

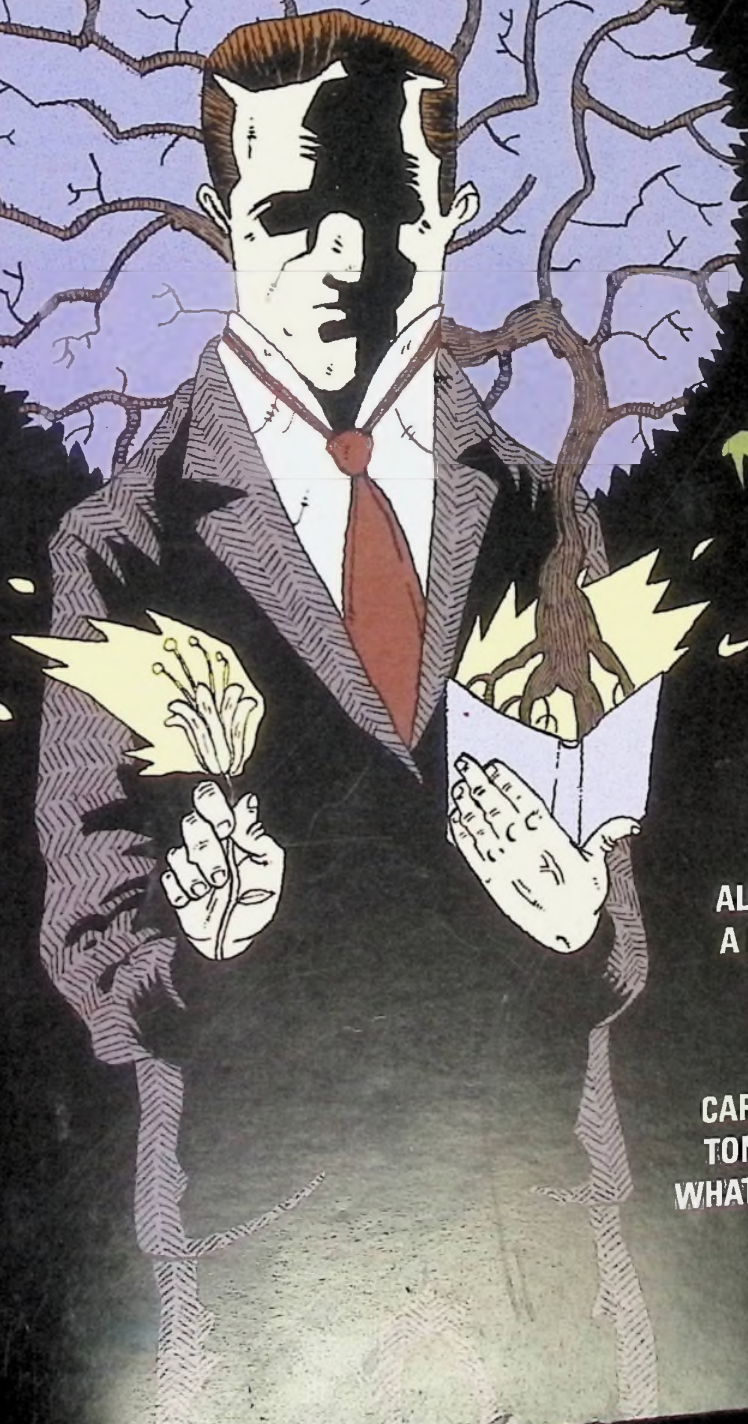
GREENING THE MOVEMENT FOR SOCIALISM  
POLITICAL AFFAIRS A MARXIST MONTHLY

# pa

Sep/Oct 2007 [www.politicalaffairs.net](http://www.politicalaffairs.net)

**EXPOSED!**  
POLICE BRUTALITY  
IN BUFFALO

**CAN  
AL  
GORE  
SAVE THE  
WORLD?**



**ALICE NEEL:  
A PEOPLE'S  
ARTIST**

**JIMMY  
CARTER AND  
TONY BLAIR:  
WHAT IS LEFT?**

\$4.95



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Illustration by Sam Heimer

Contributing writer Peter Zemer looks at the 2008 presidential election and discusses one of the most popular non-candidates – Al Gore. Marc Brodine writes on the links between our political and economic organization and the global climate crisis. Long-term change is needed, he argues, but we need to act now. Lawrence Albright revives the issue of environmental racism and its impact on communities of color. Historian Gerald Meyer reviews the recent documentary on the life of progressive artist Alice Neel and fills in the gaps. Brian Fitzpatrick visits Nicaragua and asks whether the Sandinista movement has what it takes to revitalize that country's struggle for democracy and socialism. PA Editor Joe Sims looks at the record and compares former President Jimmy Carter to Britain's former Prime Minister Tony Blair. Who is more progressive? Also, please find book reviews, poetry, debate, and more....

PA Editors

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CARE (HR 676)**



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

Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

## Eco-revolution in Order

Via e-mail

Coal, gas, oil and atomic energy is destroying the planet's livability and therefore the last 44 years of ecological green revolution has brought into being the hi-tech tools to put in place wind, tidal and solar power which transforms to electricity and is more power than can be used by society. No more blackouts. This non-pollution solution is given freely in nature's kinder laws and provides work for all and forever more. Viva socialist liberation. End pollution wars, not endless wars for more pollution. Workers of the world, unite.

Marty

Came across your mag by accident (lucky). Articles are well written with humor. I suppose you don't hear a lot about Australia over there. We are not all right-wing arseholes, but the left has been very weak for the past 11 years. If the ALP get in at the next election we will see some changes however

they won't go very far, they still feel that they have to placate business and distance themselves from the union movement. They are just another center-left reformist party.

Michael O'Rourke

## Dear Editor, Atlanta, Georgia

I have followed with interest the coverage on your Web site of the struggle to stop the execution of Troy Anthony Davis, an African American condemned to death after being convicted of killing a white police officer.

An international campaign led by groups like Amnesty International and the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty exposed the fact that seven of the nine non-police witnesses recanted their testimony against Davis, and some even claimed they were coerced by the police into helping convict Davis. Additionally, there was no DNA or other physical evidence to tie Davis to the crime. Law enforcement officers, a US

congressman, and human rights activists pleaded with the state of Georgia to save Davis's life.

Had not the Georgia Board of Pardons acted to stay Davis's execution in July, the state of Georgia might have killed an innocent man! But Davis's stay of execution ends in mid-October.

Please continue to speak up for Davis and others who have been condemned to die. Also, please help expose a racist capital punishment system: 40% of death row inmates are African Americans and almost 80% of the victims of crimes resulting in death sentences are white. The only way to make it fair is to abolish it.

Leslie Glenning

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# No Monkeying With Marxist Morality

By Frank Chapman

**T**he article "Marxism, Monkeys and Morality" by Thomas Riggins (July 2007, *Political Affairs*) is a fascinating exploration of a very controversial subject. The subject of course is, "The origins of the human moral sense in the evolutionary history of our order (the primates)."

My first question is: Is this problem of the origins of the "human moral sense" addressed by the founders of Marxism and if so how did they address it? If we are going to examine this question of the origin of moral behavior from a dialectical materialist perspective then perhaps we can get a clear view of that perspective by at least taking a look at what Marx and Engels had to say on this subject. (See, for example, Engels on "The Transition from Ape to Man" in *The Dialectics of Nature*.)

Is morality uniquely human or is it something spread throughout various species of animals (e.g., monkeys, elephants, etc.)? We observe animals behaving in ways similar to humans and we proceed to designate certain behaviors as "morally worthy behavior" which simply means that we are judging animal behavior by moral standards created by humans. And we must quickly add there is no universal moral standard for all humans for all times, places and cultural circumstances. The problem with this is that what is moral and not moral or immoral among humans varies widely from one historical period to another, from one culture to another and from one class to another.

As Jacob Bronoski pointed out in his classic work *The Ascent of Man*, our history is divided unequally. First there's the biological evolution that separates us from our ape ancestors. This was a slow and tedious pro-



Chung Sung-Jun/Getty Images

△ Exactly what separates humans and our primate cousins?

cess occurring over millions of years. Then there's the social-cultural evolution, which is only about a half a million years old. That stage of social development we call civilization started perhaps 12,000 years ago. In other words it took several million years of biological evolution before those little simian creatures emerged on the grasslands of East Africa three million years ago. They didn't hunt with or procure food solely by using teeth and claws. They made and hunted with tools. They produced their own means of subsistence. Here is where the dialectical leap occurred laying the basis for social and cultural evolution and revolution. It was definitely a qualitative change because these tool-making primates by the very act of socially engaging in the production process were also playing a creative role in the transformation of their own species.

Marx and Engels were enthusiastic supporters of Darwin's discovery of natural selection. But they were quick to point out

the error of projecting categories of bourgeois society into nature. Just as there is no biological basis for racism, war, crime or any other human institution there is no biological justification for morality. When we say there is "no biological basis for morality" we mean that "moral behavior" is not genetically determined but a derivative of the institutional arrangements within a given human society.

"Morally Worthy Behavior" exists solely within the context of the social and cultural evolution of humanity. Therefore, one can't explain human progress on the basis of morality or some "universal concept" of what's right and wrong.

In Marx's famous "Introduction" to his *Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy* it is stated that it is not our consciousness that determines our social being but our social being that determines our consciousness. This indeed is the basic premise of the materialist approach to the historical development of human society, which informs

us where to look in order to determine what "Morally Worthy Behavior" is.

Marxism is not a dogma. We do not judge human behavior by the yardstick of abstract morality. We do not see the class struggle as a struggle between "Good and Evil." Nothing human is alien to us. We see the good, the bad and the ugly within the context of the historical development of human society. We support capitalist progress over feudal backwardness and reaction, and we further support and engage in the fight for all democratic progress for the people and the working class. We uncompromisingly fight for an end to capitalist exploitation and the triumph of socialism.

The working class is forging a "new morality" in the dirt and blood of class struggle; we are raising standards and lowering barriers. We are quite capable of taking the helm in the struggle for peace, justice, equality and a clean, unpolluted environment as we continue to struggle for the emancipation of the working class.

There is an interesting study, *Bones, Bodies, Behavior: Essays on Biological Anthropology*, edited by George W. Stocking, Jr. in 1988, that provides a rather thorough history of the controversy between biological

anthropology and social-cultural anthropology. The essential question is this: Are human values biologically based?

Historically it has always been the reactionaries and the fascist eugenicist movement who have said "yes human social behavior is definitely biologically based." What does this imply? Very simply it implies that there is a natural, biological basis for the way people behave toward one another which is independent of their social conscience, culture, class, time, place or circumstance. This is nothing but a thinly veiled, disguised form of social Darwinism, which justifies racism, war and imperialism on the grounds that it is all part of the natural order of things.

Marxism does not contend that human society is not a part of the natural order of things; we just don't exclude social and cultural evolution as part of the natural order.

Brother Riggins is right, "morally worthy behavior didn't just fall from the sky." But it doesn't come from the genes either. Or does it?

Let me just boldly answer by affirming that socialism is not genetically determined and there is no scientific reason why we should be looking for a "Marxism gene." The basis of our "morally worthy behavior" and

"morally unworthy behavior" has everything to do with who owns and controls the means of production and who doesn't. The capitalist class blinded by greed and the predatory needs of the monopolies makes a mockery of morality by perpetrating lies about a "moral majority" to cover up the continued globalization of poverty, unprecedented exploitation of foreign and domestic workers, the erosion of democratic institutions and wars of aggression.

To say this or that behavior is "morally worthy behavior" is a matter of subjective evaluation. For example, is cannibalism "morally worthy behavior"? It depends. In a society that practices cannibalism it is not immoral.

Lenin once defined dialectics as a concrete analysis of concrete conditions. Why? Because we do not live in a world of "universals" or ideas unrelated to changing times. Most life on earth doesn't even have ideas. In the beginning was the deed, not the word. □

## THOMAS RIGGINS RESPONDS

By Thomas Riggins

I want to thank comrade Chapman for his interesting response to my article. I basically agree with the tenor of his comments, but there are two issues upon which I would like to elaborate.

When we say there is a biological basis for morality we don't mean there is a genetic explanation for any particular moral rule as such. We only mean that the predisposition for morality in the broadest sense was an inheritance from our primate ancestors.

An analogy with the thumb is apt. No non-human animal can play a Mozart sonata on the piano. But if our primate ancestors had not evolved thumbs, neither could we. Any particular Mozart sonata cannot be explained

by genetics, but the ability to create it can be.

I also think we should be cautious about maintaining that morally worthy behavior is a matter of subjective evaluation. When comrade Chapman says that in a society that practices cannibalism, cannibalism is not immoral, he is certainly correct. But that does not really address, to my mind, the question whether or not cannibalism is morally worthy behavior or not.

Replace "cannibalism" with "slavery" and ask whether the fact that certain societies subjectively held that slavery was not immoral is a sufficient argument to refute the proposition "slavery is immoral."

Marxists believe in progress and development as objective features of our social

and moral life. If people in the past thought that slavery was not immoral, that is a matter of historical context. But for people today to argue in favor of slavery, or honor killings, or female genital mutilation, or capitalism on the basis that all such judgments are only a matter of subjective evaluation, this runs the risk of undercutting the Marxist claim to be "scientific" and seems to put "scientific socialism" on the same level as subjectively held religious beliefs. This may be the case, but I would argue the contrary. □

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marxist IQ  
miq

**1. The year 2007 is the 90th anniversary of the Russian Revolution, the first revolution to:**

- a. establish a working-class-oriented government.
- b. establish a system of public education.
- c. establish public ownership of industry and agriculture.
- d. undertake land reform.

**2. The ultra-left took the Russian Revolution as evidence that they should break all alliances with non-socialists and organize for immediate revolutions. Lenin criticized this view in a famous pamphlet titled:**

- a. *Revolution for the Hell of It.*
- b. *The End of History.*
- c. *Red Dawn.*
- d. *Left-wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder.*

**3. In contending that the revolution against the Czarist autocracy should be transformed into a socialist revolution, Lenin argued that:**

- a. socialism could only be established in a backward country like Czarist Russia.
- b. only a socialist revolution could save the bourgeois democratic revolution from being destroyed by the counter-revolution.
- c. Russia's allies would welcome the revolution as proof that the war was being fought to "make the world safe for democracy."
- d. German workers would rise up against the kaiser and thus help the allies win the war.

**4. Capitalism must ultimately be abolished and socialism established both nationally and internationally because:**

- a. the capitalist world market destroys pre-capitalist forms and creates an escalating interdependency among the world's people
- b. capitalist exploitation concentrates wealth as never before and reduces social relationships globally to a small class of capitalists owning the production and distribution of goods and services and a very large class of workers who produce everything and own nothing.
- c. capitalists both drive wages down and greatly increase production, producing depressions and war, and compelling the working class to organize production and distribution of goods and services on a socialist basis for both its survival and its development.
- d. all of the above.

**5. Lenin believed that socialist revolution was on the agenda of history globally because:**

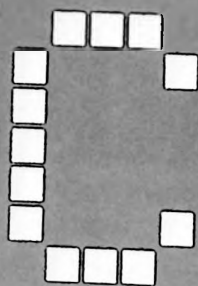
- a. the Russian revolution had worked and its forms should be copied.
- b. modern imperialism was producing global wars which would destroy bourgeois democracy and globalize class struggle.
- c. the capitalists and imperialists would establish socialism rather than being overthrown in violent revolutions.
- d. after the Russian Revolution, socialism would spread rapidly as one capitalist state after another began to fall like a row of dominoes.

**How to score yourself:**

**0-3 correct answers:** Read Lenin's *Left-wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder*, and *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*.

**4-5 correct answers:** You are hereby awarded the Lenin Prize in Leninology.

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



# AL GORE, THE ASSAULT ON REASON, AND THE RUN FOR THE PRESIDENCY

**Editor's Note:** The opinions expressed in this essay do not necessarily reflect those of the editors or publisher of this magazine.

By Peter Zemer

**A**fter reading David Brooks' nasty, ad hominem attack on, Al Gore's latest book, *The Assault on Reason*, in *The New York Times*, I felt I needed to check out Al Gore's latest book for myself, so I headed for the local Borders.

What I found was a very lucidly written, un-pompous and insightful critique into the role the corporate television and radio media have played, and continue to play, in the dumbing down of America. The networks do this by depriving the American people of vitally-needed information about issues such as the war on Iraq, global warming, poverty, the lack of health insurance, and on and on. Instead, TV viewers are left with JonBenet Ramsey, the Georgia runaway bride, Britney Spears, Paris Hilton, etc. ad nauseam – and, on a more serious note, the semi-fascist Lou Dobbs on "Broken Borders."

To me, the quality of Gore's writing equals or surpasses the kind of excellent material that is today fortunately available on the Internet (Gore was there at the beginning!), on sites such as TruthOut.org, our own PA, Counterpunch.org, and other progressive electronic news outlets.

Gore also recognizes the wave of political activism the Internet has energized, spurred by such e-roots organizations as MoveOn.org and a host of environmental, labor and peace groups.

Coupled with Gore's hard-hitting political critique is a real appreciation of literature and the printed word. He has a genuine literary flare of his own, and a remarkable ability to popularize important issues of contemporary ethics, philosophy, and science in a clear, straightforward way.

■ We are at a crucial political and environmental juncture in this country. In terms of the survival of the earth and fending off of global warming, we still have a window of opportunity.

Having obtained this picture of Al Gore's way of thinking and writing from his new book, I am coming more and more to the conclusion that he is now badly needed in the race for the Democratic Party presidential nomination and the presidency.

Imagine the level of debate – and consequently action – that would ensue if a real thinker sat in the White House – one who is a defender of the environment and an articulate opponent of adventurist wars. Contrast that to what we have now!

There are many other writers and organizations espousing views like Al Gore's in a manner similar to his, but none of these individuals are experienced politicians like Gore. How quickly the intellectual and political

atmosphere in the US would be cleared of its cloud of pollution by a Gore presidency!

As for the other candidates, I think that Hillary Clinton is far too centrist and opportunistic, and far too entangled in the considerable ethical baggage her husband brings to bear. Thus she is vulnerable to the worst kind of Republican attacks. Obama also strikes me as centrist and opportunist (not that many politicians aren't). He also can be attacked for a lack of experience. Edwards is right on union issues (the Employee Free Choice Act) and quite good on expanding health care coverage, but there is a personal injury lawyer/hedge fund/coifure problem that adversely affects his image, which, coupled with charges of a lack of political experience, are not going to go away. Gore himself has moved beyond the centrism of the Clinton administration and the former DNC. He moved on from that centrism by tackling the issue of global warming and vehemently opposing the Iraq war. He also knows how the Florida vote was stolen from him and the critical importance of electoral reform.

With 17 percent of Democratic voters now opting for Gore, even though he is undeclared, I think he would do the country a real service by running and raising the issues he knows so much about – how far ahead of the pack he was on the critical issue of global warming!

We are at a crucial political and environmental juncture in this country. In terms of the survival of the earth and fending off of global warming, we still have a window of opportunity. There is also time left to tackle all the problems of poverty, discrimination, and the lack of health care and union rights. But if a right-wing "moderate" like Rudy Giuliani becomes president, we will be plunged even deeper into the swampy, free-market morass in which we are now stuck.

I fear that Giuliani, if he gets the Republican nomination, is slick enough to defeat Clinton or Obama, especially with all the well-paid, media-types he will have in his corner (talk about an assault on reason!). Al Gore, I think, is the only Democrat right now who can stand up to Giuliani or any Republican candidate. He now has acquired the gravitas to make them all look puny. As he amply shows in his new book, Al Gore can really write. He also is someone who can win. □



# GAZA AND AFTER

By Hanna Amireh

**A**fter the tragic events in the Gaza Strip, and the complete takeover of Gaza by Hamas in a military coup, we think that it is important to stress the following points:

1) We condemn the military coup by Hamas and its ramifications of tearing Gaza away from the West Bank. This new situation will eventually complete the process begun by Israel in 1991 to disintegrate the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), and create two separate entities. And this action by Hamas puts into jeopardy the political and geographical unity of the OPT.

2) Its obvious now that the bloody infighting was a direct and indirect consequence of Israel's long-standing policy of siege, closer, expropriation of lands, and settlements, etc., which led to high poverty and unemployment rates as well as devastated trading opportunities since Israel as an occupying power has strictly limited Palestinian movement within the West Bank and with the Gaza Strip.

