy on everyone; the entire town is intimidated.

Eventually Luke gets his memory back and decides to face the committee and name names to save his career. But there's a problem, Appelton has fallen in love. Laurie Holden plays Luke's old girlfriend, who is fresh out of law school, and adamantly opposed to McCarthyism. In a stunning supporting actress performance, she ultimately convinces Luke not to be a stool pigeon. This is where some very positive political points are made. She tells Luke that this committee is opposed to first amendment rights and that he has a right to his political views, including, she says, "the right to be a Communist."

With these six words *The Majestic* takes the struggle against McCarythism a step further than most. It goes to



the political heart of the matter. Does one have the right to criticize and offer an alternative to capitalism? The movie says unequivocally, "yes!"

The film then proceeds to describe the utterly undemocratic, even un-American nature of McCarthyism and poignantly juxtaposes it to the cause of anti-fascism for which the 62 California native sons gave their lives in World War II.

It is likely the so-called Homeland Defense office would disapprove of this message. If you can see through the 1950's hokeyness, *The Majestic* has a great political message. Though made before September 11, the film defies the Bush doctrine and is a *real* defense of our homeland.

The Majestic is Carey's best movie to date; he is simply brilliant. In the end, Carey makes a stirring speech in defense of the first amendment before the dreaded House committee. This movie is full of wonderful characters played by some of Hollywood's best actors. Martin Landau is wonderful as Luke's widowed father who owns *The Majestic* and is reborn when he thinks his long dead son has come home alive. I especially like the warm hearted, rough-voiced African American war veteran who works in the Majestic, loves jazz and believes in Luke even though he knows he's not the Luke he knew. If you haven't seen *The Majestic* you'd better hurry, it is not being pushed by the studio. If you miss it in the theatre, rush out and get the video – it's worth it. ■



Sweatshop Warriors: Immigrant Women Workers Take On the Global Factory

Miriam Ching Yoon Louie
South End Press, 2001

Review by Prasad Venugopal

If corporate globalization and its extreme manifestation through sweatshops is the vehicle for US imperialism's dominance of the global economy, then the labor of millions of immigrant women workers who slave in the sweatshop industry is the engine of this process of globalization. This is the stark message of Miriam Ching Yoon Louie's book *Sweatshop Warriors: Immigrant Women Workers Take On the Global Factory*.

But Louie's book is not about the victimization of these women workers by forces beyond their control. Rather, it is a "community-sized quilt" that lays bare the depredations of globalization by weaving together stories of passionate and organized struggles waged by women whom she calls "path breakers and tree shakers" and "the real experts about the inner workings of the global economy." It is a book about the transformation of these women from sweatshop workers to sweatshop warriors.

The explosive growth in the numbers of women working in sweatshops – over 90 percent of all sweatshop workers are women between the ages of 15 and 22 – and the increased exploitation of lower-paid, part-time female labor reveal the insidious side of corporate globalization. The growth in sweatshop labor has occurred not only in countries such as Haiti, Guatemala, China and India, but also in inner-city areas in New York, San Diego and Los Angeles, and in US offshore export-processing zones such as Saipan. The fact that a majority of these women are immigrants or from communities of color adds a racial dimension to the problem of exploitation.

Injustices perpetrated by factories that employ the use of sweatshop labor are numerous. Women are paid as little as six cents an hour and work 10 to 12-hour shifts. In many instances overtime is mandatory. In some cases, women are allowed only two drinks of water and one bathroom break per shift. Sexual harassment, corporal punishment and verbal abuse are all means used by supervisors to instill fear and keep employees in line.

The 1990s saw the emergence of a multi-racial, multi-

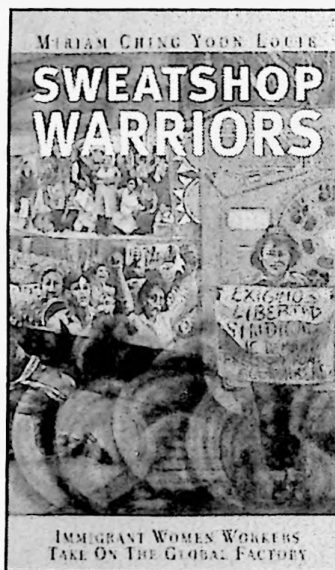
ethnic global movement ready to do battle against the policies of corporate globalization imposed by the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB). The 1999 Seattle demonstrations against the WTO marked a watershed event in the building of a global anti-corporate, anti-monopoly coalition – bringing together labor, women's, youth, human rights and environmentalist groups from around the world under the common umbrella of battling corporate greed and exploitation.