3) The international community – mainly the US and the European Union – is also to blame for exacerbating the distress and agony of the Palestinians by the imposition of political sanctions and an economic blockade on our people since early 2006.

4) We agree that a state of corruption in the Palestinian Authority, security failures, and the lack of measures to remedy this situation has contributed to generating tension and hostilities.

5) The huge bipolarization of the Palestinian society by Fatah and Hamas, and their policy, before and after the Mecca accord, to bisect and monopolize power paved the way towards excluding all the political factions and the civil society from being real partners. This negatively complicated the internal scene and encouraged infighting.

Therefore, we express serious concerns about the following four outcomes:

1) The assault on the legitimate authority and the military takeover by Hamas in Gaza.

2) The complete separation of the Gaza Strip from the West Bank.



Musa Al-Shoor/AFP/Getty Images

3) A wide scale humanitarian crisis in Gaza if Israel implements its threats to cut off vital services and supplies.

4) The upcoming situation under Hamas control, and what will happen in regard to secular civil society and individual and public freedoms as well as women's rights, etc., taking into consideration certain declarations by Hamas leaders that they are going to establish an Islamic Authority in Gaza.

Now if there is a lesson from what happened in Gaza here it is: Starving, drying up and blocking a whole population do not change consciousness or weaken political or ideological movements. On the contrary, after one year and a half of the policy of international boycott on the Palestinian Authority, Hamas has become stronger, and the boycott policy has failed. The American notion that it is possible to topple an elected government by applying external pressure on the population suffered a complete failure.

On the other hand, it was unwise behavior by certain elements in Fatah and the Authority to count on the external pressure and to follow certain policies that depend completely on the American and the Israeli good wishes.

The question now is where to go from here? To continue the boycott policy by the US, Israel and the European community will lead to more disasters. The international community needs to change direction, and it has to deal with one legitimate authority and with one legitimate government without preconditions. The international community should from now

on deal with the Palestinians through their government and not on a personal level as it had before, through the so-called temporary international mechanism. It should help the Palestinian government to deal with its people in the West Bank as well as in the Gaza Strip, and not to go over its head or by imposing conditions and giving instructions.

Only through giving the Palestinian government and President Abbas the full responsibility for his people on the political, financial, economical, and security levels without any external intervention, can he succeed in making a breakthrough and to go back to the status quo ante in the Gaza Strip.

The so-called policy of strengthening President Abbas, should be based on a real political approach and substantial steps towards a final solution to the Palestinian problem and not only financial aid and the removal of some military checkpoints.

As preliminary steps, there should be a complete and mutual cease-fire, a full withdrawal from the Palestinian populated areas, removal of all the military checkpoints, massive release of prisoners, and dismantling of the so-called illegal settlements posts. Such measures could create a new environment and give hope for the Palestinian population that the political path did not fail. All the efforts to confront Hamas, without undertaking a dramatic step such as pushing for an accord based on the Arab peace initiative will be meaningless. And without offering a genuine political alternative, extremism and fundamentalism will continue to succeed. □

# Is Jimmy Carter to the Left of Tony Blair?

By Joe Sims

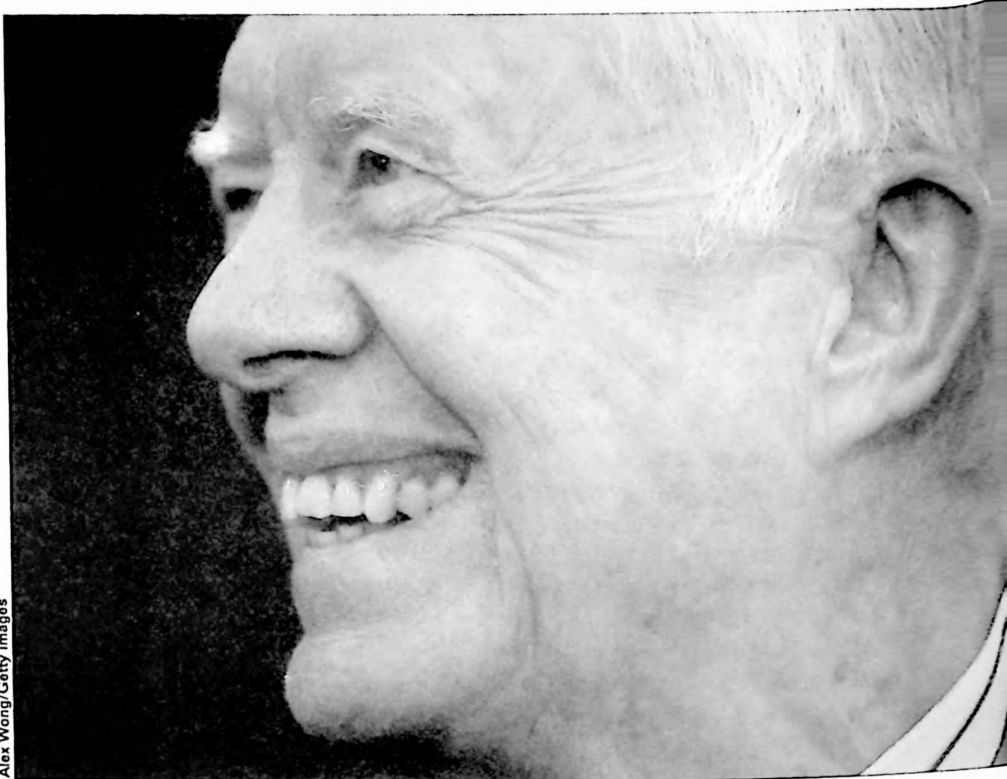
Is centrist Jimmy Carter to the left of outgoing "new" labor socialist Prime Minister Tony Blair? In a BBC interview recently, Carter sharply took on Blair's support for the Iraq war, calling it, "Abominable. Loyal, blind, apparently subservient." He continued, "I think that the almost undeviating support by Great Britain for the ill-advised policies of President Bush in Iraq have been a major tragedy for the world."

Damn. Carter had previously critiqued Blair support of the war, as reported by CommonDreams.org last March. At that time Carter said both Blair and Bush knew their decision was based on faulty and fuzzy intelligence. CommonDreams.org writer Andrew Bucombe wrote recently that,

In an interview with *The Independent* on the first anniversary of the American and British invasion of Iraq, Mr. Carter, who was president from 1977 to 1981, said the two leaders probably knew that many of the claims being made about Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction were based on imperfect intelligence.

Carter's stinging critique coincides with Blair's current farewell visit to Iraq and much commentary accessing the Labor prime minister's political legacy and ideological residue, commentary that makes one wonder how is it that a centrist Democrat from Plains, Georgia arrived to the left of London-based Blair. In fact it makes one wonder, what in fact it means to be on the left today.

This problem was placed in bold relief when listening to a National Public Radio rebroadcast of a BBC debate between two



Alex Wong/Getty Images

△ Former President Jimmy Carter has re-entered the public eye with sharp criticisms of the Bush administration and controversial analysis of the Middle East conflict.

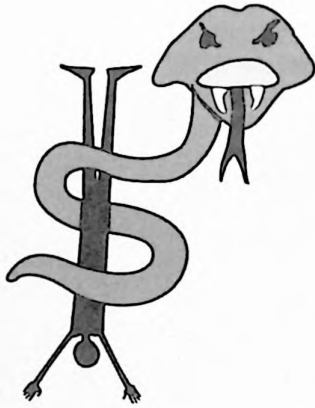
erstwhile British leftists, one who had abandoned all hope of "traditional left solutions" (read public ownership), the other an editor of the magazine *Red Pepper* who still nurtured a belief in equality and democracy, even if of the "another world is possible" variety. Blair, they suggested, took his ideological lead from the Democratic Council's Bill Clinton third way philosophy of triangulation, seeking to take the best of right and left and forge a new political synthesis. Labor's Blair and indeed the prime minister designate, Gordon Brown, with this "new" ideological dispensation, want to use the market to achieve traditional socialist aims. With the old Communist left, in their view, completely discredited, this only makes sense using China's "use of the market to lift hundreds of millions out of poverty" as proof positive of the assertion. To be fair, the editor of *Red Pepper* was less supportive of this pro-market view, but she also declined old "Stalinist" solutions.

What is so striking is how deeply Thatcherism's There is No Alternative (TINA) ideology has penetrated this segment of left thinking. So much so that what Carter criticized with regard to Blair's political posture could equally be applied to these folks ideological perspective. "Abominable, blind, loyal, apparently subservient." No wonder why Blair and company are viewed as lap dogs. OK. Name-calling doesn't help. But how else can you describe this bowing down before US imperial policy and the dictates of the market? As if the market were some value free panacea, without history, existing outside of time and space.

Hello!?! Does anyone remember we are celebrating the 200th anniversary of the end of the British slave trade, a slave trade that cost 60 million African lives? That's the capitalist market. Or how about World War I? Still too distant, another era maybe? Well, what about today's slaughter in the Congo.

# That's Capitalism

By Owen Williamson



- The American Psychological Association (APA) is divided over the participation by its members in the development of torture techniques used at the illegal American detention center at Guantánamo and elsewhere. Recently declassified documents prove that civilian psychologists who previously helped design programs for US troops to resist torture were hired by the CIA after September 11 to "reverse engineer" their courses in order to produce and fine-tune non-lethal torture techniques, including prolonged isolation and sensory deprivation, sexual humiliation and waterboarding, that ultimately

become impossible for detainees to resist. Two psychologists, James Mitchell and Bruce Jessen, are now under Congressional investigation, while the name of another psychologist, a Dr. Shumate, has also been raised in connection with ethically questionable activities. The APA has guidelines that effectively allow its members to participate in military interrogation, unlike its sister group, the American Psychiatric Association, which has reacted to these reports with horror.

⌘

- Lauren Turner, director of Google's medical and health care search engine, Google Health, has urged pharmaceutical manufacturers, hospital chains and health care corporations to buy attack-advertising (on Google, of course!) to counter the "bad press" that Moore is giving their industry with his latest production, *Sicko*. Turner's attacks against Moore have been so acerbic that she was later forced to clarify that her opinions were personal and not corporate.

⌘

- According to *New York Times* reports, the United States is spending about \$300 million a day (more than \$2 billion a week) on the war in Iraq. Kennedy School of Government economist Linda Blimes and Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz recently warned that the total real cost of the Iraq war may ulti-

mately exceed two trillion dollars, enough to build both Iraq and the USA an unparalleled industrial base that would offer every citizen of both our countries a well-paid job with a comfortable middle-class standard of living for life. Instead, Iraq now has unemployment estimated at over 70% and roughly 32% of Iraqis now live in "extreme poverty," defined as less than a dollar a day. Half of all Iraqi children suffer from some form of malnutrition, and the country now has one of the highest infant mortality rates in the world.

⌘

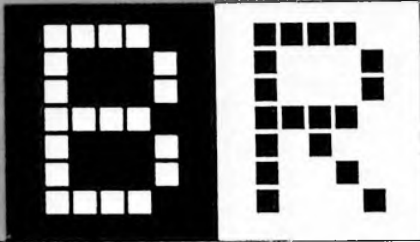
- Reality check: How many members does Al Qaeda actually have? In a 2006 *Harpers Magazine* article researcher Ken Silverstein suggested that the true number of sworn, full time Al Qaeda fighters has never exceeded 1,000, most of them in Afghanistan. It took the Allies about six years of hard fighting (from 1939 to 1945) to beat to the ground then-superpowers Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, along with Fascist Italy. In the six years since September 2001, even spending two billion dollars a week, the world's only remaining superpower has been unable to defeat an enemy whose number is clearly less than the population of Belize, Vanuatu or the Republic of San Marino. And to think there are still wackos who rant about taking on Cuba, Korea, Venezuela or even China! Earth to neo-cons: think again, boys! □

No wonder why Blair and company are viewed as lap dogs. OK. Name-calling doesn't help. But how else can you describe this bowing down before US imperial policy and the dictates of the market?

Darfur or the Iraq war. All of these are demonstrably market driven conflicts.

It was striking too that Latin America's sharp left turn was notoriously absent from their Europe-is-the-center-of-the-world thinking. Here, public, socially-owned solutions are being attempted in new 21st century scientific socialist experiments. Attempts that, learning from the mistakes of the past, seek to combine market mechanisms with public ownership, and democratic people-run economies and governments. Perhaps here and in other parts of the world – including the US and Europe – a new "triangulation" might occur, jettisoning the right, but combining the

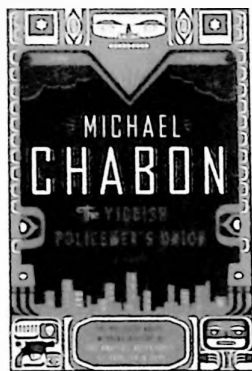
best of the old left (while boldly ridding itself of the abominations of the past) with new 21st century scientific socialist initiatives. Sadly, though, until these take firm root, what was left moves to the right, allowing honest "center" forces like Carter, to take defiant and principled stands on grounds once proudly occupied by labor's left. □



## BOOK REVIEWS

### The Yiddish Policemen's Union.

Michael Chabon, New York: HarperCollins, 2007.



Reviewed by Martha Kramer

In Michael Chabon's latest novel, *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*, Meyer Landsman is a member of the Yiddish Policemen's Union by virtue of being a homicide detective at Sitka Central, in the Provisional Jewish Settlement in Sitka, Alaska. And he's at the end of his rope.

His sister, whom he loved dearly, has just died in an airplane accident. His ex-wife and former partner has been promoted to be his boss. Alcohol has replaced food for his nourishment. To top it off, a neighbor, whom he hadn't known from Adam, has just been shot. And they're pounding on his door in the wee hours to get him to check it out.

Sitka, Alaska is a real place. But Chabon has transformed it into a sanctuary for Jews fleeing Nazi Germany more than 60 years ago. In this counterfactual history, the US government did allow millions of Jews to come to America. As a result millions were spared the Nazi holocaust.

But they were sent to this provisional paradise in southeastern Alaska, where they hold a tenuous refugee status, which now in 2007 is about to be revoked. The US government is going to dissolve Sitka's provisional status in two months, and rumor has it that only about 40 percent of the people are going to get permanent resident status, or green cards. Maybe even fewer.

And because in this story Israel was never established in 1948 – the Zionists were expelled by the Arabs – there is no homeland to return to. Some are moving to Canada. Others to Argentina, Madagascar, Russia, who knows where. All they know is that they are no longer welcome in America.

Sitka is no paradise. While the province has retained relative autonomy from overt outside interference, various religious sects compete for power, sometimes violently. Russian and Jewish gangsters also battle for supremacy. The competition for land and resources with local indigenous peoples has sometimes turned violent as well, fostering decades of animosity between the Tlingits and the Jews.

Now that this island of Jewish refugees is about to revert to US control and many thousands forcibly expelled, there is no more use for a Jewish police department. Landsman, his ex-wife commander orders, has two months to close out his cases, no ifs, ands or buts. If you can't find the perpetrator, find someone you can pin the crime on. No

new cases either.

But Landsman isn't satisfied with this order. His latest murder victim is unidentified, but appears to have been an avid chess player who was addicted to heroin. Something about this mysterious person compels Landsman to dig further, contrary to orders. Chabon's tale takes us with Landsman, a self-described cynical Jew, and his zealous half-Indian, half-Jewish partner, Berko Shemets, through the fictive city of Sitka in search of the identity of this latest unfortunate.

In the process, they uncover startling secrets about the city's history and the future of the Jewish people.

Chabon's magnificent story is a well-crafted postmodern tale about the search for the elusive fixity of religious and national identity. Like all well-done detective fiction, this novel is about the alienated, cynical individual's search for personal redemption, as well as a gradual uncovering of

Chabon's magnificent story is a well-crafted postmodern tale about the search for the elusive fixity of religious and national identity.

the powerful forces behind a seemingly isolated and insignificant event.

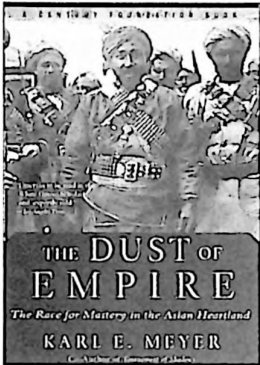
What sets Chabon apart from and above most other writers in this genre, however, is his great skill with language. Within a few sentences, I often found myself by turns surprised, laughing, and moved to tears. Chabon's descriptive turns of phrase are unmatched. Consider this 1940's noiresque imagery: "Night is an orange smear over Sitka, a compound of fog and the light of sodium-vapor streetlamps. It has the translucence of onions cooked in chicken fat."

Or, in a moment of vulnerability and intimacy between Landsman and his partner Berko, Chabon describes Berko's realization of Landsman's emotional pain thus: "Berko notes also that Landsman has been crying; one eyebrow shoots up, hangs suspended, drifts down like a tablecloth settling onto a table."

This may be one of the best novels of 2007, and is certainly a worthwhile read on a free weekend spent curled up on the couch. □

## The Dust of Empire: The Race for Mastery in the Asian Heartland.

Karl E. Meyer, New York: Public Affairs, 2004.



Reviewed by Emilian Kavalski

Since the Ukrainian revolution in December 2004, the wave of an "orange" revolution has swept through the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Middle East. It involved a popular uprising against the veteran Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze, followed by an analogous ousting of the president of Kyrgyzstan, Askar Akaev. Similar demonstrations in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, however,

were less fortunate in their objectives, and especially the Uzbek President Islam Karimov went out of his way in the use of violence and the military to suppress (if not annihilate) the protesters. Orange was also the dominant color of the anti-Syrian opposition during the August 2005 elections in Lebanon and more recently it has been the color of resistance of Jewish settlers during the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. The dominant query underwriting the media coverage of these events has focused on the sources and reasons for the volatility of these countries.

In this respect, Karl E. Meyer's book provides a background against which these "orange" events could be analyzed. His account sweeps the area framed by Ukraine and the Black Sea to the west, Russia to the north, China to the east and India in the south. This vast and diverse landmass encompasses Iran, the former Soviet states in the Caucasus and in Central Asia, including Afghanistan and Pakistan. Meyer proffers the term "Central Eurasia" as the common denominator of this area. His argument is that the main reason for the instability of this region is the legacy of Western imperialism – primarily its British and American variants. Meyer's book is, therefore, a thinly veiled attack on Washington's historical tendency to rule by proxy leaders (in lieu of creating a formal empire) that underscores its endemic unilateralism in foreign affairs. He argues that indirect domination is one of the most certain ways to polarize the societies governed in this way, increase the significance of local symbols (as has been the case with radical Islam) and enhance their allure as weapons of resistance.

Premising his inference on cases such as the Philippines, Cuba and Iran under the Shah, Meyer contends that there are two main reasons for Washington's policy of indirect domination: the US predilection towards unilateral action and the overwhelming ignorance of the American public about the history, geography and context of other parts of the world. The latter point implicates the target audience

The policy-making of successive presidential administrations has benefited from (if not encouraged) such sweeping "asymmetry of knowledge," which allows Americans to travel the world knowing little about the history, culture and language of the countries they visit.

of Meyer's book – American readers. In this respect, he provides a somewhat sweeping account of the history and politics of Central Eurasia, which however is balanced by a reference list that suggests further texts detailing various events and occurrences. Meyer also provides a discussion of the British and American imperial projects, which he puts in the context of the US invasion of Iraq. His thesis is that the moral and diplomatic dilemmas confronting the US today differ only in degree but not in kind from those faced by Britain prior to World War II. Then, the suggestion is that the policy-making of successive presidential administrations has benefited from (if not encouraged) such sweeping "asymmetry of knowledge," which allows Americans to travel the world knowing little about the history, culture and language of the countries they visit, while non-Americans do not have that option. As a result, Meyer claims that "Americans tend to live in a perpetual present, viewing the past as at best a diverting idyll, suitable for theme parks."

Hence, he intends his book as a revival of American public interest in Central Eurasia in the expectation that an informed public opinion would pressure Washington to opt for multilateral approaches that would favor not only the US interests but also those of the people living in this vast area. The verdict on the extent to which Meyer succeeds in this endeavor is still out; however, it is undeniable that his book is worth a read. □

**Flight**

Sherman Alexie's, New York, Black Cat, 2007.



Reviewed by Clara West

**W**ith its ironic play on Herman Melville's classic opening line and its nod to the magical realists such as Marquez, Sherman Alexie's latest novel, *Flight*, walks the fine line between the nightmare of history and the possibility of hope.