Integral to this struggle has been the movement against sweatshops in the United States, organized by youth-labor coalitions, which has exploded onto college campuses with sit-ins, protests and boycotts of sweatshop-produced apparel. The anti-sweatshop movement has drawn feminist, labor and youth groups into its fold even as it has won spectacular victories on some organizing fronts and lost on others.

While the anti-sweatshop movement itself has diverse and varied roots, the organizing approach employed by most anti-corporate groups has typically been to focus on sweatshop labor as a human rights problem or of labor and women's oppression, to be remedied by the imposition of appropriate labor or gender standards at a national or international level. The recent debate on the inclusion of labor standards in the WTO is a perfect example of this. Unfortunately, this kind of thinking has two serious limitations. First, it portrays the immigrant sweatshop laborers merely as victims or pawns of the global econ-

omy, dismissing their agency in "producing" globalization as well as in countering it. Having cast these women in the role of victims, it then overlooks the creative and tenacious struggles they themselves are waging for justice.

Sweatshop Warriors is relatively unique in its focus on the women who slave and toil in the global sweatshop industry, and fills a serious gap in the analysis of globalization. Focusing on immigrant women from China, Korea and Mexico who work in the garment, toy, electronics and restaurant industries, Louie documents their exploitation by transnational corporations and subcontractors scavenging for cheap labor in their drive for increased profits. But the story is also about fighting back – about organizing through community centers and immigrant workers associations, about new models of union organizing, about solidarity across racial and eth-



◆ (continued on page 30)

Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics

bell hooks South End Press, 2000

Review by Dee Myles

Her name, bell hooks, is written in all lower case letters, and she is a feminist activist and theorist. In this book, hooks shares her experience with feminist politics and her recommendations on the way to move forward.

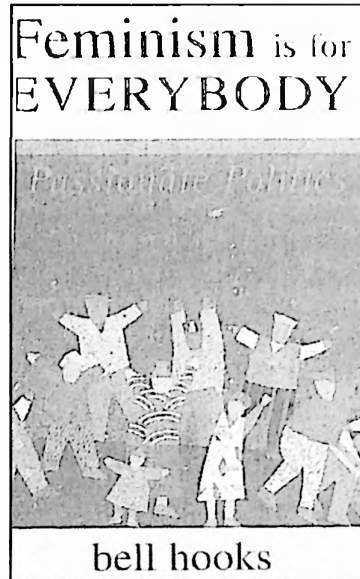
She defines feminism as "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression." Patriarchy is defined as institutionalized sexism. hooks argues that all, both male and female, contribute to the perpetuation of sexism in thought and action. Most men are disturbed by domination, oppression, and violence against women, but fear letting go of the only world they know, she says. It was the realization that women as well as men could be sexist that moved the feminist movement away from an anti-male position. Gender justice then became the focus and class and race concerns interrupted utopian visions of sisterhood.

hooks familiarizes the reader with the various categories of feminism, particularly reformist and revolutionary. Reformist feminism wants gender equality within the capitalist system and has particular appeal to bourgeois women. Revolutionary feminism wants to destroy sexism and patriarchy in addition to winning additional rights within the system as it exists. "Reformist feminist thinking, focusing primarily on equality with men in the workforce, overshadowed the original radical foundations of contemporary feminism which called for reform as well as overall restructuring of society so that our nation would be fundamentally anti-sexist."

According to the author, the victory in the fight for women's studies was an important achievement, however, university women's studies classes replaced the more inclusive consciousness-raising groups, where women confronted their own sexism and reached a broader audience. In hooks' opinion, without confronting their own sexism, women who claim to be feminist betray the cause. When feminism became housed in the university, women and men outside the campus were no longer an important audience. Hooks argues that this led to the depoliticalization and deradicalization of feminism.

The author stresses that the whole spectrum of issues related to reproductive rights needs to be understood and addressed.

hooks' remarks on class struggle are quite compelling and open the door to issues concerning race: "only privileged women had the luxury to imagine



working outside the home would actually provide them with an income which would enable them to be economically self-sufficient. Working-class women already knew that the wages they received would not liberate them."

hooks says that as a result of not being consciously vigilant about class concerns, the feminist movement failed to respond adequately to the dismantling of the welfare system and the

feminization of poverty. In her opinion, the global problems of women are of great concern. Constant vigilance is required to prevent intentional or unintentional support for US imperialism within the feminist movement. "Just because they (white women) participated in anti-racist struggle did not mean that they had divested themselves of white supremacy, of notions that they were superior to black females, more informed, better educated, more suited to 'lead' a movement."

hooks explains that issue of violence must include violence against women by both sexes and violence against children by adults. It all falls under the rubric of patriarchal violence, which for hooks is a more sexist-focused term than domestic violence. Also, the movement against patriarchal violence must include concerns about military aggression.

Reading this short book is a worthwhile endeavor for anyone interested in or curious about the women's movement in the United States. hooks explains the differences between Communist and feminist theory and how the two approaches can be reconciled.

What we learn from reading this book is that the women's movement has objectives, which are congruent with the goals of the working-class movement. It is imperative that the labor and women's movement become indivisible allies. In fact, we get a sense that the working class has a responsibility to make sure that the embrace of the movement of women is fully felt. As opposed to the ruling-class exploitation and oppression of women, the working class has a real interest, in securing the freedom and equality of women. The influence of male supremacy and racism undermines the cause of the working-class movement. ■

The Battle for God

Karen Armstrong
Ballentine Books, 2000

Review by Thomas Riggins

In this ambitious book, Karen Armstrong attempts to explain the origins and goals of the major fundamentalist movements in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It is a heroic attempt which she ultimately fails to accomplish. Along the way, however, she presents a useful, if fanciful, account of the history of religious fundamentalism over the last 500 years.

Why do I think she fails to accomplish her task of explicating the origins and goals of fundamentalism? The reason is that she does not really understand the social role of religion and its relation to the economic base of society. Her explanations are almost uniformly conditioned by idealist fantasies on the nature of religion as an independent force which exists to make us better people (more compassionate) and to help us find a truth about the nature of life that reason cannot provide.

She tells us that in olden times there were two ways of thinking and "acquiring knowledge" - namely "mythos" [religion] and "logos" [philosophy/science]. Then religion was primary as it gave meaning to life while science "enabled men and women to function well in the world...[it] could not assuage human pain or sorrow. Rational arguments could make no sense of tragedy." In other words, religion is a support which people who cannot face the world science reveals to them fall back upon to find comfort.

The book is divided into two unequal parts. The shorter first part deals with the pre-history of modern fundamentalism from 1492 [the expulsion of Muslims and Jews from Spain] to 1870. It is well worth reading for the orientation it gives on the pre-modern relations between traditional religion and science. Islam, for example, after an early embracing of science, or at least toleration, and critical thinking in its first centuries, found itself confronted with social conditions [Mongol invasions, conflicts with the West] that led it to retreat from rationality into mysticism and dogmatism: forces also at work in Judaism and Christianity for other reasons.

Some of her explanations are not acceptable, however. In her chapter "Jews and Muslims Modernize" we are informed that the "Jews would ... have to adopt moder-

nity in an atmosphere of hatred," which she blames on the "modern ethos" of the Enlightenment and on Karl Marx who "argued that the Jews were responsible for capitalism, which, in his view, was the source of all the world's ills." She mentions in passing, many pages later, that Christianity had been anti-Semitic for centuries.

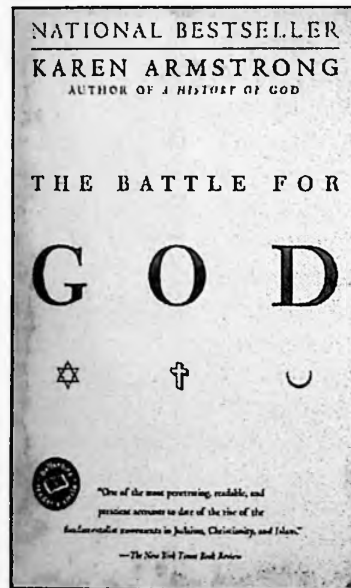
It will come as news to Marxists that Marx blamed capitalism on the Jews. This would be a big disappointment to the ultra-rightists who blame them for communism. Nietzsche blamed them for Christianity. It will also be news that all the ills of the world are due to capitalism. Marx and Engels devoted many pages to the problems and the "ills" of pre-capitalist economic formations that plagued humanity - serfdom in Russia, feudalism and semi-feudal land tenure in Germany and Eastern Europe. It might surprise Ms. Armstrong that Marx and Engels even spoke of the progressive role that capitalism had played in world history.