Zits has been abandoned. He is a 15-year-old Native American youth who has moved from foster home to foster home.

He has been in and out of juvenile detention facilities, and has been drinking on the streets with homeless people since he was 11. When greeted one morning by his newest foster family at breakfast, he says nothing except "whatever." Needless to say, he has trouble with authority, and he is about to become a mass murderer.

Zits is plagued by the absent father who abandoned his mother at his birth. His loss is further deepened upon his mother's death at a young age. But recently he has met a new friend who fills the void. Justice is the name of the beautiful white boy who seems to understand his pain, anger and loss. Justice seems to understand both the historical experience of racism and conquest experienced by American Indian nations and the means for overcoming: violence.

Justice gives Zits his first taste of power; power that comes from seeing fear and terror on the faces of those to whom he is about to do violence. Perhaps guns and killing can redeem Zits from the life into which he has been abandoned.

But before Zits can go through with the horrendous act of mowing down the random customers in a bank he happens to walk into, he is transported through time and space into the lives and experiences of different individuals. First, he awakens in the body of a white FBI agent investigating the alleged activities of American Indian rebels in the 1970's. He participates in the killing of one activist – in the name of a different kind of justice – and quickly discovers his own repulsion at killing.

Zits learns that both the FBI's and Justice's violent means of attaining "justice" are indistinguishable in practice and outcome. "How can you tell the difference between the good guys and the bad guys when they say the same things?"

Transported into the bodies and experiences of a 19th-century US calvary scout on the trail of Crazy Horse, a white pilot, and his own father, Zits learns that "revenge is a circle inside of a circle inside of a circle." Betrayal is commonplace

Maybe the lesson Zits learns is simple. Don't kill people because "all life is sacred." Don't betray. Don't hate. Don't leave your babies alone.

in the human condition, and even trust itself is little more than the first step to more betrayal.

Maybe the lesson Zits learns is simple. Don't kill people because "all life is sacred." Don't betray. Don't hate. Don't leave your babies alone. Where does this cycle end?

In some ways, *Flight* is a tale of the search for identity. At one point, Zits wishes he could be a "real Indian." But what, after all, is that? And who is there to teach him? He also learns that, despite his personal horrible experiences with white people and the historical experience of Native Americans with white people, there must be a difference between being white and "whiteness." But is it possible for Zits to survive or thrive in these two worlds?

Alexie's novel is extraordinary in its sweet simplicity. It locates the personal and internal human life within the framework of history and a system of racial supremacy that produces a cycle of division, devaluing and violence in order to perpetuate itself. But because human beings have made this system, they also have the ability to short circuit that cycle for their own and, perhaps, the entire species' survival.

Bravo to Alexie for another brilliant work. □

# HARD ROAD HOME

Reviewed by Anthony Papa

Statistically, it is well known that if you wind up in prison and are lucky enough to get out, you will be going back some time soon. Julio Medina is someone who has beaten the odds hands down. It was a long way from prison and his past life as a drug dealer when he stood beside President George W. Bush at the White House National Conference of Faith Based Community Initiatives in 2004.

Medina served 12 years in prison for his crime. He spent countless days and nights in his cell thinking about how could he change his life around and use his experience to help others. He attended New York Theological Seminary while at Sing Sing prison and when he was released he put his plan to help others in action. The first job he landed as a substance abuse counselor working with ex-offenders quickly brought him the realization that the men and women he counseled struggled to fit within a free society because of the defense mechanisms that they had built up to survive the prison experience. Julio then vowed to help them break the repetitive cycle of recidivism he was witnessing.

In 1999, Julio opened Exodus Transitional Community in East Harlem, New York, to assist formerly incarcerated men and women as they integrate back into the community. His organization offers social, economic, educational and spiritual support to individuals in transition from incarceration, drug addiction and homelessness. Exodus's services include counseling, employment preparation, job, housing, health and education referrals, court and parole assistance, and computer training. The amazing thing about Exodus is that its staff consists entirely of ex-offenders or individuals directly affected by incarceration.



Throughout the film its characters aspire to freedom and security "on the outside," while grappling with the constant challenges posed by poverty, addiction and the relentlessness of rage and despair brought on from their incarceration.

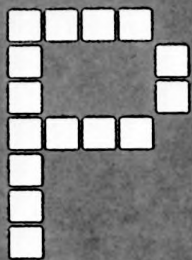
Exodus also provides HIV/AIDS education and referrals for the person released from prison and his or her partners, spouses, friends and families. Other activities include an after-school group with neighborhood youth and gang members and a speakers' bureau of formerly incarcerated persons who make presentations to raise public awareness about prison conditions and the impact of incarceration on individuals and communities. Its life-altering approach is based on a "contract," an assessment tool and action plan, by which participants evaluate their status in areas of family, physical well-being, education/vocation, and community involve-

ment. The self-evaluation is the basis for formulating goals and plans and encouraging each individual to take back control of his or her life.

So impressed with Julio and his organization filmmaker Macky Alston recently captured Julio's life-saving organization in a new documentary titled, *Hard Road Home*. Throughout the film its characters aspire to freedom and security "on the outside," while grappling with the constant challenges posed by poverty, addiction and the relentlessness of rage and despair brought on from their incarceration. Just when things look good, someone you've come to care about falls apart. Just when you have given up hope, someone beats the odds and hangs in.

Julio Media is the first one to admit that life after prison is indeed a "hard road home." But with the dedication of caring individuals like himself and the staff of Exodus, one can be assured that the cycle of recidivism can be broken if the correct ingredients are applied to those who re-enter society. □

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THIS FILM AND HOW TO SEE IT BY GOING ONLINE AT [WWW.HARDROADHOME.ORG](http://WWW.HARDROADHOME.ORG)



## POETRY

### Alone with the Shoe Manufacturer in His Memorial Park

You bang on the statue's metal knee  
and speed off, chasing around the square.  
You think you're such a flash  
with your red shirt flapping in the breeze.  
Then you are long gone and I'm alone  
with Endicott Johnson, his calm hand  
clenched against one ringing, greenish knee.  
I stroke the cold wrist of industrial man,  
a chill straight through the finger bone.  
One docile boy and girl kneel at his side  
in shoes no mother's love could bronze so huge.  
And four feet down a thickly muscled man of iron broods  
on his mystical code: Labor is Honorable.

Here are the first uncertainties  
of spring, but nothing comforts me,  
gone stiff with terror, surrounded by the dead  
and silent birds sleeping in the trees.  
I find dark hieroglyphs on the girl's lace hem.  
Have faith in the people. But where are they?  
The iron boy studies his anchored shoe.  
Some stranger runs maniacally at me,  
mouth open in wind, hair like a nimbus  
lit by the greasy streetlamp glare.  
I grab at his cool familiar hand, the streak  
of red life leaping through the shadowy park.

– Liz Rosenberg

Reprinted with permission from *The Fire Music* by Liz Rosenberg  
University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986

Illustration by Ryan Studley



### The Carpenter Uses Nails: American Soldiers in Vietnam and Iraq

The grunts wait, like cheap nails  
to be hammered into the earth  
as if all the world was fragile wood.  
Generals and other officers in the field  
were not as sublime, or sure of themselves  
as they thought themselves to be,  
in the bitter rice fields,  
and deserts searing with heat,  
scorched like a cleaner's hot iron.  
Killer carpenters, they pound human nails  
into blood-stained wood,  
shattering brain matter  
scattering memories now chiselled  
into history by words.

– Luis Lazaro Tijerina





### Leopardi at Chávez Ravine - 1946\*

That gentle orb, the moon, drifts light & airy through this windswept night.  
Dancing, round & full, high above the shabby rows of buildings,  
Happy as a peasant girl, bright & plump –  
Her kindly heart & head awl, her skirts flying,  
As the candles of Saturday burn down to waxen smoke.  
In this dusty village, a shepherd husbands home his herd of clouds,  
His bleating flock. The bellwether's clank, the dog's muffled bark,  
Hush klaxon clash & ease a bit the grind of Time.  
As lights come on across the shadowed hills  
Of Griffith & Elysian Park.  
Suddenly, a letter 10 feet high, sputters, sparks, flares –  
Shooting stars off the Hollywood sign.  
The hermit of the park takes note – drawing deeper  
Within his blanket. Clutching tight his army coat.  
Each spark's a dead friend's face, a twenty year march,  
& still they come.  
Now the wind reaches Bunker Hill, its hot fingers touch  
Each Victorian as if for the last time.

"Something's going from the world"

Thinks the maiden lady in her furnished room.  
Her treasures rest in a candy tin,  
Her false eye floats, sleepless in a glass.  
She touches the cameo at her throat.  
She knew the hermit as he was before before fire & shock erased  
his mind,  
Like a forest cleansed by flame is turned to chartless waste--  
No marker left, or stone.

I rested my crook't back against a tree, dreaming for a time.  
On waking, took up pen & ink fulfilling my fate as unnamed  
scribe  
Laureate of this desert sprawl, before freeway or Interstate,  
Before bulldozer & wrecking ball.

Frog & cricket vie for my ear.  
The Andrew Sisters & Krupa drift up  
From the unbridled juke at Club LA.  
The *canciones* of the Santana delivers up  
This brief gift

The goddess of the moon steps down, to take my hand & draw  
me up.  
We dance, at 78 rpms, three minutes straight.

All I could ask of this place? That it might never change.

Let the machinery fall idle, & the rich,  
Grown senile in their counting houses,  
Forget us.

– Michael Shepler

\*Giacomo Leopardi: 1798-1837: Italian lyric poet of the moon, solitude,  
nature and lost love. Melancholy, yet never despairing, never unconsolated  
by earth's beauty.

\*Chávez Ravine: A small community in Los Angeles consisting of working  
poor of all races, Anglo, Black and predominately Hispanic. These people  
were dispossessed and their community destroyed in 1959 when the  
City of Los Angeles made a deal to import the the Brooklyn Dodgers  
and house them in a new stadium built on the former neighborhood that  
had been Chávez Ravine.

# THE BIOLOGICAL WAR

## AGAINST COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

# SLAM DUMP

By Lawrence Albright

One of the central tenets of civil rights regulations as they presently exist in the United States is that an individual cannot be subjected to retaliatory actions following the assertion of their rights. By enacting these anti-retaliatory measures, the legislative interest of the Congress was to insure that individuals who were genuinely aggrieved by discrimination would not be reluctant to file complaints and litigation.

Recently, both the Equal Employment

Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) released statistics for fiscal year 2006 that indicated it was a banner year for complaints of discrimination. This certainly points to the wisdom of federal legislators in mandating anti-retaliatory clauses. Sadly, it also gives mute testimony to the fact that discrimination continues to be a fact of life four decades after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964—and that incidences of discrimination have increased during the tenure of the ultra-right Bush administration.



Spencer Platt/Getty Images

▲ Mothers who live in apartments with high lead levels protest outside of a lead contaminated building in New York City.

To an extent, the statistics disclosed by EEOC and HUD are not surprising. In a political climate dominated by the ultra-right-ultimate-corporate culture, there are surely individuals who believe they have greater rein to discriminate, or at least to gamble that enforcement will be more lax during the Bush administration. Across the table, however, there has been substantial education that discrimination in employment and housing is against the law, and the mainstream media has often publicized the more sensational cases and their financial settlements.

By contrast, there has been substantially less media coverage on the topic of environmental racism.

Environmental racism was first defined by the Rev. Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr. in 1981 when he was serving as chairman of the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice. Chavis provided a definition of environmental racism that included the following features:

Bestowing an award on businesses and industry for environmental justice would be akin to the Department of Justice giving a posthumous award to 1930's desperado John Dillinger for his enduring contributions to the field of bank security.

- Racial discrimination in race-based differential enforcement of environmental rules and regulations;

- The intentional or unintentional targeting of minority communities for the location of polluting industries such as toxic waste disposal, and;

- The exclusion of people of color from public and private boards, commissions, and regulatory bodies.

In 1992, 11 years after Rev. Chavis issued his report, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) created an Office of Environmental Justice. Two years later, President Bill Clinton issued Executive Order 12898 ("Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations



Spencer Platt/Getty Images

△ Children who have high levels of lead in their blood walk past a peeling lead paint wall in their apartment in Brooklyn, New York City. While lead paint was banned in housing construction in New York in 1960, buildings built before 1960 still have high amounts of lead which landlords, especially in low-income communities of color, refuse to remove.

and Low-Income Populations") which provided for the creation of an "inter-agency working group" and established goals for:

each Federal agency [to] develop an agency-wide environmental justice strategy...that identifies and addresses disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations. The environmental justice strategy shall list programs, policies, planning and public participation processes, enforcement, and/or rulemakings related to human health or the environment that should be revised to, at a minimum: (1) promote enforcement of all health and environmental statutes in areas with minority populations and low-income populations; (2) ensure greater public participation; (3) improve research and data collection relating to the health of and environment of minority populations and low-income populations; and (4) identify differential patterns of consumption of natural resources among minority populations and low-income populations. In addition, the environmental justice strategy shall include, where appropriate, a timetable for undertaking identified revisions and consideration of economic and social implications of the revisions.

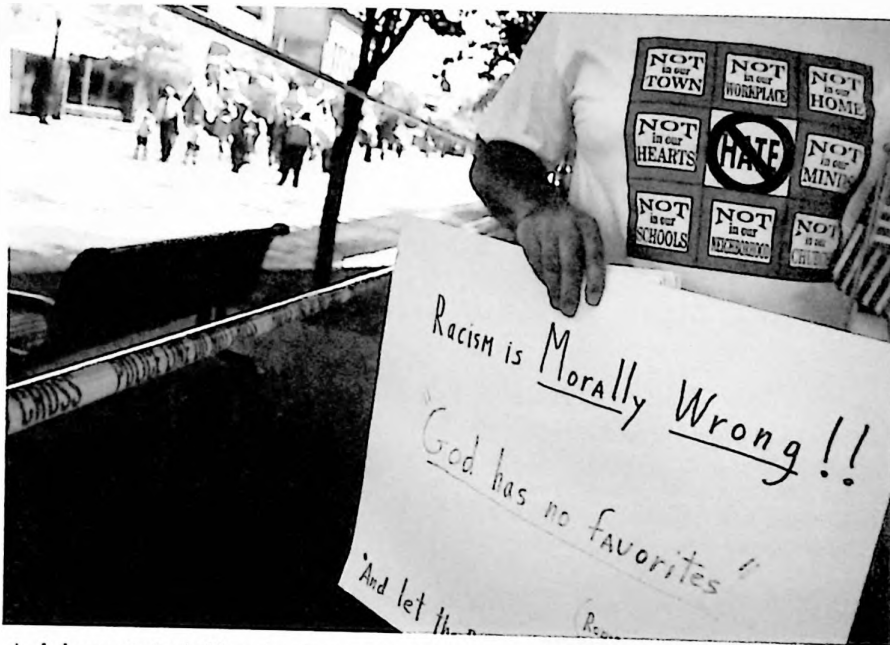
That same year (1994), a major report was released entitled "Toxic Wastes and Race Revisited" by authors Dr. Benjamin A.

Goldman and Laura Fitton. The key findings of this report were as follows:

- *The percentage of people of color is three times greater in communities with the highest levels of commercial hazardous waste management activity than in communities without hazardous waste facilities.* These communities have three commercial waste facilities, a commercial hazardous waste incinerator, or one of the largest commercial hazardous waste landfills. On average in 1993 people of color comprised one-half of the population in these communities (46 percent) compared to less than one-sixth the population (14 percent) in communities without commercial hazardous waste facilities. *The probability that this racial disparity is due to chance is less than 1 in 100;*

- *The percentage of people of color increased significantly in all communities with operating commercial hazardous waste landfills, from 22 to 36 percent of the average population.* This change from 1980 to 1993 represents a statistically significant 90 percent rise in the racial disparity between communities with landfills and those without. (From 1.79 times greater percentage people of color in 1980 to 2.48 times in 1993). *The probability that this racial disparity is due to chance is less than 1 in 100;*

- *The percentage of people of color increased significantly in communities with commercial hazardous waste facilities, from 25 percent to more than 30 percent of the average population.* This change from 1980 to 1993 represents a significant 9 percent rise in the racial disparity between communities with waste sites and those without



▲ A demonstrator holds a sign denouncing racism in America.

Jerome A. Polos/AFP/Getty Images

Environmental racism is most directly and immediately threatening low-income communities and people of color, but it is also every bit as threatening to every community since a healthy environment is one of the prerequisites to healthy lives.

(from 2.05 times greater percentage people of color in 1980 to 2.14 times in 1993). The probability that this racial disparity is due to chance is less than 1 in 1,000. (Goldman and Fitton, emphasis in original).

The findings of Goldman and Fitton were buttressed by James T. Hamilton one year later in an article entitled "Testing for Environmental Racism: Prejudice, Profits and Political Power" that appeared in the *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*. Hamilton used zip codes to test environmental racism, as did Goldman and Fitton. In contrast to Goldman and Fitton, whose statistical analysis did not draw any conclusions for the causes of the disparities, Hamilton

suggests that the hazardous waste industry has selected locations based on the expectation that communities of color are less likely to raise successful and collective challenges to their plans. Challenges to zoning plans in communities populated predominantly by whites have become so commonplace that they have been given their own acronym: NIMBY (Not in My Backyard).

Critics of the concept of environmental racism frequently point out that income plays a more important role than race in the matter of hazardous waste site location. Of course, the effort of these critics to postulate a disconnection between race and income levels is so ridiculous as to be undeserving of comment. Statistical studies have demonstrated for decades disparities in income based on both race and gender.

But in an effort to study the factual basis of environmental racism, the journal *Social Science Quarterly* published an article in 1997 entitled "Is there environmental racism?: The demographics of hazardous waste in Los Angeles County" by four distinguished academics who found that:

1. industrial land use and manufacturing employment do matter, as suggested by critics of environmental justice;

2. income has first a positive, then a negative effect on TSD location, a pattern that likely reflects the fact that the poorest communities have little economic activity while wealthier communities have the eco-

nomical and political power to resist negative environmental externalities; and

3. race and ethnicity are still significantly associated with [hazardous waste or landfill] location, even when percentage African American and percentage Latino are evaluated as separate groupings. Taken together, the results suggest that communities most affected by [hazardous waste] in the Los Angeles area are working-class communities of color located near industrial areas.

Earlier this year, two decades after its pioneering report, the United Church of Christ revisited environmental racism and issued a new analysis that disclosed:

Of the more than 9 million people estimated to live within 1.8 miles of the nation's 413 commercial waste facilities, more than 5.1 million are people of color, according to the report. That means that while people of color make up just a quarter of the general US population, they constitute about 60 percent of those living near waste facilities.

The authors of this report drew on information from the 2000 census, as well as Environmental Protection Agency databases of commercial waste facilities. The reports' authors listed some recommendations to turn the tide of environmental racism, including passing legislation that would protect communities of color, holding Congressional hearings on the EPA's response to waste contamination in communities of color, and requiring states to generate report cards on progress toward "environmental justice."

It must be pointed out that this propensity for environmental racism is not confined to the United States, and that US-based companies haven't hesitated to use developing nations like India for the dumping of hazardous wastes.

In August of 2006, the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council (NEJAC) met and issued a number of recommendations. In a letter dated August 10, 2006 and addressed to EPA Administrator Stephen L. Johnson, NEJAC Chair Richard Moore wrote:

There is a distinction between public participation and meaningful involvement. Meaningful involvement requires fully informed participants from all perspectives, all armed with the capacity to participate in policy

development as full partners. Moreover, the point of meaningful involvement is not only to formulate policy advice, but it must lead the way in to concrete results in achieving fair treatment.

Moore's letter continued,

If treatment is to be fair, it must reflect context and historical fact. The NEJAC is well aware that in the past, people of color and low-income community members have not had equal voice in public policy deliberations, and that these groups as a consequence have yet to realize fair treatment. If the goal is fair treatment for all, it must be acknowledged that some will need the support and resources necessary to finally participate as a full partner in the shaping and implementation of public policy.

Moore's letter then conveyed a series of recommendations.

*Award' for businesses and industry which have addressed environmental justice issues or achieved environmental justice goals in a manner resulting in positive community impacts.*" (Emphasis added).

Bestowing an award on businesses and industry for environmental justice would be akin to the US Department of Justice giving a posthumous award to 1930's desperado John Dillinger for his enduring contributions to the field of bank security.