She justifies her claim that Marx held Jews responsible for capitalism by a general reference (no quote) to an early work of his, "On the Jewish Question." Had she read this work she would be hard pressed to find any statement by Marx to the effect that the Jews were responsible for capitalism. This despite her own comment about "the fabled business acumen of the Jews." If Ms. Armstrong's readers are interested in Marx's views on the origins of capitalism, they should be referred to the first volume of *Capital*.

Part Two of her book deals with fundamentalism *per se*. She provides a detailed history of its development in the 20th century focusing on Iran, Israel, and the US - Pakistan and Egypt also come in for special mention. These are important chapters as she relates some of the more extreme movements in Islam to the reaction of the fundamentalists to the aggressive policies of imperialism and its Zionist offshoot.

However, we are also told that the main reason for fundamentalism is that for humans it is almost impossible to live without a religious belief in the ultimate meaning of life and that fundamentalism is a reaction to the extreme threat of the Western scientific outlook to this religious need especially as it is manifested in less developed areas. She maintains that these ultimate questions of meaning cannot be addressed by science. (She means fundamentalists do not like the answers of science).

Armstrong discusses the recent history of the West in order to show that science is no substitute for religion. World War I was brought about by "a nihilistic death



wish, as the nations of Europe cultivated a perverse fantasy of self-destruction." A good dose of Lenin's *Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism* would remedy this mis-diagnosis of the causes of the First World War.

Nevertheless, we get a good introduction to the men who founded modern fundamentalist movements. Unfortunately, too much of Armstrong's criticism is based on her own religious sensibilities. She condemns the violence of fundamentalism because she thinks it violates "one of the central tenets of all religion: respect for the absolute sanctity of human life." Distressingly, no such central tenet exists for any of the world religions, as their blood stained histories attest.

She does mention the expulsion of the Palestinians from their homes by Zionism and the Western role in the overthrow of Musaddiq and the restoration of the Shah in Iran. But these appear as incidental to the root cause of fundamentalism, which is rooted in man's search for meaning which has been road blocked by the Western scientific outlook.

She tells us WWII, the Holocaust, and the bombing of Hiroshima demonstrate "the limitations of the rationalist" worldview. "Reason is silent: there is - literally - nothing that it can say." She appears to view the Nazis as the product of "unfettered rationalism" [!] and again, the mass destruction of WWII reveals "a nihilistic impulse."

What can the response be to Armstrong's position? I can only say that reason is not only not silent but has in fact, through the medium of Marxist analysis, explained the reasons for the wars and acts of mass destruction which the imperialist system, in its quest for market supremacy and economic domination, has and is still inflicting on the peoples of the world.

The attack on reason as inadequate and unable to explain our world, a mainstay of the arguments of bourgeois commentators, is motivated by a refusal to admit that a rational solution involves a Marxist solution. The existing capitalist relations of production are irrational and engender the contradictions in the world economy. It is these relations, not the nihilistic impulses of European rationalists that have been, and still are, responsible for the social anarchy we see about us.

Still, this book is recommended for the mountain of facts, names, movements, and historical accounts it gives of the fundamentalist religious movements of our times. But her conclusions are themselves nothing more than religious nonsense.

At the end of the twentieth century, the liberal myth that humanity is progressing to an ever more enlightened and tolerant state looks as fantastic as any of the other millennial myths we have considered in this book. Without the constraints of a higher mythical truth, reason can on occasion become demonic and commit crimes that are as great as, if not greater than, any of the atrocities perpetrated by fundamentalists.