The fact is that if environmental justice was a concern for the business and industry community involved in the transportation and disposal of hazardous wastes and the designation of landfills, environmental justice would have been accomplished long ago. But the fact is, these industries are concerned with their bottom line profit figures. And they have long ago factored in to these calculations that by preying upon communities of color, which they regard contemptuously as politically disempowered and far less likely

discussions are taking place, low-income communities and, increasingly, communities of color are struggling with both day-to-day and long-term survival on top of or near bubbling cauldrons of toxic crap so that as businesses become richer, they risk becoming sicker. Indeed, scores of women, men and children will doubtless suffer from cancer or other diseases of vital organs just so corporations can cut their overhead costs. Make no mistake, as President Bush is so fond of saying, pursuit of more dollars at marginal cost is what the ultra-right really is all about when they defend "American values." Who would have thought that "values" would have no moral or ethical implication – only a monetary one?

Dr. James E. Jackson, a long-time leading African American activist, put it best when he wrote that,

Capitalist society has become a sadistic torture chamber which grinds into dust the lofty ideals, the creative potential, the hopes for happiness, the longing for brotherhood and freedom, indeed the very lives of millions of people.... Racism is the blinders on the eyes of the white working people which prevents them from seeing the threat to, and violation of, their own self-interest when discrimination is tolerated against Black citizens.

(*Revolutionary Tracings*, International Publishers, 1974).

In the final analysis, environmental racism is *most directly and immediately threatening low-income communities and people of color*, but it is also every bit as threatening to every community since a healthy environment is one of the prerequisites to healthy lives. It is racism, environmental racism, that the businesses involved in hazardous waste and landfills are using as the prime mode of transportation to the bank which houses their profits. And it is hazardous waste and landfills which are truly, and beyond argument, among the weapons of mass destruction. □



Alex Wong/Getty Images

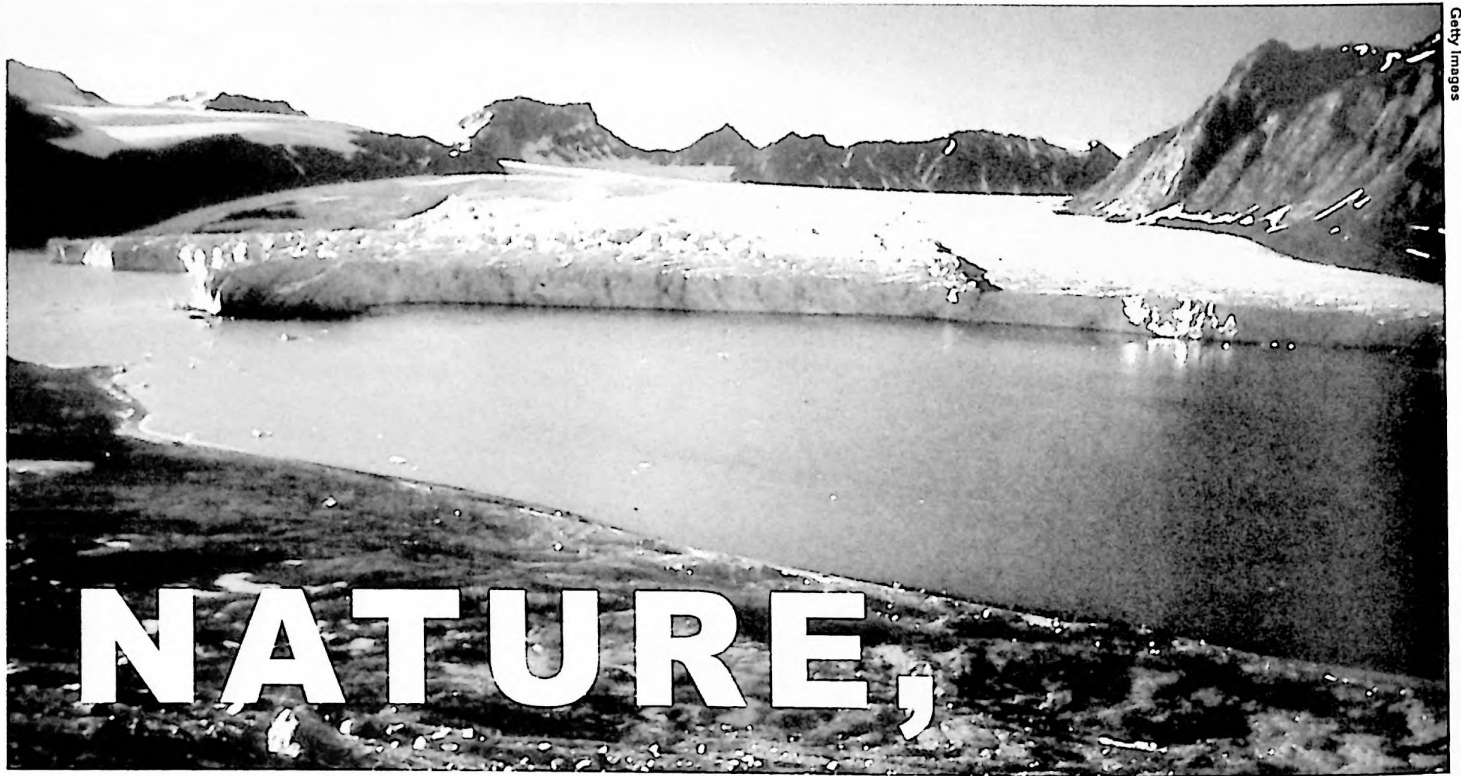
△ Women march in Washington against institutionalized racism.

In his response to Moore dated February 2, 2007 – almost a full six months after NEJAC had sent their recommendations – Granta Y. Nakayama, EPA's assistant administrator for enforcement and compliance assurance, wrote that EPA was "moving forward" with a number of initiatives including, "Establishment of an 'Environmental Justice

to engage in costly, class action litigation, they have little incentive to change their traditional practices. In contrast to NEJAC's specific focus and recommendations, the EPA responds with vagaries, awards, and a pledge to use a series of "workgroups," as recommended by NEJAC.

And while these decades-long-now dis-

▽ Global warming has melted the ice cap in Greenland by more than 2.5 cubic kilometers.



Gaety Images

# NATURE, SOCIETY AND HUMAN SURVIVAL

**Editor's Note:** This article is based on a longer essay, "The Dialectics of Climate Change," that addresses the ecological crisis in more detail, with more social and scientific examples. The complete essay relates dialectical materialism to the environment; provides a unified framework to help us understand the interrelationships between social, economic and environmental crises; addresses several contentious questions like China's role, nuclear power, and the practical and theoretical challenges that environmental crises pose for socialists and communists; and proposes a number of steps humanity needs to take to begin to deal with the most crucial climate change questions. This essay is available on the *PA* Web site, [www.politicalaffairs.net](http://www.politicalaffairs.net).

By Marc Brodine

**F**rederick Engels, in his graveside address for Marx, noted that "Marx discovered the law of development of human history: the simple fact, hitherto concealed by an overgrowth of ideology, that mankind must first of all eat, drink, have shelter and clothing, before it can pursue politics, science, art, religion, etc."

These are the fundamental realities of all human life: our lives are based on food, water, and resources that come from nature. As well, the ways in which we create and distribute food, drink and shel-

ter impact the natural world we depend on. We need nature for our survival. If the air becomes too polluted for human health, we can't simply breathe something else. Pollution that is blown away is blown away to somewhere else; it doesn't just disappear. We can't just stop eating; we require water.

Humans are not separate from their environment, and the environments of different countries are not separate from each other; what we experience in one region of the world is intimately connected to what people experience in other regions; what happens to natural global systems also happens to all of us.

All value to humanity comes either directly from nature, or from nature altered by human labor. If we compromise nature's ability to regenerate the materials we need for our survival, we compromise our own ability to survive. We face a series of linked environmental problems – from climate change, to water use, to soil depletion – which have the potential to negatively affect sea levels, weather systems, our ability to grow food and drink water, and other essential aspects of human life. We can't endlessly alter the balance of natural systems like the atmosphere or the oceans without suffering the consequences of that alteration.

There are direct human costs of capitalism, but there are also serious indirect costs, as capitalist production and agriculture exploit

▷ Filipino activists sunbathe in Manila during a climate change protest in a public park. The group demanded that local election candidates commit to renewable energy and stop ignoring the inevitable effects posed by climate change.



Joel Nino/AFP/Getty Images

the non-renewable resources we depend upon in an ever-speedier race to catastrophe.

Capitalism operates on several deadly assumptions: that nature is “free,” that natural resources are limitless, that the waste-absorbing capacity of nature is infinite, that economic activity and the natural world are separate, that short-term profit is more important than long-term sustainability, and that the production of more commodities without end is progress. This is in addition to the human exploitation and oppression capitalism engenders and profits from.

The potential of looming environmental catastrophe isn’t a single problem with a simple solution. The climate crisis, excessive garbage and toxic waste, an increasing list of endangered species, pollution and toxic chemicals in the air, water, soil, and in our food, our workplaces, and our homes, are among the myriad problems we face. When we are threatened with a series of related potential crises, the chances that one or another of them will happen are much greater. We can’t now predict exactly which of the interlocked environmental problems we face will first lead to major negative tipping points. But because we face so many related problems, we can be pretty sure that if we fail to act, one or another of these crises is going to get us.

That’s the nature of risk probability: many risks times many opportunities for system breakdown equals inevitable crisis. Because the world is a complex of interlocking processes with dynamic interrelationships, once any one of these crises hit, the chances of the others occurring escalate rapidly. More global warming results in more forest fires. More forest fires heat the atmosphere and result in more glacial melting, melting more permafrost, releasing more greenhouse gases, melting more glaciers, resulting in more forest fires, all of which increase global warming. The world is a series of giant feedback loops. And humanity is busy impacting those feedback loops.

The real question is: *will we continue to force these natural systems to work together against humanity? Or will we restructure our social, economic, agricultural, and industrial systems to work more in harmony with them?*

## Human Society Needs to Change

The adaptability of human social systems is more limited than general human adaptability. When oppressive, class-divided societ-

■ We can either work with nature, or nature will work against us. Nature doesn’t “care” about humanity; humanity must care about nature. We must work to enable nature to sustain us.



Adrian Dennis/AFP/Getty Images

△ A campaigner dressed as a polar bear in Grosvenor Square near the US Embassy in London protests calling for world leaders to act urgently on climate change.

ies are stressed by external events, whether war, economic crisis, or impending environmental collapse, the ruling class first transmits the main burdens of that crisis to the oppressed and exploited classes, using money and power to escape the consequences as long as possible. So the crises that threaten us are not just environmental, they are also crises of our social and economic systems and will accelerate social and economic problems, contributing to even more social instability and conflict. The genocide in Rwanda is one example – global

warming and competition for limited degraded agricultural land were not the only causes, but certainly exacerbated the genocide.

When a society comes into unresolvable conflict with its environment, there are three basic adaptations that can happen:

- the society can move elsewhere and continue as before in a new place (the main adaptation in ancient times),
- people can stay where they are and transform their society and economy, or
- the society and people can die out.

There are many examples of all three occurring over the course of human history, such as the Mesopotamian Fertile Crescent, North Africa, and Easter Island.

Our globalized economy and globalized environmental crises have left us with nowhere else to go. We can change our economic practices or else perish, or perhaps survive in a diminished fashion in a much more inhospitable world.

In the 10,000 years of agriculture and the four or five centuries of capitalism, humans have already transformed our relations with the microbial world, the seas, the vegetation, the crust of the earth, and

now the atmosphere. We have reached a new successional stage in our relations with the rest of nature. The ecological crisis of our species is inextricably entwined with capitalism and its inefficient use of resources for the profit of a relative handful of individuals.

If we create ways to transform our relationship to nature by changing our social and economic systems, we may be able to adapt and create a new ecology that enables our species to continue. Otherwise, we will be subjected to the often brutal workings of climate change and natural selection.

**We can't have healthy humanity  
without a healthy natural world.**

The world will survive. That is not in question. The earth has been through many more cataclysmic changes than global warming will bring. Nature *will* reach a new equilibrium. The question is whether or not our species will be able to survive that new balance. And if we are, will it be compatible with developed human existence, with the existence of human sustainability at a level of technological and cultural advancement and agricultural and water sufficiency.

We can either work with nature, or nature will work against us. Nature doesn't "care" about humanity; humanity must care about nature. We must work to enable nature to sustain us.

Most discussions of global climate change are limited in an odd way. The problems are seen as problems of human interaction with natural systems (which they are) or as problems in need of technological solutions (which they are). But little is done to connect any of this to our economic and social systems. In a private property system, when we collectively face problems that need collective solutions (and it doesn't get much bigger or more collective than global climate change, both on the problem side and the required solution side), we run into private property rights and private decision-making about production, land use, resources, disposal of waste, and investment.

The environmental problems we face are fundamental, so the solutions need to be fundamental. Solutions to our collective problems must be collective solutions.

A starting point is transforming the political and economic system from one that is ruled by a tiny class that privately expropriates maximum profit from socially-produced goods and services, to one led by the vast majority, motivated by the collective survival and sustainability needs of humanity as a whole. As with fundamental solutions to other problems such as racism, inequality, economic exploitation and others, socialism is a necessity for the survival of the human race – not a guarantee, but a necessary precondition for the kinds of fundamental solutions humanity needs. Socialists also need to understand that if capitalism does a bad enough job of ruining the environment, then the material basis for socialism will be harmed or destroyed.

Socialism is a necessary, essential aspect of the changes we need to make to protect the survival of our species, but it is not a sufficient condition by itself.

However, we can't wait for socialism to preserve our existence on this planet. We need to stop making things worse now. As well, confronting environmental problems and their social and economic causes are part of what will convince millions that we need socialism.



Pornchai Kittiwongsakul/AFP/Getty Images

△ Activists in Bangkok, Thailand march in front of the headquarters of the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) to protest against the bank's financial backing of the coal industry in Thailand which is contributing to community displacement, pollution and climate change.



## What More is Needed?

Socialism is crucial to the environmental, industrial, agricultural, and distribution changes we need to make, but by itself that won't be enough. We need to integrate socialist economics with environmental science.

The natural world we live in is not infinite, and the resources in and of nature are also not infinite. So our definition of the "greatest good" must not be the greatest amount of material goods, but rather improving the living and health standards of all humanity while facilitating the continual reproduction and restoration of the natural conditions which we need to survive. We can't have healthy humanity without a healthy natural world.

While the history of socialist countries contain positive environmental steps (such as Cuba's recycling, organic agriculture and reforestation programs), they also have produced some very negative examples. This is discussed in more detail in the complete essay, available online.

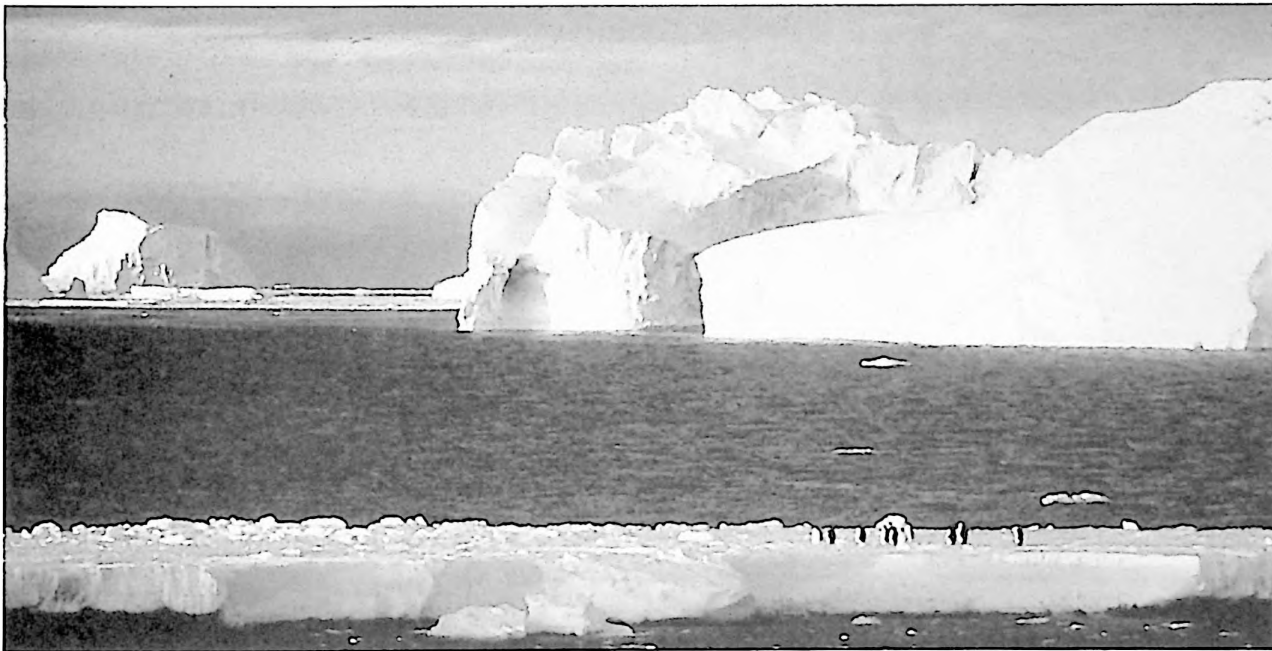
Ultimately, failures and problems of socialism represent a failure to think, research, plan and implement dialectically. Economics and

tribute goods, are necessary for our survival as a species. We have to redesign our industrial processes to eliminate the creation of pollution and take other steps to decrease the impact of human activity on the natural world, including reducing the impact of our agricultural systems and reducing over-reliance on chemical fertilizers, including reducing toxic chemical wastes. We have to restore and rebalance our relationships with nature.

The collective problems of humanity require the collective thinking and action of humanity. That is part of what socialist economic democracy must be about, the mobilization of our collective intelligence, ability and activity to solve our shared problems.

## What To Do

There are many steps we need to take to address the linked series of environmental problems facing humanity. Some are changes in individual behavior; others are major changes in how we produce food and industrial commodities. Both kinds of changes are needed – if we only focus on changing the habits of individuals but still keep running our industries in ways that continue to produce pollution,



Dr. Hans Ooster/AFP/Getty Images

△ This tabular iceberg recently broke away from Antarctica. Scientists see this breakaway as an important clue to the rate of global warming.

development are based on nature, based on the ability of nature to reproduce itself, and based on maintaining a healthy balance between human needs and the needs of the natural systems humanity depends on. If economics and development don't work to maintain that balance, they work against the survival of humanity, and that is as true of socialist development as any other kind.

We shouldn't use up non-renewable resources wastefully, like oil, and we can't act as if the waste-absorbing capacity of the natural world is infinite. Even renewable resources can be damaged by human activity – if water and soil are degraded faster than nature rebuilds them, they turn into non-renewable resources. Significant shifts in what and how we produce, and in how we package and dis-

CO<sub>2</sub> and methane, we won't make much of a dent in the problems. Social, economic, industrial and agricultural changes are required to solve environmental problems. Capitalism is a big part of the problem, and engaging in struggles to solve ecological crises are part of the path to replacing capitalism.

## Recognizing Necessity

Engels said that "freedom is the recognition of necessity." Only by recognizing environmental imperatives will we be free to make the right choices for humanity's survival. Only by recognizing the restraint required of us by natural systems can we become truly conscious factors in improving the world for ourselves and our descendants. □

# EXPOSED!

## POLICE BRUTALITY IN BUFFALO



Illustration by Chogrin

By Chris Stevenson

**A** talk show producer once told me that he breaks police officers down into three categories. Twenty percent of the officers are really good cops; they arrest dangerous criminals, they'll climb a tree to save your little girl's cat. Another 20 percent are flat-out evil, bad, corrupt, racist and abusive. And 60 percent are in the middle. Believe it or not it's the ones in the middle that are the biggest problem: they're the ones who will often be in a position to stop the malcontents and won't do it. An officer among the 60 will help cover up police misconduct, will at times side in favor of the

erring cop not really out of maliciousness, but in the spirit of going along to get along, and lasting long enough to collect his or her pension. This is a story about officers in all three categories.