Reason will not take the rap for the irrationality of the capitalist system, and no higher mythical truth will solve the problems of humanity. The solution remains as it was first enunciated to the world in 1848 in *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*. The working people of the world must unite to end the oppression of an economic system that puts profits, at any cost, before the well being of humanity. ■

Sweatshop Warriors: Immigrant Women Workers Take On the Global Factory ♦ (continued from page 26)

nic lines, about immigrant women laborers fighting against exclusively male subcontractors and their transnational bosses, about immigrant women passing on the threads of struggle between mothers and daughters, sisters and friends, locked in a battle against a sweatshop pyramid that has transformed their lives and of those around them across continents and generations.

Sweatshop Warriors is also not a book written from the sidelines of struggle. Louie's active and personal involvement in these struggles spans three decades and numerous community organizations, including the Asian Immigrant Women Advocates (New York), Fuerza Unida (Texas) and other women of color and Third World solidarity organizations across the country. Besides resulting in numerous articles and speaking engagements, her work has also taken her to the Beijing World Conference on Women, a conference of migrant

workers' organizations in Seoul and an Environmental and Economic Justice meeting in Tijuana. She currently works with the Women of Color Resource Center.

The anti-globalization movements need to place a greater emphasis on an analysis of sweatshops and subcontracting on a global scale. An analysis of the economic foundations that underlie the growth of sweatshops and their central role in the global economy needs to be integrated with grassroots organizing. Labor and women's groups need to re-enter the debate surrounding the WTO/IMF/WB and globalization with a sharper understanding of these issues. The inspiration, leadership and creative strategies for resistance against global capital must be built from the grassroots. Miriam Ching Yoon Louie's sweatshop warriors tell us how, in an inspiring and courageous story. We would do well to listen to them. ■

SOMEONE WHO IS LIKE NO ONE

*I have had a dream that someone is coming,
I have had a dream of a red star.
My eyelids continually flutter,
and my shoes continually pair off
And may I go blind
if I'm lying.*

*I had the dream of that red star
while not sleeping.
Someone is coming.
Someone is coming.
Someone new.
Someone better.
Someone who is like no one – not like father,
not like Ensi, not like Yahya, not like mother.
He is like the one who he must be,
taller than the trees of the builder's house
and his face even brighter
than the hidden Imam's.
He does not fear the brother of Seyyid Javad,
who has gone and donned the police uniform.
Nor does he fear Seyyid Javad himself,
who owns all the rooms of our house.*

*His name, like my mother invokes
at the beginning and end of her prayers,
must be either "the judge of all judges"
or "the grantor of all wishes."
He can read, with his eyes closed
all the hard words in the third-grade book,
and can subtract one-thousand from twenty-million
without missing anything.
He can even take from Seyyid Javad's store
on credit, whatever he needs.
And can do things like re-lighting the lamp of "Allah,"
which was green, green like the early dawn,
in the sky over the Miftahiyan Mosque.*

*Ah...
How wonderful is light!
How wonderful is light!
And how much I'd like
for Yahya to have
a vendor's cart,
and a propane lamp!
How much I'd like
for myself to sit
amidst the melons on Yahya's cart
and circle around Muhamadiyah Square"*

*Ah...
How wonderful to circle around the square!
How wonderful to sleep on the roof!
How wonderful to go the national park!
How wonderful the taste of Pepsi,
and the cinema of Fardin!
How I enjoy all the good things,
and how my heart longs to tug the hair
of Seyyid Javad's daughter!*

*Why am I so small
that I get lost in the streets?
Why doesn't my father, who is not so small,
and does not get lost in the streets,
do something to hasten the day
of the coming of he who has come to my dreams?
And why the people of the Slaughter House District,
the soil of whose gardens is soaked in blood,
the water of whose ponds is soaked in blood,
and the soles of whose shoes are soaked in blood,
don't do something?
Why don't they do something?*

How lazy is the winter sun!

*I have swept the stairs to the rooftop,
and have washed the window panes.
Why should father see dreams
only when he is sleep?*

*I have swept the stairs to the rooftop,
and have washed the window panes.*

*Someone is coming.
Someone is coming.
Someone who is with us in heart.
Someone who is with us in breath.
Someone who is with us in voice.*

*Someone whose coming
cannot be stopped,
handcuffed and thrown in jail.
Someone who has planted his seeds under
Yahya's old trees,
and who day by day
grows bigger, and bigger.
Someone who will come through the rain,
through the sound of pouring rain,
amidst whispering petunias.*

*Someone is coming through the sky above the
Tupkhaneh Circle
on the night of fireworks.*