Lawsuits are currently being filed in Buffalo, New York over cases that have nothing to do with public safety or fighting crime, but everything to do with harassment of inner city Blacks and the subsequent acts to keep these ridiculous behaviors from reaching the media. On November 1, 2006 a mailman flagged down an officer after witnessing a domestic squabble between a former live-in couple. Evidently, the former girlfriend of a Mr. Neal Mack stopped by his Walden Avenue

home to pick up an anticipated check that didn't come with Mack's batch of mail that day and the woman accused Mack of stealing her check. Along comes a really bad role of the dice known as Officer Greg Kwiatkowski – literally one of Buffalo's worst.

According to Mack's attorney Anthony Pendergrass, Mack was arrested because when Kwiatkowski and a backup officer who arrived at some point (Buffalo squad cars have only one officer per vehicle) at Mack's door, he asked them if they had a warrant and the officers indicated they didn't have one so he made an attempt to close his door. And the officers were said to have kicked the door open and according to Pendergrass:

"run rough-shod over his home... beating up his children – one under 18 – his adult son Neal Mack Jr., and his girlfriend. He was billy-clubbed over the head."

Mack, a middle-aged family man wasn't just weathering the current abuse, he was in danger of losing his life and probably would have if it weren't for a very bold and selfless action of a police officer who was about to arrive at that apartment. Officer Cariol (or Carol as she is known) Horn of Buffalo's C-District (formerly known as the Ugly-12th Precinct) says she got the call to the residence not knowing what the situation was or that another officer was there.

Officer Kwiatkowski went back on duty without suspension, just a 30-day administrative leave with pay – little more than a slap on the wrist for doing something he should have been arrested and fired for.

She disclosed to me her version of the incident: "When I got there Neal Mack was cuffed in the front and he was standing sideways while the cop (Kwiatkowski) was punching him in the face." Hmm, already cuffed, punching him in the face. What a brave soul this Kwiatkowski is. Officer Horn continued, "so the cop that was in front of me said 'Greg let me get him, let me cuff him in the back,' and Greg said 'no,' When I walked in there, Kwiatkowski continued to punch him in the face."

Considering that Officer Kwiatkowski's actions were a complete breakdown in police and public safety procedure, not to mention the uncalled for lack of total respect for a private citizen and his guests in his home, Horn said the only thing on her mind at that point was to get Mack out of the apartment. "Actually I was really thinking we'd better get him out of here before Kwiatkowski kills him," said Horn in an interview with me for the *Buffalo Criterion*. Other officers of course did arrive, but thanks to the determined Kwiatkowski, things didn't get any better.

Then Greg had Mr. Neal; he pulled him down to him and just started choking him with his arm (around Mr. Mack's neck). I was looking at the guys face and I said "Greg! Greg! You're choking him." So I grabbed his arm from around the guy's neck and he said "Get the F—k off of me" and punched me in my face.

When Kwiatkowski hit his own fellow officer because she stopped him from choking Mack, other officers stepped in to separate them both. Horn wasn't the only Black officer there but her quick thinking probably saved a life that Kwiatkowski may have been determined to take. Predictably she didn't receive a hero's welcome at downtown headquarters.

No less than eight charges were leveled against Horn by Buffalo's internal affairs division (known in Buffalo as Professional Standards Division) most relating to obstruction. Kwiatkowski accused Horn of jumping on his back, which she denies. Horn is not without her own prior issues with the depart-

all conventional thought of right and wrong and make a conscious effort to become totally obstinate (nothing new in Buffalo).

What makes this story still relevant is that Kwiatkowski has long been back on duty, while Horn is still considered IOD (injured on duty) pending a medical approval. I knew of the incident back when it happened, but the *Buffalo News* and the *Buffalo Challenger* covered it immediately (the *Challenger* – a Black paper – went into more detail). Officer Kwiatkowski went back on duty without suspension, just a 30-day administrative leave with pay – little more than a slap on the wrist for doing something he should have been arrested and fired for. This is not even my first story on him.

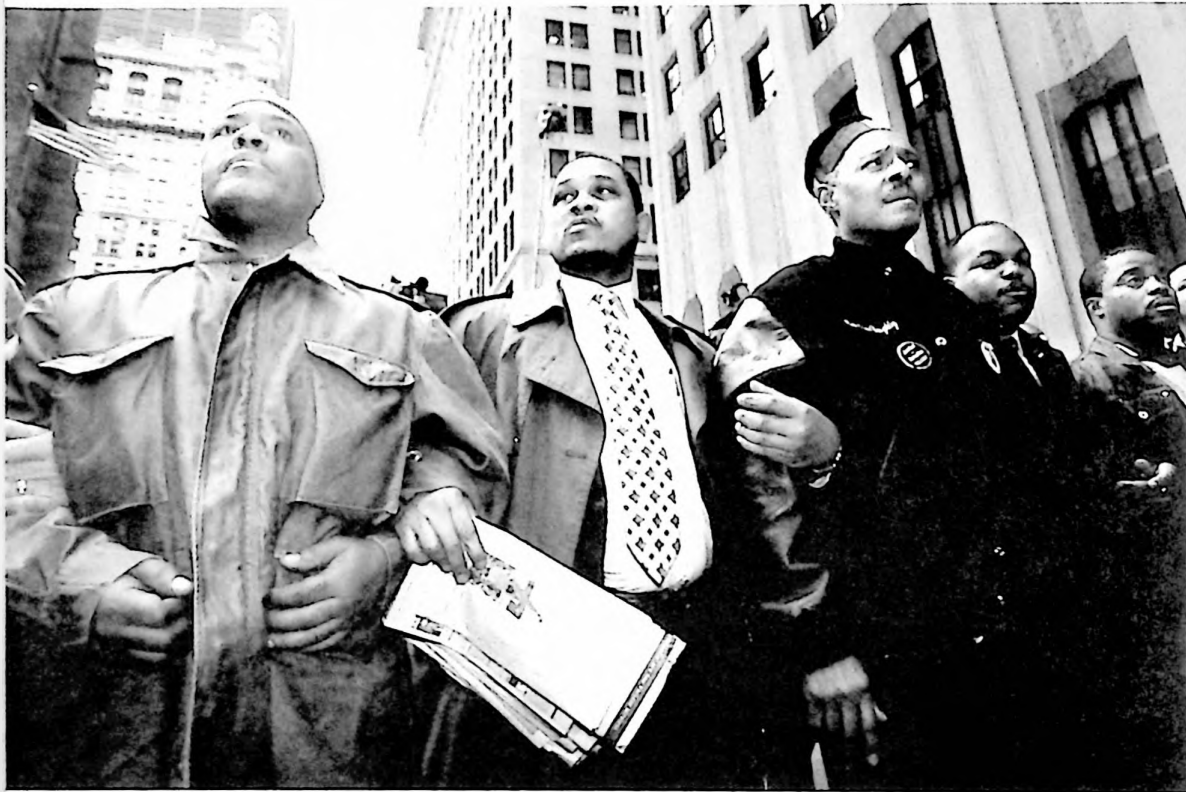
I spoke with Commissioner Gipson about this case several times now. Once myself and about eight local activists met with Mr. Gipson in a scheduled meeting in his conference room back on April 19 at downtown headquarters to see about getting Horn back on duty and to call for Kwiatkowski's



△ Protesters confront officers during a protest against police brutality.

ment, but she deserves more objective judgment. She was once fired years ago by the same PSD officer who is investigating this case: Carl Terranova. Eventually she fought it and was reinstated to the department. In order to understand Kwiatkowski's angle, one would have to bend his mind away from

ouster from the department. Our esteemed police chief heard what we had to say and basically told us his decisions weren't going to be influenced by public opinion. I think he feels that Horn is dodging it, but she's a tiny woman, shorter than average at just over 5'1". She can't shake a blow from a 6'2"



◀ Demonstrators protesting against police brutality wait to be arrested in New York.

Chris Hondros/Newsimages/Getty Images

guy like that the way a larger person might and just go back to work. Over the months she's suffered headaches. Gipson told me last July while returning one of my messages that even though he is the commissioner, there are laws that prevent him from firing Horn as well as Kwiatkowski.

Officer Horn has been before the elec-

tronic media and stated her case. Her last interview on a local Black talk show resulted in members of the local police department marching into the Apollo Theater studio with a fake subpoena or warrant demanding copies of the show. Kwiatkowski's Kooky Kops I call them (KKK). This also earned Horn three more charges from PSD including their most

It would send out a good message to the rest of Buffalo's head-case cops if the new commissioner removed a cancer like Kwiatkowski.



Michael Nagler/Getty Images

▲ Demonstrators protest police killings of African Americans.

precious, the one that both the commissioner and their internal affairs want out of her the most: a complete silence regarding all media contact. A couple of activists have told me this is just a way to get her quietly fired.

Kwiatkowski should have been fired long ago. I broke a story on him back in February 2000 where he at least in part helped start a fight in a bar after exchanging words with three men talking to two white females. Two of the three men were Black and whether or not any of the women is nobody's business. But the real kicker to this story is, the officers were said to have been intoxicated by this time. An interdepartmental memo I obtained from a police source admits they "created a problem in this bar," and, according to the memo, they were released from duty early by a supervisor after returning from a "training session."

Just what was this rigorous training session that evidently caused enough stress

that forced Kwiatkowski and his charge to seek the comforts of ye olde watering hole? Was it SWAT training? Perhaps they were training to go undercover. Nope. It was cultural diversity training. I even talked to the head of the training group back then, Brian Hayes. He said a police lieutenant told him that those guys got "stirred-up but in the wrong direction."

It would send out a good message to the rest of Buffalo's head-case cops if the new commissioner removed a cancer like Kwiatkowski. A new line of work would probably give the troubled officer a new perspective on life knowing he has to deal with various people without a uniform, badge and Glock to shield him.

As it turns out, all news isn't bad news. Charges against Mr. Neal Mack were recently dropped. They originally charged him with obstructing governmental administration (I guess if you want to call Kwiatkowski's actions "governmental administration" you are free to do so), petty larceny (for stealing a check that was assumed to have been in his own mailbox, even though that check had yet to be delivered), criminal mischief, and probably for not breathing hard enough while Kwiatkowski was choking him.

Mack's attorney Anthony Pendergrass moved for a dismissal of all charges based on one small factor; the initial arrest was unlawful. Pendergrass referenced an old case from 1980, *Payton v. New York*, in which the US Supreme Court ruled that "absent consent exigent (a situation requiring swift attention or action) circumstances, no home may be entered by the police for the purpose of arresting its occupant without an arrest warrant first being obtained." Honorable City Court Judge Debra Givins agreed with Pendergrass in June. It was a gutsy ruling by her, and rare for a Buffalo attorney to fight the case for Mack without the customary compromises that most area lawyers try and make their Black clients think they have to settle for.

Pendergrass says he is not within the local "old boy network" and a lot of Blacks don't even realize how deep that network runs. Most Blacks suspect the surface evidence. If a given city has an ample amount of industries leave, the fate of Blacks reverts to the hands of remaining corporations, white politicians on both parties and the judicial system.

Buffalo's network runs deeper still. Former longtime Deputy Assembly Speaker Arthur O. Eve recently stated on his Saturday

morning radio show that he and several ministers actually believe that Buffalo is suffering from a "43-year-old curse" that has kept our city from moving forward. Is this curse making Buffalo suffer more than other industrial cities hit with structural decline? Is Buffalo's racism more potent than racism in other cities like New York, Philly or Chicago? Bad cops exist as a result of certain white indus-

try and business leaders giving them the signal through the low hiring and redlining of working-class and business Blacks. The 60 percent complicit officers exit through Black indifference. Buffalo cops are not given to murder as they were in the early 1990's, but continued police abuse and disrespect of Blacks could lead to an unrest they haven't seen since the 1960's. □

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△ L to R: Nancy Lessin, Military Families Speak Out, Michael McPherson, executive director, Veterans for Peace, Charley Richardson, Military Families Speak Out talk at the United for Peace and Justice assembly.

# ENDING THE WAR

## PEACE ACTIVISTS MEET TO CHART COURSE

“Can we live in peace when more than a quarter of the world’s people live in poverty and all we can offer is increased war spending and more unwinnable wars?”

– Jeremy Corbyn

By Ben Sears

This was the over arching question posed by British MP Jeremy Corbyn, one of the prominent international guests at the recent national meeting of United for Peace and Justice in Chicago. Corbyn and the other guests encouraged the delegates as they tackled tough issues of organization and strategy during three days of intensive work. He told them that their decisions and future actions would, in turn, encourage people around the world.

Corbyn continued, “What we do is very, very important. It matters to the people of Palestine; it matters to the people of Iraq,” to see that people in the US and Britain are actively opposing their government’s imperialist policies. Corbyn was joined on the stage that night by an array of distinguished visitors from Middle Eastern and Asian nations that have resisted or are resisting US foreign policy. These included two Iraq trade-union leaders as well as Dr. Mona al Farah, vice president of Gaza Red Crescent; Tran Xuan

Thu and other plaintiffs in a lawsuit against Dow Chemical and 35 other corporations on behalf of millions of Vietnamese suffering from the use of chemical defoliants by the US during the Vietnam War; Gihad Ali, a young woman poet of Palestinian ancestry; and a group of Iranian cyclists who are touring the US to build friendship and understanding between our two countries.

The speakers at the Saturday evening public program were at once uplifting and sobering. Their message – the urgency of building a powerful US peace movement – resonated with the delegates. In plenary sessions and small group workshops they wrestled with the conference’s main challenge: reaching and mobilizing the 70 percent majority of the US population that opposes the Iraq war.

The proceedings showed that they were well aware of the connections between peace and justice, at home and abroad. For example, at the Saturday morning plenary session, the delegates heard Michael McPherson of Veterans for Peace tell how his organization had made the link between FEMA’s lack of response to refugees from Hurricane Katrina and the resources being wasted on the Iraq war. He emphasized the importance of making a difference in people’s immediate lives in order to win “strategic victories” by, for example, participating in a rally against police brutality in an American city as well as a rally against prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib. In confronting US imperialism he said

it was important “to fight the body as well as the tentacles.”

After hours of passionate but respectful discussion and debate, they set priorities and dates; they reached agreement on strategy and allowed for flexible tactics by local and regional organizations. They set October 27 as the target date for large regional demonstrations around the country for an end to the war and the occupation of Iraq. They elected a steering committee for the period ahead. UFPJ is, after all, a widely diverse coalition of organizations. Among its criteria are requirements that its various constituencies be represented on the steering committee: At least 50 percent women; at least 50 percent people of color; at least 20 percent youth and students; at least 15 percent LGBT identified persons. The steering committee is authorized to add groups in between national meetings if these minimums are not reached by the election process.

Among the key constituent groups at the meeting were delegates from the labor movement. John Cameron is political director of AFSCME in Illinois and an executive committee member of US Action. He told the delegates that US Action, after finding that the top issue with voters in the 2006 elections was the Iraq war, had refocused its activity and was working to bring in labor, African American and military leaders. His organization’s “Iraq summer” project has 100 organizers across the country in key districts to insure a super-

majority in Congress in 2008.

Labor's contribution to building the anti-war movement was underscored by the appearance of two Iraqi union leaders at the Saturday evening international program. Hashmeya Mohsen al Hussein of the electrical utility workers, is the first woman to lead a national union in Iraq. Faleh Abood Umara is the general secretary of the Iraqi Federation of Oil Unions. Their appearance was part of a national speaking tour to inform Americans about the struggles of Iraq's workers.

The labor delegates included some who had previously been active with US Labor Against the War (USLAW is a member organization of UFPJ) and those who were meeting that organization for the first time. Dorothea Wilson, past president of the retiree chapter of Philadelphia's AFSCME District Council 47, an affiliate of USLAW, was a first time delegate to UFPJ. She told *Political Affairs* "We should send more people next time. All of us have to be a part of this to bring the troops home. If funds were cut off, we would get them back faster." She also connected the gun violence ravaging American cities to the government's war priorities. "We've lost brothers, cousins, husbands.... We could use that money we've sent over there for our schools in Philadelphia."

Michael Zweig of SUNY's faculty and professional staff union was at the conference representing the 32,000 members of AFT local 2190, also a USLAW affiliate. He felt that it was important for the peace movement to bring in organized labor, since it represents "a constituency that has not traditionally been in

Activists wrestled with the conference's main challenge: reaching and mobilizing the 70 percent majority of the US population that opposes the Iraq war.

the house. Fifteen million people is a sizable group, and they are already organized and ready to use their power and experience." An example of the unique contribution that labor can make, he pointed out, was bringing the Iraqi trade unionists, "our co-workers," to the US. Their message made the link between the struggle for economic justice and peace. "They are protecting their jobs; they are also protecting the resources of their country. They are fighting the same corporations that we fight for contracts."

Zweig said that the "mainstream" media represents Iraqis either as terrorists or as helpless victims, but that most Iraqis are ordinary workers, "as are most Americans." Labor, which is "prepared to exercise power in a reasonable way... can show people that Iraqis can solve their own problems."

Zweig's comments reminded this writer that both of us had heard the Iraqi unionists in Philadelphia a few days earlier. There, in a lively question and answer session, they had expanded on the theme of labor's significance in Iraq and in working for peace. Hashmeya emphasized the multiethnic character of Iraq

and its labor movement. She told the audience that she, a Shia, left her 7-year-old son in the care of a Sunni woman and that Faleh is Shia and his wife is Sunni.

Faleh told of the oil workers' recent strike. When an Iraqi military commander refused a government order to arrest striking workers, saying "I will not arrest anyone who loves Iraq," the government had to agree to establish a broad based committee to recommend solutions to the problem of control of the nation's oil resources. And both leaders had ridiculed



Ben Saars/Political Affairs

△ Dorothea Wilson, delegate to the United for Peace national assembly from AFSCME DC 47, Philadelphia.



Ben Saars/Political Affairs

◁ Hashmeya Mohsen al Hussein, president of the Electrical Utility Workers of Iraq, talks with delegates at the United for Peace and Justice national assembly held in June in Chicago. Pictured on the left is Prasad Venugopal, science editor of *Political Affairs*.

the notion that Iraqis needed the "protection" of the US Army. "Did we fight among ourselves before the occupation?" Hashmeya said she believes that one of the aims of the occupation is to make Iraqis lose hope in their own future and to force them to accept the privatization of their national resources.

The Chicago UFPJ conference was memorable both because of the successful formal proceedings and the decisions reached and because of the countless sidebar conversations and discussions that enriched everyone's experience. Readers are urged to go to the Web sites of UFPJ and USLAW in order to get involved in what promises to be an active period in the struggle for both justice and peace. See: [www.unitedforpeace.org](http://www.unitedforpeace.org) and [www.uslaboragainstwar.org](http://www.uslaboragainstwar.org). □

# NICARAGUA'S SANDINISTAS

A BORN AGAIN  
SOCIAL-DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT



Yuri Cortez/AFP/Getty Images

▲ Children supporters of Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega celebrate Ortega's election victory. Can the Sandinista movement revitalize Nicaragua's struggle for social democracy?

By Brian Fitzparick

**T**he painting floored me, literally. My knees buckled; I sat on the floor and stared. Six feet high and four feet wide, the canvas on the stucco wall of the cultural center of Leon, Nicaragua spoke a thousand impassioned words. The blue-green tones depicted an agricultural valley surrounded by dark green mountains. At its center stood a life-size Latina peasant with slashed wrists; her blood dripped down her hands onto the fertile earth. To her left and right stood two brightly colored jesters; the first was Henry Kissinger, secretary of state under Presidents Nixon and Ford, the other was Caspar Weinberger, secretary of defense during the Reagan administration. On the woman's head and shoulders sat Ronald Reagan, holding a

**Somoza family** interests profited from Nicaraguan food processing, sugar, timber, cotton, gold, rubber, coffee, tobacco, cardboard, cement, meat, shrimp and lobster businesses, public railroads, water and electric utilities. In essence, Nicaragua became the Somozas' personal fiefdom.

pump shotgun and smiling his movie-scripted smile. Reagan's smarmy grin contrasted dramatically with the solemn demeanor of the Latina. A British student walked by and said, "That's a great painting. It says it all."

At the Denver airport a week earlier, I had met a couple who had just traveled to Costa Rica. We spoke about Costa Rica's spectacular geography, and I asked, "Have you ever crossed the border to Nicaragua?" She responded, "No, we're afraid of the communists there." I nodded, silently reflecting that although the cold war ended 15 years ago, its myopic mentality lives on. Just before we parted, she asked, "Where are you going?" I said, "Nicaragua." She gasped.

In March 2007 I spent several weeks traveling through Nicaragua, admiring its tropical beauty, meeting dozens of warm and engaging Nicaraguan families, and learning about the other side of the Contra war that so many



Americans, like the woman I had just met at the airport, knew so little about. Americans have been taught to fear communism. The word *communism* has been demonized, and when it is pasted onto people, they immediately become the enemy. The poor, Catholic farmers of Nicaragua were labeled communists in the 1980's and subsequently bombed. We Americans knew little of the reality on the ground in Nicaragua during that tragic era, nor did we know that the bloody Contra war was largely a war of the CIA's making. In 2006, Daniel Ortega, the former leader of the Sandinistas and a man portrayed as a communist devil by the Reagan administration, was once again elected president of Nicaragua. As I encountered the extraordinary Nicaraguan people and countryside this spring, I wondered what hope there was for Nicaragua to heal its wounds and begin a new chapter in its long-fought struggle for social justice and equitable development.

A block from the stunning painting in the Leon Cultural Center, the Museum of Heroes and Martyrs displays hundreds of photos of men and women who died fighting the Contra war from 1979 to 1989. I read the personal histories attached to the photos, and with utmost discretion glanced at the somber women sitting in the museum tending to the memories of their dead family members. The old curator approached and asked if she could help me. I looked into her thoughtful eyes. Her face was framed by photos of the Nicaraguans my government had killed; one of the photos was of her son. She wore a medal of the Virgin Mary and had rosary beads draped around her wrist. This woman and her son weren't diabolical, crazed, freedom-hating commies; they were poor, Catholic peasants struggling for justice and dignity. Overwhelmed by deep sadness for the ravages wrought by my government in the name of "freedom," I thanked the curator for her kindness.

## The Somoza Dynasty

The Somoza family governed Nicaragua for 43 years, from 1936 to 1979. Their regime is widely recognized as one of the most brutal dictatorships in Latin American history. For four decades, torture, mutilation, and murder were common governmental practice.

During this era, Anastasio Somoza and his sons controlled every aspect of Nicaraguan life. By the late 1970's Somoza family interests profited from Nicaraguan

food processing, sugar, timber, cotton, gold, rubber, coffee, tobacco, cardboard, cement, meat, shrimp and lobster businesses. They also profited from public railroads, water and electric utilities. In essence, Nicaragua became the Somozas' personal fiefdom.

Somoza's hold on power revolved around a three-pronged strategy: first, to keep the National Guard happy by allowing it to run gambling and prostitution rackets; second, to cater to Washington's interests and to wine, dine and influence US diplomats; and third, to bribe and coerce opposition leaders into compliance or complicity. This strategy succeeded for decades until a major earthquake in 1972 shattered the capital city of Managua. Somoza's iron grasp began to weaken when international relief funds never reached the quake victims; popular opinion blamed Somoza and his corrupt cabal for stealing the money. The Somozas' grip on Nicaragua was viewed with tacit approval by the US; President Franklin D. Roosevelt once said of Somoza, "Somoza is a son a bitch, but he's our son of a bitch."

*Time* magazine in partnership with CNN reported on March 14, 1977 about a typical day in "Somoza's Reign of Terror":

A 15-man patrol of the crack General Somoza battalion surrounded the village of Varilla in Nicaragua's Zelaya province. With the troops were police magistrates. The official, alleged charge that brought them there was that five of Varilla's rural families had aided anti-government guerrillas. The soldiers shot, bayoneted, or strangled 4 men, 11 women and 29 children. After dumping the bodies in an unmarked pit, the magistrates divided the villager's land among themselves.

During my travels, I heard numerous stories of similar atrocities. People described to me the absolute terror that Somoza's National Guard troops provoked when they confronted a civilian.

Because hatred for the Somoza regime was ubiquitous, a resistance movement emerged. It was a leftist populist movement that referred to itself as the *Sandinistas*, a name originating with Nicaragua's national hero, Augusto Sandino, the murdered peasant political agitator who led a resistance to US invasions and occupations from 1918 to 1934.

In January 1978, the Sandinista resis-

tance gained momentum when Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, a newspaper editor who had been critical of Somoza's dictatorship, was gunned down on his way to work. In May of 1979, the Sandinistas launched an offensive. Somoza responded by sending airplanes to drop napalm on civilians; his Sherman tanks rumbled through towns trying to quell the uprising. The uprising then spread to all corners of the country. On July 17, 1979 Somoza fled to Miami and the Sandinistas assumed power.

## Sandinista Triumph

When the FSLN (the Sandinista National Liberation Front) government took charge in 1979, it began a series of social reforms. Their literacy campaign is legendary. For four hundred years, illiteracy had been endemic in Nicaragua; within a few years brigades of volunteers reduced the illiteracy rate from 53 percent to 12.9 percent. The poor could read, and they began to participate in government. In 1984, after the revolutionary dust had settled, the FSLN candidate Daniel Ortega was elected president with 67 percent of the vote. Women's rights, agrarian reform, and the literacy campaign spearheaded the FSLN agenda.

During the 1980's the FSLN government did something never before done in Latin American history; it armed the populace. No other Latin American government would dare arm its population because it would be immediately attacked and overthrown. The arming of the Nicaraguan peasants stands as a testimonial to the popular support enjoyed by the Sandinista government. The vast majority of the Nicaraguans stood behind the FSLN government and its commitment to social reform.

## The Contra War

The Sandinistas (FSLN) immediately earned the antipathy of Washington with their left-leaning ideas and policies. President Reagan labeled the FSLN communists and used the full force of cold war mentality to turn US opinion against them. He warned that FSLN posed a real threat to the USA. Though cooler heads argued that the GNP of Nicaragua was barely equal to that of a very small US city and that the idea that Nicaragua was a threat to US security was absurd, Reagan succeeded in generating public fear of this small, poor country's social-democratic movement.

After the Sandinista triumph, former Somoza National Guard members, with CIA

support, formed the Contra army. *Contra* means "against" – against the popular movement. To topple the Sandinistas, the Reagan administration resorted to breaking US law. The US Congress had specifically prohibited funding the Contras, but the Reagan administration imitated Nixon and Kissinger's strategies in Cambodia by waging a private, covert war. US operatives sold arms to Iran in order to fund the Contras – whom Reagan called "freedom fighters." Lt. Colonel Oliver North and other high-ranking CIA and National Security Council officials eventually were convicted of perjury and conspiracy to defraud the US government.

While traveling through the Nicaraguan

countryside this spring, I heard the personal stories of dozens of Nicaraguan families about their suffering during the Contra war years. The Nicas (Nicaraguans) are a warm, joyous and generous people. For all their resilience, though, thousands of families remain deeply scarred by the brutality they endured at the hands of the Contras. Time and time again, I met people who had lost family members to violence.

In the city of Esteli I met Don Filimon sitting at his desk below a red and black Sandinista flag. Don Filimon told me how his two sons and brother were killed by the Contras. His third son is mentally disabled because of his Contra war experiences. He described seeing castrated corpses with their genitals stuffed in their mouths. Sophia at the Museum of Martyrs told me that after one of her sons was killed in combat, the Contras executed her other three sons right in front of her. My Spanish instructor, Maria Lydia Gomez, described the impact of five-hundred-pound bombs being dropped on civilians. Tomas reminisced how he went to his fields, a hoe in one hand and a rifle in the other. Pedro told me that he dropped his school books and grabbed a rifle after Contras murdered his father.

For 10 years, from 1979–1989, the Contras waged a war of attrition against the FSLN. Their goals were to harass, enervate, destabilize and discredit the Sandinista movement. It was a war designed to exhaust the population's patience with the Sandinista government. The Contra's tactics forced the Sandinistas to fight on multiple fronts. The tactics also caused the Sandinistas to rush more and more troops to the fronts. Too many of these young recruits were inadequately trained and equipped, and many of them died needless deaths. The families of the dead soldiers and many others began to question if the war against the Contras and the US government would ever end. Social reforms took a back seat to the war; disenchantment with the Sandinistas grew.

Finally, the US promised peace if Violeta Chamorro, a candidate running in opposition to Daniel Ortega and the FSLN, was elected. In 1990, with generous financial backing from the US and a population exhausted by war, Chamorro assumed presidential powers. For the next 16 years, Presidents Violeta Chamorro, Arnoldo Aleman, and Enrique Bolanos instituted the economic reforms strongly promoted by Washington and

unraveled the social achievements of the Sandinista movement. Within fifteen years, Aleman was jailed for corruption, Bolanos refused to reveal how he acquired seven million dollars for his campaign, and Chamorro illegally sold the national railroad tracks and the timber of the Sumu Indians.

### Revolution Interruptus

In 2006, with the US too occupied in Iraq to pay much attention to its southern neighbors and with left-leaning governments taking power in one Latin American country after the next, the FSLN trotted out their old war horse Daniel Ortega. He won the presidency with 38 percent of the vote, the ALN party receiving 25 percent and the PLC party garnering 23 percent. After their first month in power, Ortega and the new FSLN had already legislated universal health care, education reform, and lower mass transit fares. FSLN members bragged that in 16 days the poor had benefited more than they had in the last 16 years.

The world has changed dramatically since 1989 when the Sandinistas last held power. Many of these changes may produce a more conducive climate for Sandinista reforms. No Contra war saps resources from social programs. Social-democratic movements are gaining influence throughout Latin America. The leftist governments in Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador and Cuba offer resources, loans, grants and services to the new FSLN government. The intoxicating brew of Venezuelan wealth and Cuban expertise can significantly impact Nicaragua's tiny population. Venezuela alone has offered to build 200,000 homes and to assist Nicaragua with debt relief packages.

Other factors favor the new Sandinista movement as well. The Nicaraguan populace is now better educated, more politically involved, more vigilant about authority, and more aware of populist successes throughout Latin America. Nicaraguans have tasted the sweetness of freedom from Somoza's terror; they are no longer medieval peasants emerging from the dark ages of dictatorship. The last few decades have opened their eyes. Aspirations are higher now. Women expect and demand equality and work incessantly for its actualization. Women want services for their children and not a society of privilege that serves only the oligarchy. Both men and women will be reluctant to assume the subservient posture of the Somoza era or to meekly accept the crumbs that fall from the



Miguel Alvarez/AF/Photo Images

▲ Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega's new political persona is a mix of Christianity, socialist ideas and internationalism. Will he be able to solidify Nicaragua's broad struggle for democracy and social justice?

table of Washington-style neoliberal reform.

In addition, the present Sandinista leadership is far more experienced and sophisticated than it was during the 80's. With less bravado and more discretion, the FSLN stands better prepared to operate in a shifting political climate.

### Déjà Vu

I think back to President Reagan's speeches and how he fabricated and magnified a Nicaraguan threat to US national security, and my head spins with déjà vu.

For 50 years, I've heard about domino theories, weapons of mass destruction, and communists menacing our southern border; 50 years blurred into one word: NiclraqNam. I had never seen the brutal face of those lies. In Nicaragua, I met the victims of United States' diabolic foreign policy, and it made me weep. Millions died in Vietnam, tens of thousands died in Nicaragua, hundreds of thousands have died in Iraq. For what? Today US businessmen are knocking each other down to trade with Communists in Vietnam.

No weapons of mass destruction were found in Iraq. And Nicaragua, a nation with a GNP smaller than Colorado Springs, never posed the smallest threat to the US.

The question now arises: Can a phoenix arise from the wreckage? Can the Sandinista movement be reborn? Can Sandinista reforms reshape Nicaraguan society? Can the FSLN government provide health care and education and develop its precious human capital? Can they decrease unemployment and raise living standards? Can they direct national wealth back to the Nicaraguans instead of to foreign corporations?

No one doubts that Daniel Ortega and the Sandinistas have their work cut out for them. Revolutionary euphoria no longer generates FSLN loyalty. The complex issues of international relations, underdevelopment and poverty, and the country's disparate and impassioned interest groups present daunting challenges to leadership. Will the Sandinista government be able to guide Nicaragua through the maze of urgent issues or will a handful of wealthy elites and foreigners continue to reap

the harvests of the Nicaraguan poor?

If and when you go to Nicaragua, pause at twilight, when doorways fill with rocking chairs and an audience of grandmothers watches the street circus unfold. Listen to dogs barking from balconies like long-gone dictators, hear rap music rattling alleys where unemployed men linger, heed the gossip of palm fronds murmuring to one another, and feel fans flutter, stirring the heat. Inhale the aroma of pork sizzling over glowing coals, marvel at a gliding bicycle balancing a family of four, feel the clip-clop of horse carts beating back time. Behold devotees genuflecting on moss-bearded cathedral steps and nuns scurrying below clanging Angelus bells. Watch women slapping tortillas in time with their internal Cumbia rhythms and feel fans flutter, stirring the heat. See boys kicking cans, girls skipping rope, lovers kissing in the privacy of shadows. Study the hypnotic rocking of old men milling their thoughts of what is past, passing, and to come, and you'll better understand the resilient spirit of the Nicaraguan people, a people who hope for a brighter tomorrow. □

## INTERNATIONAL NOTES

- The Chinese government intends to strengthen macroeconomic control of the economy. Wen Jiabao, the premier, says the economy is functioning satisfactorily but there are areas that need more state control. There will be more supervision over food quality and prices will be stabilized. The government will also regulate land control and bank loans to projects with high energy requirements. Farmers will also receive subsidies to encourage grain production.
- Europe's "green policies" will unfairly hurt African producers. The Europeans are backing a "buy" local campaign in order to appear progressive with respect to greenhouse gas admissions. The attack is aimed at food products from Africa that compete, on a small scale, with food produced in Europe. People are encouraged to buy only local food to cut down on the pollution caused by flying in fresh food from Africa. That this is a hypocritical program is shown by the fact these same European "conservationists" have made trade deals with China not only to export European food to China, but to import 3.3 billion euros of Chinese products as well. It seems that only flights from Africa to Europe cause excess pollution.
- The Fifth Congress of Landless Movements (MTS) was recently held in Brasilia. The MTS held a massive march through the city to protest foreign industries in Brazil. The congress called for the hastening of agrarian reform and rejection of the privatization of mining in favor of the transnationals. The theologian Tomas Balduino spoke to the congress saying that the economic plans of neoliberal capitalism led only to the oppression of working people.
- The CPI (Marxist) and the Left Front in Bengal were able to pull off a major election victory in the municipal bye-elections. Of the 398 seats up for grabs, the Left Front won 256 (an increase of seven over 2003) while the opposition won only 142. The election saw an unprincipled coming together of all opposition parties. This included cooperation between the liberal bourgeois Congress Party and the Hindu fascist BJP.
- Nicolas Sarkozy is on a rush to change the country after his recent election as president of France. His newly appointed Prime Minister Francois Fillon notified the trade unions to come up with proposals by the end of August to limit the right to strike by public service workers. Sarkozy has a worked out reform program and intends to carry it out at all costs (costs to the working class that is).
- It seems that the Amazon is not the only forest plagued with illegal logging. The Vietnamese provinces of Dak Lak and Dak Nong are being overrun with people fleeing poverty by settling in the jungle, and then cutting down the trees and selling them to illegal logging groups. Local officials say that without government help the jungles will disappear. So far it doesn't look good. \$2 million a year is needed for proper resettlement and only \$250,000 has been forthcoming. □

By Gerald Meyer, Ph.D.

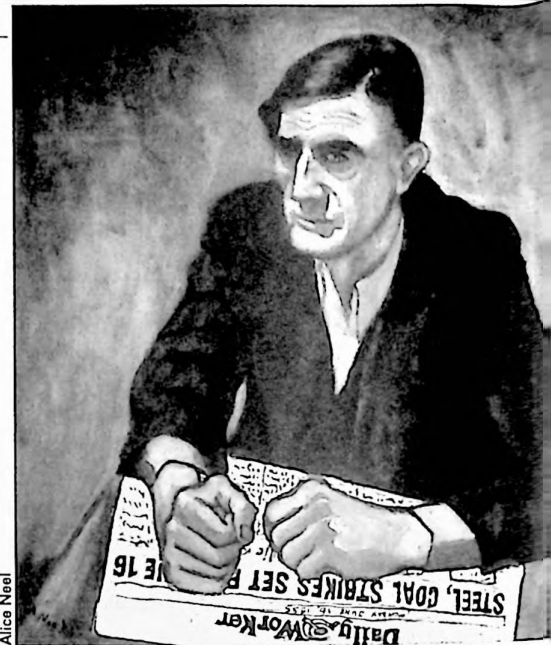
**A**lice Neel was America's pre-eminent social-realist expressionist painter, who lived and painted in poverty and obscurity until the age of 64, when one of her portraits was selected for inclusion in "Recent Painting USA: The Figure," at the Museum of Modern Art in 1964. From that moment until her death in 1984, she achieved genuine celebrity. She is especially noted for her dedication to painting portraits, which Pamela Allara in *Pictures of People: Alice Neel's American Portrait Gallery* has described as creating "an alternate vision of social realism," which sought to document (much in the manner of the great social-realist photographers) the people of El Barrio, the Puerto Rican community in East Harlem, Communist Party activists and leaders, and, much later, countercultural individuals and gay couples.

*Alice Neel* (a recently released documentary directed and produced by her grandson, Andrew Neel) traces her life from the perspective of her family. This is not an unreasonable thing to do. Alice Neel was devoted to her two sons, parents, and a larger extended family, which included friends whom she treated like family. She painted them all, some frequently. There is, however, a major flaw in *Alice Neel*, that this review will address. At no time does the film mention that Alice was a long-time member and lifelong supporter of the Communist Party. Without letting the viewers know this aspect of her life, much of what made Neel special and great becomes inexplicable.

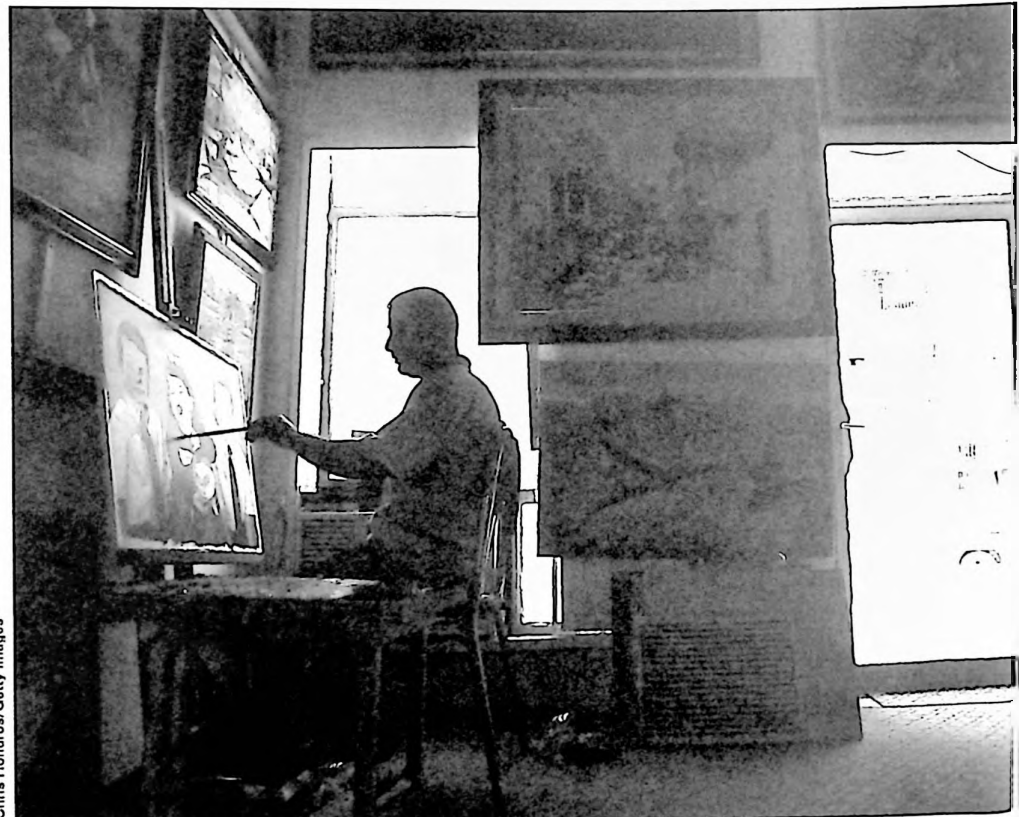
In *Alice Neel* we hear much about Alice's relationships from her sons. They describe their disappointment at their mother's choices. Richard expresses genuine bitterness about his mother's negligence and tolerance of abusive men. None of her partners made good husbands or fathers, but they served her needs as a woman and, in some crucial

# ALICE NEEL

## A REVIEW



△ A 27 x 23 inches Oil on canvas by Alice Neel, titled *Pat Whalen*, 1935.