*He will spread the cloth,
and will divide the bread
and the Pepsi
and the national park
and the whooping cough syrup
and the school registration day
and the hospital's waiting numbers
and the rubber boots
and Fardin's cinema
and the trees of Seyyid Javad's daughter
and anything else that has swollen.
And he will give us our share, too.
I have had a dream....*

Forough Farrkhzad (1935-1967) is one of the most prominent contemporary poets of Iran, and a literary figure of international stature. Without ever considering herself to be a feminist, she was one of the staunchest defenders of women's liberation in Iran. Her own short life was in fact a clear example of a woman's rebellion against the anti-woman, repressive norms of a traditional society.

While beginning her literary life with cultural rebellion, Forough's social and political outlook rapidly developed from a humanist into a progressive and then a socialist one. Toward the end of her short life, she had already rejected the then popular guerrilla tactics of the 1960s and had begun embracing the concept of a working class revolution. That is why many people in Iran still think that her sudden death in a car accident at the age of 33 was not in fact an accident but an assassination carried out by the Shah's secret police, SAVAK.

Her poem, "Someone Who Is Like No One," is an example of Farrokhzad's embracing of a working-class, socialist revolution in Iran. The poem was originally translated into English and footnoted by Hassan Javadi and Susan Sallee, and published by Albany Press (Emeryville, California, 1981) as part of a collection called *Another Birth*, itself named after one of her most famous poems.

CHARACTER

*You're a girl
and you'd better not forget
that when you cross the threshold of your house
men will look askance at you.
When you keep on walking down the lane
men will follow you and whistle.
When you cross the lane and step onto the main road
men will revile you and call you a loose woman.*

*If you've got no character
you'll turn back,
and if you have
you'll keep on going,
as you're going now.*

SELF-PORTRAIT

*I don't believe in God,
I look upon nature with wondering eyes.
However much I move forward grasping the hand of progress
society's hindrances take hold of my sleeve
and gradually pull me backwards.
I wish I could walk all through the city
in the middle of the night,
sitting down anywhere alone to cry.*

*I don't believe in God.
From house to house the religion mongers
secretly divide us into castes,
segregate the women from the human race.
I too am divided,
I too am defrauded of my human rights.
The crafty politician
gets loud applause when he rails about class exploitation,
but he cleverly suppresses all the terminology
of women's exploitation.
All those people of supposed good character, I know them.*

*Throughout the world, religion has extended its eighteen talons.
In my lone brandishing, how many of its bones can I shatter,
how much can I rip discrimination's far-spreading net?*

NOORJAHAN*

*They have made Noorjahan stand in a hole in the courtyard,
there she stands, submerged to her waist with head hanging.
They're throwing stones at Noorjahan,
those stones are striking my body.*

*Stones are striking my head, forehead, chest and back,
they're throwing stones and laughing aloud, laughing and shouting abuse.
Noorjahan's fractured forehead pours out blood, mine also.
Noorjahan's eyes have burst, mine also.
Noorjahan's nose has been smashed, mine also.
Through Noorjahan's torn breast, her heart has been pierced, mine also.
Are these stones not striking you?*

*They're laughing aloud, laughing and stroking their beards,
there are tupis stuck to their heads, they too are shaking with laughter.
They're laughing and swinging their walking sticks;
from the quiver of their cruel eyes, arrows speed to pierce her body,
my body also.
Are these arrows not piercing your body?*

* Noorjahan was the daughter of a landless peasant in the district of Sylhet, in northeastern Bangladesh. Divorced by her first husband, in January 1993 Noorjahan married again – a common and accepted practice among Muslims worldwide. The local mullahs (Muslim religious leaders), however, declared Noorjahan's second marriage to be against Islamic law. Several days later, Noorjahan was taken out to a field at dawn, buried up to her waist in a pit, and publicly stoned for alleged adultery by the mullahs' followers. The insult and humiliation led Noorjahan to commit suicide by ingesting insecticide.

Taslima Nasrin is a poet from Bangladesh. With concise language and a biting wit, her work is a call for society to reconsider its attitudes towards all victims of persecution, especially women. These three poems are drawn from her major collection in English, *The Game In Reverse*, 1995 (translated by Carolyn Wright). They are reprinted by permission of the publisher, George Braziller, Inc.

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