Chris Hondros/Getty Images

△ Can the artist afford to be socially isolated from the struggles for liberation, equality and freedom?

ways, as a painter. Her third husband, Sam Brody (the father of her second son, Hartley) had been the leader of the Film and Photo League, a Party-led organization analogous to the John Reed Clubs. The interweaving of the sons' complaints with the story of their mother's struggle to continue painting under conditions of genuine deprivation is gnawing.

In 1938 Alice moved to East Harlem's El Barrio with José Santiago (a professional musician, 10 years her junior, who fathered Richard), and stayed there for the next 24 years. While in East Harlem, she painted the people of Spanish Harlem, most often the children. In addition to Alice's paintings, *Alice Neel* makes effective use of archival footage of Spanish Harlem, including clips from *In the Street*, Helen Levitt's renowned 1952 documentary on children's street games that was shot there.

Hartley and Richard got a mother who "followed her bliss," and who ultimately succeeded in becoming a widely known and respected artist; along the way she found men who provided companionship and joy. Richard and Hartley never seem to realize that the alternative, a mother who would have put aside her artistic and sexual desires to center life on her children would have resulted in a smaller, cramped and unfulfilling life for all concerned. Surely they must know by now that mothers who choose the path of self-abnegation generally inflict worse damage on their children than those who take an assertive role in their own lives and needs. In any case, no one makes documentary films about typical families for that period. (If someone attempted to do so, the film would necessarily be very short and shot in black and white.) This viewer vacillated from wanting to yell aloud in the cinema to Richard and Hartley "to get over it" or to complete their therapy.

We learn in passing from the film that both sons attended, on full scholarship, the Rudolph Steiner School and later private schools in New England, affiliated with the Steiner School. Their superior education prepared them for admission to Columbia on full scholarship, which laid the foundation for Hartley's career as a medical doctor and Richard's as a lawyer. The documentary effectively depicts the political rift between Richard and his mother. On the one side, we have Richard's vociferous right-wing politics, and on the other, Alice's unflattering 1979 portrait, *Richard in the Era of the Corporation*.

Whatever their disappointments, Alice's sons have continued to maintain their mother's apartment as a shrine, which not only stores her remaining paintings, but also her paint brushes, furniture, clothing, etc. Many of the documentary's interviews take place in this apartment, as do some of the interviews from previous filmings that were integrated into *Alice Neel*. And it is to his long-deceased mother's apartment that Richard goes in the evenings to contemplate his investment strategies! Despite their complaints, both Richard and Hartley exude pride in the mother's work. The walls of their homes are covered with her paintings. At the openings of her shows, they are filmed appropriately beaming; and Hartley is eager to tell the camera how he encouraged the director of New York's Whitney Museum to hasten the opening of Alice's first retrospective while she was still alive to enjoy it.

Unlike the creator of this documentary, the Federal Bureau of Investigation thought Neel's association with the Communist Party to be very important. Over a period of 10 years, it assembled a thick dossier, 156 highly redacted pages of which have been released under the Freedom of Information Act. Under investigation from 1951 until 1961, an agent's report describes her as a "well-known Communist artist," and in another report as a "romantic Bohemian type Communist." The FBI twice sent a pair of agents to interview Neel at her East 108th Street apartment. The first meeting, held on October 11, 1955 was terminated five minutes after the FBI agents arrived because Neel had other visitors. At the second meeting, which took place six days later, Alice turned the tables on the agents. They reported to their superiors that during the 35-minute interview "she refused any information concerning her activities, associates, or affiliations," [and] "the subject became adamant in her refusal to furnish any information to this Bureau." (Her sons recall their mother asking the two agents to sit for portraits.) In addition to the solicitation of information from informants, the FBI placed her under a "thirty-day mail-cover." The FBI could not damage her career as it had with other Communist artists (Ben Shawn, William Gropper, Rockwell Kent), because she had no career to lose. After the WPA's artist project dissolved (Alice was one of the last 11 artists still on its rolls) in 1943, she then subsisted on public assistance for the next decade.

What prompted the FBI's attention to Alice Neel was her continued association with the Communist movement. From her earliest involvement in Party circles, around 1934, Alice eagerly participated in the most ordinary Party work. In the thirties, Neel joined the picket line demanding union recognition at May's Department store in Manhattan, and participated in a Party-led effort to dislodge

Under investigation from 1951 until 1961, an agent's report describes Neel as a "well-known Communist artist," and in another report as a "romantic Bohemian type Communist."

the corrupt leadership of the International Longshoremen's Association. During the McCarthy Era, when bystanders threw eggs and worse at the marchers in the annual May Day parades, Alice wheeled Hartley and Richard in a red wagon the length of the parade route. When V.J. Jerome, the Party's arbiter in artistic matters, was released from prison in 1957, where he had served a three-year sentence for violating the Smith Act's injunction against "conspiring to overthrow the United States government," Neel dutifully called at his home for a welcome-back visit. According to an FBI informant, Neel was not always content with doing the routine work of an activist. She reported that Neel "complained that the Party has given her nothing more important to do than to pass out leaflets and paint signs."

Soon after its founding in 1948 until its most unfortunate demise in 1963, Alice Neel submitted sketches and drawings to *Masses and Mainstream*, a first-rate cultural monthly, sponsored by the Communist Party. Neel created two covers for *Masses and Mainstream* – a portrait of the Marxist writer Kenneth Fearing, at the time of his death, and a sketch of an impoverished family in its bare kitchen. Along with Charles Keller, Neel sketched the 1948 Smith Act trials of the 12 major Communist leaders at the Federal Court house in Foley Square, in Manhattan. Some of these sketches (including a Daumieresque drawing of one of the ex-Communist witness-

es) appeared in *Masses and Mainstream*, as did sketches of W.E.B. Du Bois and Willie McGee, who was legally lynched in 1951 when the Supreme Court refused to hear an appeal to stay his execution in Jackson, Mississippi for the crime of allegedly raping a white woman, with whom he had had a long-standing sexual relationship.

Neel's other involvements with the Party in the post-World War II period included giving lectures and attending classes at the Jefferson School for Social Science; exhibiting at The New Playwrights Theater; and participating in the Writers and Critics Group, a remnant of the once powerful National Council of the Arts, Sciences, and Professions; writing articles for the *Daily Worker/Daily World*. But Alice Neel's propinquity with the Party had infinitely less to do with her political work than with her painting itself.

Some of her very finest portraits comprise an iconology of Communists, who were largely ignored or demonized in the wider society: Pat Whalen, Art Shields, Mike Gold, Moses and Raphael Soyer, Ella Reeves (Mother) Bloor, and individuals who were close to the left, such as Linus Pauling, Kenneth Fearing and Bella Abzug. There is some reason to believe that Neel's assiduous proliferation of an iconology of Communist leaders – includ-

ing Gus Hall, the Party's General Secretary from 1959 until his death in 2000 – paralleled the use of portraiture for this purpose in the Soviet Union. In the words of Pamela Allara, her portraits of Communist activist, artists and leaders, reflected her "insistence that these leaders will not be written out of American history – or into it – simply as enemies or crackpots."

El Barrio was Alice Neel's home for 24 years, and she loved that community and its people. In addition to her extraordinary paint-

According to an FBI informant, Neel was not always content with doing the routine work of an activist.


ing, Neel was a fairly decent poet. Here is a brief excerpt from her explanation of her intense attachment to this community. "I love you for electing Vito Marcantonio, and him for being what he is. And for the rich deep vein of human feeling buried under your fire engines your poverty and your loves." Neel described herself as "a collector of souls," and nowhere did she do better at this mis-

sion than in East Harlem where the people of every imaginable shade are presented in the fullest individuality yet in the context of an accurately understood social reality. These portraits are a triumph of an historically accurate social humanism.

It's important to note at once that it is not only the subjects of her portraits (and some cityscapes) that reflect Alice Neel's deeply held leftist beliefs, it's also the style in which they were painted. In *Alice Neel* there is little discussion of her artistic style or her aesthetic commitments. But Alice does tell the camera that "even Picasso said there is no such thing as 'pure abstraction.' Every image had to have had its origins in the real world." In lieu of abstract art, in a letter published in *Masses and Mainstream* in 1955, Neel proposed that "what is important and ethical, in the deepest sense, [is] the relation of art to life and the responsibility of the writer/artist to reflect in the most humanistic and advanced way any part of the life of his/her day." And that is what Alice Neel set out to do, one portrait at a time. □

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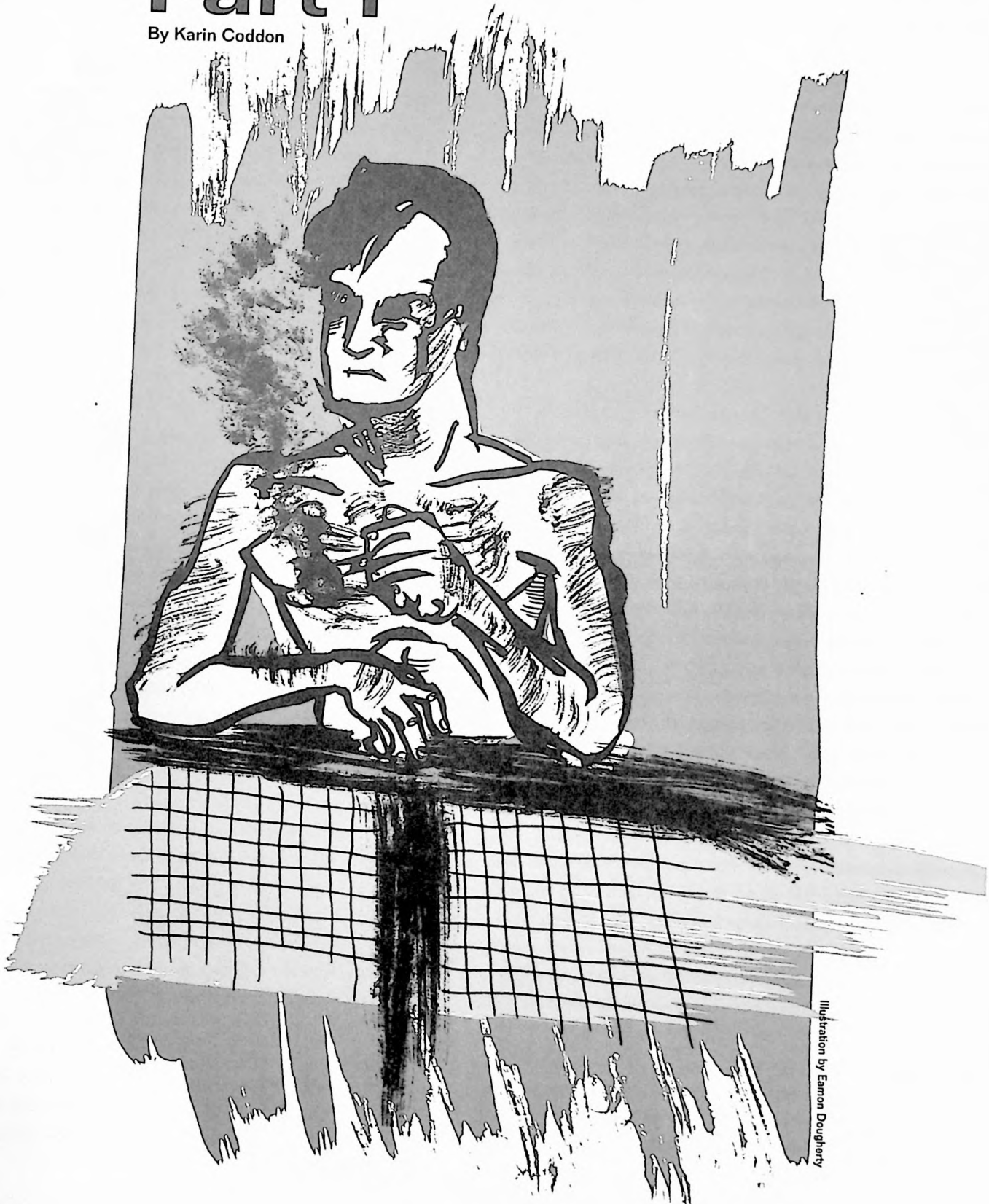
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# The Shadow Man, Part I

By Karin Coddon



The little patio off the dining area had been his smoker's haven, his thinking spot, from the day they'd moved in nearly four months before. These days, when he doubted she cared any longer if he smoked inside or out, it was still his haven.

He'd quit doing irony along with meth; now he realized irony was just a hipper form of self-pity. He had no self-pity. The situation was what it was. No time for the Big Picture, either. All the "one day at a time" and "easy does it," Twelve-Step mantras that had always sounded so facile and Stuart Smalley-esque (*I'm good enough, I'm smart enough, and doggone it, people like me*) now swirled about him like a cloying miasma, mocking the scorn he'd once heaped upon them. At no other time in his life had he so longed for the manic energy and present-fixation that crystal brought. And at no other time in his life could he less afford even to fleetingly acknowledge as much to himself.

He lit another cigarette, listened to the quiet, listened for the muted roto of the surf across the street. They really ought to have moved further inland, east of I-5; cramped though it was, this little apartment on busy Sierra was a block from the ocean and they were paying dearly in rent for the proximity. He wondered how she had ever managed on a freelancer's wages to support Kat and herself, before the fateful windfall of the trust and the house and the old man. The windfall had probably saved his life, but was it at the too-high cost of hers? They were adamant about taking no more from the trust than covered Kat's expenses, not their own, and even that still felt opportunistic and mercenary. Kat deserved better than two parents forced to support her through the largesse of a dead woman she'd never known. But again, the situation was what it was, and he supposed they should be grateful for a source of income not dependent on the fruits of their own labor.

He'd assumed most of her freelance obligations with none of her clients the wiser. She'd told him what the work required and as always, he was a good student, a quick study. Sometimes when she felt up to it she helped him, or made the phone calls necessary for keeping up the pretense. When she couldn't, his years of easy, practiced lying came to their rescue. He'd even told one client the week before who was seeking a face to face meeting that she had Epstein-Barr, and too compromised an immune system to leave the apartment.

Because he, of all people, should have noticed the crisis creeping up, he questioned his own motives for not doing so.

Alcohol and marijuana had never been a problem for him, and although – or perhaps because – he knew it was in defiance of AA and NA's strict admonitions against any kind of intoxicant, he truly saw no harm in having a few beers with her, with Ryan, sharing the occasional joint when Kat was spending the night with a friend. Neither booze nor weed ignited that insatiable *more!* within his being that meth did. Sometimes he'd join her in wine with or after dinner, other times he'd refrain. Fuck, in Europe they drank it with lunch, too, every day, and they were the healthiest people in the Western world. And when she'd begun to drink a bottle of wine most every night he had actually thought it good for her. She never really got drunk, and she was under so much stress, worrying about him, about Kat, about money. But did a part of him recognize what was happening and somehow feel vindicated for her weakness given all the years ruined by his own? Or was his refusal to see born of habitual blind faith in her strength, in her being the one who held things together? Worse still, was his subconscious filing away her frailty for future reference to justify a relapse of his own?

She was so proud; she'd always tried so hard to present a perfect façade to the world. Not for him, because for years he'd monopolized the role of family fuckup. He knew she suffered keenly from a sense of having failed everyone, even though he was fairly certain that almost no one among their family and friends suspected the extent of her problem. The only person he'd told about her excessive drinking was Father Bob, and then only after he'd discovered in mid-January that she was drinking during the day, too, camouflaging vodka in Coke cans and with breath mints. Predictably the priest had recommended inpatient treatment and AA, both so instrumental in his own recovery. But he didn't judge Tim for refusing, for admitting he couldn't humiliate her by confronting her with what she already knew and agonized over. Besides, he'd added, she wasn't an alcoholic; it was the goddamn house and the old man that had done this to her. How insane and naïve of them to have believed the house's virulence, its toxicity, was so easily subdued. "He did this to her because she made sure he couldn't do it any more to me."

Though a priest, Father Bob was a man of reason and attempted to dissuade Tim from this line of thinking. Alcoholism was a disease, not a supernatural stigma; who knew better than he himself? But then, Father Bob hadn't witnessed their battle with that awful thing at the foot of the stairs, heard its



mocking voice or smelled its putrescence. Though the priest hadn't said as much, Bob plainly attributed Tim's account of the bizarre encounter with the malignant ghost of his grandfather to an overly excited imagination.

"Daddy?"

Behind him Kat, in her flannel pajamas, was slipping through the screen door to join him.

"You should be in bed, baby." But he eased her onto his knee and wrapped his arms around her slim waist.

"I can't sleep."

He knew she missed her mother. Maggie tried to keep up appearances with Kat, but the child was too astute and, unfortunately, too experienced with having a parent simultaneously there and not there to accept the charade. "Things'll get better, Kat," he said, smoothing her hair. "Look at me. I got better and Mommy's not half as sick as I was."

"I don't want her to go away, though."

"She's not going to. She's gonna be OK. We all are." Of course, he didn't believe a word of it but hoped she would.

"I wish we were all in our old house."

"Hm, back in LA?"

She shifted in his lap to face him. "No, silly. Where Mommy and I lived before you came home. We shouldn't have left."

Tim hoped that the darkness shielded his revulsion. "There were leaks in the roof, Kat. We couldn't stay."

"I liked it there until the little boy left. Then when you came home I didn't even miss him anymore."

He tried not to shudder, just as he tried not to consider the possibility that Kat, too, had been infected through her brief exposure to the house's malignancy. "Someday we'll have a really cool house," he improvised. "As nice as Aunt Di and Uncle Wes's, or your abuelos' place." Eva and Armando were another worry. How long before they sensed that their daughter wasn't *quite right*? He hoped that if they did, they would blame the stress of his own peculiar circumstances. And maybe he was being hypervigilant, but he thought Eva was starting to sound skeptical about his various excuses why Maggie couldn't come to the phone.

Maggie would cry and cry every hungover morning, begging him not to tell anyone – that is, after she begged him to bring her just a little glass of something to get her past the nerves and shakes. Lately she'd begun to suffer from acute anxiety attacks, drunk or sober, if she set foot outside the apartment, a circumstance that put him in the position of hav-

ing to be her supplier. That would really break him up if he let himself think about it.

Thus it was that Tim Emerson, onetime student philosopher and recovering meth addict, did his best these days not to do much thinking at all.

Morning. He hoped that Kat had managed to sleep after he let her stay up an extra hour to watch reruns of *The Simpsons* on one of the local stations. Today was a riding lesson day on top of school, and he didn't want her taking jumps on less than a full night's sleep. Reckless though he was about his own riding of Warlock – yes, to that extent that asshole Billy O'Donnell had been right – his solicitude about Kat's safety had increased exponentially with her mother's incapacity.

Maggie still slept that fake sleep induced by alcohol. He kissed her hair lightly before hopping into the shower. When he emerged from the bathroom she was just beginning to stir. "I'll make Kat breakfast," she mumbled against the pillow, her swollen eyelids fluttering.

"I got it, Mags."

The muffled sound of her crying followed him out of the bedroom. He carefully clicked the door shut behind him so Kat wouldn't hear.

He let the dog outside into the patio whose small patch of grass served as Thumper's latrine, went around to the front door to retrieve the *LA Times*. Had to keep abreast of Bush's abundant fuckups. He glanced at the headlines as he put on coffee, grabbed cereal bowls and a box of Cheerios for Kat and himself. She'd informed him that only Thumper liked his scrambled eggs, and he wasn't about to apply his limited culinary skills to the dog's breakfast.

"How'd you sleep?" he asked when she appeared neat and combed and pretty in her Catholic school uniform.

"OK." She let Thumper back inside. "Can he have some sausage?"

"If you eat some. I'm not playing fry cook just for Thumper's benefit."

Maggie came into the kitchen. Wrapped in her robe with her hair tied back, she looked almost as tiny and fragile as Kat. "I'll make the sausage," she said, and the relative steadiness of her voice told him she'd had the hair of the dog it took for her to get out of bed.

He saw as well the tears streaming down her wan cheeks as she took the box of sausage links out of the freezer. He

stepped between her and the open freezer door and planted a kiss on her chapped lips, subtly swiping at the tearstains in hopes that Kat wouldn't notice them.

The ploy must have worked, for Kat laughed and said, "That's gross. Who wants to kiss first thing in the morning?"

Maggie strained to smile. "Only your father and Thumper, I think." She moved away from him to put a few sausages into a frying pan, which she splashed with a little water from the tea kettle before covering the skillet.

He knew her routine. She'd be all right for the first couple of hours, sipping wine or vodka mixed in a tumbler with Diet 7-Up. By midmorning she'd need a nap. Sometimes she asked him to make love to her, but he sensed the request was motivated less by desire than a need to appease him. She never came nor seemed bothered that she didn't. Then she'd sleep maybe another hour, wake up again, refill her tumbler, and take a bath. Afterwards she'd usually curl up on the sofa, dully watching TV while he worked at the laptop at the dining room table. Occasionally she'd respond to his request for advice regarding a project; other times she would simply look at him helplessly and shake her head.

Damn good thing that Kat had the stables, that Armando and Eva had overridden Tim and Maggie's initial objections and bought her the little school palomino. Kat rode after school most days, with her evenings devoted to homework and some television. Unless Ryan was visiting, Maggie had generally retired for the night by the time Kat got home from Camino Equestrian. Loath to have her daughter see her inebriated, she opted instead to retreat behind the closed bedroom door.

Ryan, of course, was aware of Maggie's dependency – on two recent occasions she'd called him in a state of panic, pleading with him to bring her some wine, because Tim was either at the barn with Kat or had taken her to a movie. But Ryan told Tim he believed that Maggie's excessive drinking was only a temporary aberration. "I went through a similar thing a few years ago after Eric and I broke up. I almost lost my job and ended up in the ER with alcohol poisoning. But then I just sort of clawed my way out of it."

Maggie's behavior was so uncharacteristic that Tim might have bought Ryan's take on the situation – if only it hadn't been for that goddamn house.

"Are you gonna ride Warlock today?" Kat asked on the drive to school. Busy with her job and her new marriage, Nicole was happy to have him ride her horse as often as he liked dur-

ing the week.

"Maybe. Maybe I'll just watch you ride instead." That she was already learning show-jumping was a source of tremendous pride for him, although Maggie was terrified by it and couldn't watch even before the anxiety attacks made leaving the apartment a considerable feat.

"Warlock couldn't jump, could he?"

"Uh-uh. He's not built for it. It'd be like asking an elephant to use a trampoline."

She giggled. "We call Sister Pius the old elephant. She made a little boy cry yesterday."

"No. That's bad."

"His name is Zack, and she kept saying to him it was Zachary. He cried."

"Jesus. I thought they phased out that kind of nun with the eight-track tape."

"What's that?"

"Well, what I mean is that I thought nasty nuns like Sister Elephant were what Mom and I had to deal with when we were your age. Now they're supposed to be nicer."

"Sister Pius is old. I think she's, like, a hundred."


He bit back a smile. Nothing, not even the grim circumstances at home, could dim the joy his daughter gave him.

He dropped Kat off at Saint James and drove on to the morning AA meeting in Carlsbad he preferred to attend because it was Father Bob's usual group. His feelings remained radically mixed about the dogma of Twelve Step programs; their hybrid disease/spiritual-sickness paradigm struck him as contradictory, and given his Catholic upbringing, he really didn't need a self-help group to exacerbate his already acute sense of guilt. But there was, he admitted, something calming about the nonjudgmental company of other addicts, now more than ever.

The value of such camaraderie had only started to sink in during what he hoped was his last stint in rehab, maybe because he'd gone in under no legal duress, maybe because he'd at last "hit bottom" after literally losing Maggie and Kat. Hearing of other lives at least as screwed up as his own, if not more so, of the destruction of families, promising futures, and physical and psychic health, eroded his conviction of a doom as personalized as a vanity license plate. On occasion he wondered how many of those fellow travelers were still clean. Certainly Father Bob was, but there had been casualties, defections, even before Tim had walked out that night

last November. A beautiful, deaf woman, Hannah, who had a Master's in education and two small children whose custody she'd lost due to her crack addiction, had just vanished one day from the program, and when she tried to re-up 48 hours later she failed the pee test and was turned away. He'd felt awful about her. An expert lip-reader, she had been especially kind to him, sharing his irrepressible cynicism about some of the more inane treatment protocols such as high-school-ish peer pressure videos and therapeutic field trips to the Universal Studios theme park. Then there were others who were so gung-ho, so desperate to embrace every orthodoxy of the rehab philosophy or "Hazeldenia," as he'd dubbed it, that either they were bound to annoy everyone out of their lives not already alienated by their addiction or to return to earth with such a precipitous thud that only that forbidden drink or

drug would cushion the disillusionment. Successful treatment outcomes were like batting averages – 300 was considered good, and meth addicts were lucky to hit the Mendoza line – and it seemed hubris to think one would be in the minority to achieve permanent sobriety. "It's like the doctrine of the elect," he'd once complained to Father Bob. "Only a handful of us are going to be saved, and the rest are just screwed no matter how hard we try." Not unexpectedly, Father Bob offered a less Calvinistic interpretation of the long odds against lasting recovery. The high failure rate didn't account for the vicissitudes of human motives, the more-or-less sober, or those who had fought and conquered their chemical demons in privacy. Amused, Tim thought it highly Jesuitical of Bob to base his counter-argument in statistical error. □



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# PUNTOS DE ENFOQUE

PARA UNA PERSPECTIVA  
DE IZQUIERDA EN EL  
DEBATE SOBRE LA  
INMIGRACIÓN



Por Emile Schepers

**S**e está escribiendo y hablando mucho sobre los problemas relacionados con la inmigración de los indocumentados. Los políticos y los llamados "expertos" pitorrean mentiras racistas. Los defensores de los derechos de los inmigrantes valientemente intentan refutar estas mentiras. Pero hay unas verdades básicas que no se deben mencionar. La derecha no las repiten por temor que van a poner al descubierto su esquema de echarle la culpa a los inmigrantes por todo. No son mencionadas ni por liberales ni progresistas envueltos en la lucha por defender los derechos de los inmigrantes por no comprender las mismas o por temor de que no sean comprendidas

por los políticos o el público.

Al reconocer las limitaciones del balance del poder en Washington, el movimiento de derechos para los inmigrantes comprende que no puede lograr todo lo que desea en estos momentos. Saben que tiene que haber compromisos y cambalaches. La legislación que deseamos solo podrá lograrse en etapas porque los Demócratas solo tienen un voto de mayoría en el Senado y una mayoría de 31 votos en la Cámara de Representantes que no es suficiente para derrotar una obstrucción en el Senado o un bloqueo de ley por parte de la presidencia. Sin embargo la administración Bush está tratando de lograr una ventaja a través de redadas despiadadas de inmigrantes, detenciones masivas y deportaciones. Algunos

aceptan el concepto de una "reforma comprensiva de las leyes de inmigración" que incluye algunas concesiones para lograr la legalización de 12 millones de indocumentados que se alega viven en este país. Durante este proceso hemos tenido que escuchar disparates absurdos sobre inmigración que vienen de parte del presidente Bush, de los Republicanos, de las corporaciones que salvan por un programa de braceros y hasta de los políticos demócratas que en su mayoría están tratando de ayudar.

Los disparates incluyen la idea de que, antes de bregar con la legalización de los indocumentados y crear una política de inmigración sensata para el futuro, tenemos que "fortalecer las agencias que manejan las leyes de inmigración" y tenemos que "sellar

las fronteras." Los que hemos trabajado en el asunto de inmigración sabemos que esto es un disparate de mayores proporciones. En caso de que una ley surja de las diferentes tendencias en el Congreso que incluye estas tonterías, tenemos que estar claros, y conocer la situación para poder explicarle la realidad al pueblo norteamericano.

El problema de los inmigrantes indocumentados no se puede comprender sin saber lo siguiente:

- La inmigración en masa de los indocumentados a los Estados Unidos de Norteamérica es el resultado de la destrucción despiadada de las economías de Méjico y otros países pobres del Caribe, América Latina y demás, que viene de las políticas de comercio y desarrollo que el gobierno estadounidense ha impuesto agresivamente para beneficiar las corporaciones norteamericanas, y no por la falta de enforzar las leyes de inmigración, o por complots para reconqui-

obra era aún más barata. Los únicos ganadores fueron las multinacionales norteamericanas y sus cómplices de la élite económica y política norteamericana, canadienses y mejicanas. Lo mismo pasó en otros países pobres. No se tiene que ir más allá de estos hechos para la causa del aumento en la inmigración. Si se quiere parar la inmigración indocumentada, entonces no dejemos que nuestros líderes construyan murallas y criminalizen a los inmigrantes, luchemos contra el imperialismo y la globalización capitalista.

- Esta inmigración entra al país sin documentos por que el gobierno norteamericano sencillamente no le da visas a este tipo de persona, campesinos y trabajadores urbanos, cuyo sustento ha sido destruido por cosas como el Tratado de Libre Comercio de Norteamérica (TLC) o el Tratado de Libre Comercio Centroamericano. De hecho, en 2005, EEUU solo expidió 5,000 visas de residencia permanentes para estos tipos de

trabajadores. Más personas entraron con visas a través del programa de unidad familiar, la cual la legislación que se está discutiendo en el Senado busca reducir radicalmente. Personas que han perdido su manera de sobrevivir por la política económica norteamericana y que desesperadamente necesitan buscar una nueva manera de mantener a sus familias tendrían que, en muchos casos, esperar hasta que sean muy viejos para trabajar y entrar al país legalmente. En vez de dejar a sus familias sufrir deciden entrar sin documentos.

- No hay ninguna "fila" para los inmigrantes indocumentados en el proceso de legalización. Los pobres que se ganan las habichuelas con sus manos no han podido unirse a la fila de visas estadounidenses aunque sean los que más necesitan emigrar. Ellos no se colaron al frente de la fila, fueron excluidos de la fila por la política norteamericana aún cuando se estaban implementando

Cóbrente las contribuciones a las corporaciones y los ricos y habrá más que suficiente fondos para la educación y la salud y no habrá la necesidad de quejarse que los inmigrantes están usando más servicios sociales de lo que les corresponde.

star las tierras de Méjico que fueron robadas por EEUU, ni la inmigración en cadena que envuelve bebés nacidos en este país, tampoco por los atractivos empleos bien remunerados de EEUU. Por ejemplo, la inmigración de indocumentados desde Méjico aumentó desde el 1994 cuando entró en vigor el Tratado de Libre Comercio de Norteamérica (Nafta) y Wall Street impuso las medidas crueles neoliberales como condición para el préstamo Clinton-Rubin para salvar la economía mejicana. Como resultado para el año 2000 más de 6 millones de mejicanos fueron ahuyentados de la economía agrícola y de otros sectores económicos. Los nuevos empleos que supuestamente iban a generar las corporaciones extranjeras nunca llegaron, se fueron a otros países donde la mano de



Timothy A. Clary/AFP/Getty Images

△ Inmigrantes y sus partidarios se preparan para marchar por el bajo Manhattan llamando a la reforma migratoria.

políticas estadounidenses que los desalojaban y los forzaban a intentar venir a este país. Hasta demócratas como el Senador Kennedy, cuando los acusan de ser blanditos con los indocumentados, hablan de hacer a los indocumentados ir a la cola de la fila antes de poder recibir sus visas de trabajo. Esto es otro disparate más.

- Plantear que los indocumentados "toman los trabajos que nadie quiere" es un disparate también. Aunque no hay prueba de que los empleos que los indocumentados tienen serían tomados por los desempleados de los arrabales urbanos si fueran mejor remunerados, si está claro que las principales industrias que emplean trabajadores indocumentados en masa lo hacen para mantener un ejército de reserva de obra de mano barata. Sin embargo, el impacto de la inmigración indocumentada sobre los salarios y el desempleo es una cuestión complicada; los indocumentados participan en la economía de muchas maneras no sólo tomando los trabajos que pagan menos. Lo cierto es que si los que ahora son indocumentados dejaran de serlo no tolerarían las condiciones de trabajo peligrosas, sucias y mal pagadas que enfrentan ahora.

- No es verdad, como sugieren entidades como la Cámara de Comercio norteamericana y el Instituto Manhattan, que la única manera de canalizar legalmente la inmigración desde los países pobres es a través de programas de braceros. Esta es pura propaganda promovida por la industria agrícola, gastronómica y otros sectores industriales que quieren mantener la obra de mano barata y sin derechos que tienen ahora implementando programas de braceros con pocos derechos laborales. La mejor manera de "legalizar" los indocumentados es aumentando las visas de residencia permanente a trabajadores de países pobres despojados por la globalización corporativa.

- La explotación despiadada de los indocumentados le ha producido superganancias a las industrias agrícolas, gastronómicas y otros sectores del capital norteamericano y si esos inmigrantes ganan poco y pagan menos impuestos es por que sus patronos los explotan tomando ventaja de su estatus vulnerable. Forzemos a los patronos a que paguen mejores sueldos (y que reconozcan el derecho a sindicalizarse y poder luchar por mejores condiciones de trabajo) y así los



Timothy A. Clary/AFPr/Getty Images

△ Una muchedumbre multiracial, multinacional de inmigrantes y sus partidarios marchan a la Alcaldía de Nueva York para exigir reforma migratoria.

trabajadores tendrán la posibilidad de pagar más impuestos.

- Los cortes en las contribuciones que les tocan a los ricos hacer comenzó con Ronald Reagan y ha llegado hasta la estratosfera con George W. Bush permitiendo a estas compañías lograr muchas ganancias de la explotación de los indocumentados, mientras, no pagan su porción equitativa de las contribuciones. Si te quejas que los indocumentados están chupando sin pagar, culpa a los explotadores y no los explotados por esta situación. Hay que hacer que las multinacionales y los ricos paguen sus contribuciones, así se verá como habrá bastante dinero para las escuelas y la salud. No hay que quejarse de que los inmigrantes están abusando del erario público.

- Si legalizamos a los 12 millones de inmigrantes indocumentados de una manera eficiente, rápida y menos costosa y creamos un sistema de inmigración justo, basado en quien tiene la necesidad verdadera de venir a este país, entonces el problema de

como enforzar las leyes en la frontera y dentro del país va a disminuir bastante. Uno de los problemas sería el detener a los verdaderos criminales, a los terroristas y los contrabandistas de drogas. El negocio ilícito del contrabando de indocumentados y de la falsificación de documentos virtualmente desaparecería. No habría necesidad de construir centros de detenciones o de emplear más guardias fronterizos o de construir murallas en las fronteras, si se desviarán los recursos para usos más constructivos; los contribuyentes ahorrarían mucho dinero.

- Las medidas propuestas de seguridad interna (encontradas en muchas de las propuestas para reformar el sistema de inmigración) va hacerle más daño a los ciudadanos norteamericanos y a los residentes legales de lo que el gobierno está dispuestos a admitir. Por ejemplo, en unas de las secciones de la propuesta del Senado, todos los patronos en el país tendrán que eventualmente chequear el estado legal de cada trabajador. De acuerdo a las estadísticas

de la Administración de Seguro Social este sistema que ahora se implementa voluntariamente ha demostrado una tasa de error de un cuatro por ciento. La fuerza de trabajo de este país es de 140 millones y con la tasa de error esto quiere decir que unos 5,600,000 trabajadores pudieran ser afectados por esta medida, muchos perdiendo el trabajo que han tenido por años o injustamente ser rechazados para trabajos. Esto le causaría miseria y sufrimiento a muchas familia y le haría daño a la economía del país.

• Los indocumentados no son una amenaza rampante de depravación y enfermedad. Al revés, tienen una tasa de criminalidad y enfermedad mas baja que otros sectores similares. En vez, son los chivos expiatorios del momento, víctimas inocentes que sirven para cubrir los fracasos deshonorosos del gobierno actual y los crímenes de la clase dominante norteamericana. Si las personas no le hicieran caso a Lou Dobbs, el Centro para los Estudios de Inmigración y todos los otros anti-inmigrantes estrepitosos, y en verdad estudiar estas cosas se darían cuenta de que los inmigrantes no tienen la culpa por:

- La crisis financiera del sistema de salud de EEUU.
- Los cortes en la ayuda financiera para los estudiantes universitarios.
- La falta de apoyo a la educación pública por nuestros líderes.
- Los cortes en la ayuda federal a las comunidades.
- La corrupción masiva en todos los niveles del gobierno.
- El desmantelamiento de la acción afirmativa y la pérdida de oportunidades para la juventud y adultos de color en EEUU.
- El fracaso del Congreso de legislar un aumento significativo en el salario mínimo.
- La negativa de la administración de enforzar las leyes laborales para todos los trabajadores y no solo dónde trabajan muchos indocumentados.
- La guerra de Iraq y el desperdicio de tantas vidas y fondos que ésta ha consumido.

Los inmigrantes con o sin papeles no han causado estos problemas serios de nuestra sociedad. Los culpables son una élite codiciosa de las corporaciones ricas y los políticos corruptos que están al servicio de éstas, incluyendo específicamente la administración de Bush.

• Los ocho millones de trabajadores indocumentados en la fuerza laboral estadounidense sin duda alguna son utilizados por los patronos para minar los sueldos, los beneficios y las condiciones de trabajo de otros trabajadores, pero, si son deportados a sus países, el impacto para los trabajadores norteamericanos sería aún peor. Las economías de Méjico, el Salvador, la República Dominicana, Haití, etc. no podría

Encontremos la manera de luchar juntos, resolver los problemas que enfrenta nuestra sociedad y no dejarnos llevar por los esquemas tramados por nuestros enemigos mutuos que buscan dividirnos y conquistarnos.

absorber el retorno de tantas personas, ni la pérdida de renta del dinero enviado a los familiares por los indocumentados que generaría un colapso total de las economías. Estos países serían aún más pobres, con unas fuerzas laborales baratas atrayendo a las corporaciones norteamericanas aún más.

• Los trabajadores indocumentados con papeles se pueden convertir en una fuerza libertadora para nosotros. ¿Cómo sabemos esto? Sólo tenemos que recordar las manifestaciones masivas por derechos de los inmigrantes de este año y del año pasado para darnos cuenta que este no es un grupo manso dispuesto a dejarse explotar. ¿No nos gustaría ver manifestaciones masivas para los derechos laborales, para poner fin a la opresión racial y la discriminación sexual, para un sistema de salud universal, por mas fondos para las escuelas públicas y para poner fin a la guerra de Iraq? Los inmigrantes, sus aliados, familiares compañeros y compañeras de trabajo han demostrado que son un fuerza de lucha por la justicia y el progreso. Se alzaron en protesta en el 2006 contra la legislación siniestra del congresista Sensenbrenner (HR 4437) que amenazaba a sus seres amados y a ellos. Los inmigrantes también son trabajadores, padres de niños en el sistema escolar, estudiantes, pacientes en el sistema de salud, consumidores y

miembros de nuestra sociedad y lucharán por la justicia social para todos.

Encontremos la manera de luchar hombro con hombro con ellos para juntos resolver los verdaderos problemas de nuestra sociedad, en vez de caer en la trampa tendida por nuestro enemigo común que busca dividirnos y conquistarnos. □



Robyn Beck/AFP/Getty Images

△ Miles de personas se manifiestan en el centro de Los Angeles, California, por los derechos de los inmigrantes, como parte de un "Día Nacional de la Acción".

# IF YOU BELIEVE:

- THAT ALL PEOPLE SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE AND COMPREHENSIVE HEALTHCARE,

WE ARE YOUR QUEER CONTINGENT.

- THAT WAR IS NOT THE ANSWER,

WE ARE YOUR QUEER CONTINGENT.

- THAT NOT ALL LGBT FOLKS LIVE LIKE THE ACTORS ON "WILL AND GRACE",

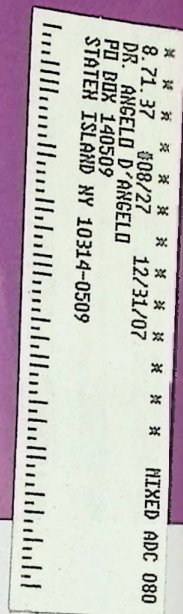
WE ARE YOUR QUEER CONTINGENT.

- THAT A WOMAN'S RIGHT TO CHOOSE IS NON-NEGOTIABLE,

WE ARE YOUR QUEER CONTINGENT.

- THAT WE MUST CHALLENGE RACISM, CLASSISM AND SEXISM,

WE ARE YOUR QUEER CONTINGENT.



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