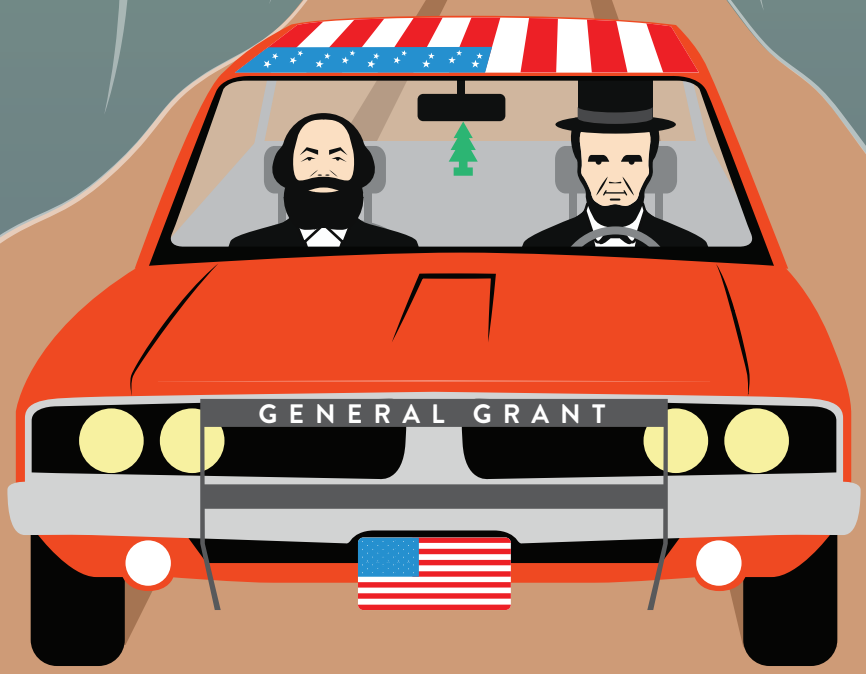
JACOBIN

Debt: The First 500 Pages
Mike Beggs

China in Revolt
Eli Friedman

Happy Hookers
Melissa Gira Grant

Gimme the Loot
Gavin Mueller



DOUBLE ISSUE | SUMMER 2012

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EMANCIPATION

Lincoln and Marx
Robin Blackburn

American Jacobins
Seth Ackerman

The War of Northern Aggression
James Oakes

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Jacobin (2158–2602) is a magazine of culture and polemic that Edmund Burke ceaselessly berates on his Twitter page. Each of our issue's contents are pored over in taverns and other houses of ill-repute and best enjoyed with a well-shaken can of lukewarm beer.

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IN MEMORY OF ALEXANDER COCKBURN, 1941–2012

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

I've boasted about *Jacobin* a bunch on this page. Beyond narcissism, it's rooted in the feeling that our improbable success is symbolic of a wider intellectual shift. Qualify that with sober acknowledgement of the Left's marginality, include token slaps in the direction of a certain mainstream commentator, strategically add "youthful" profanity, and there you have it – a successful editor's note.

But here's where the attention we've gotten is all smoke – we have no institutional base and survive financially issue-to-issue. *Jacobin*'s existence is more precarious than publications with less reach and influence than us.

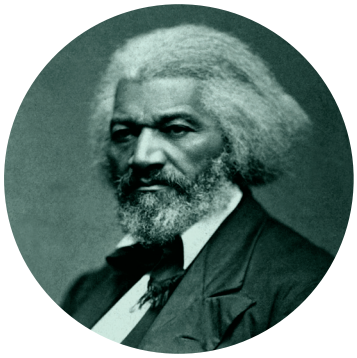
This is natural for a young magazine. But rather than bleed our subscriber base, it's worth pointing out that beyond having a microscopic donor base, we *don't have any institutional subscribers*. Other publications rely on a steady stream of renewals from universities to stay afloat. *Jacobin* has been successful leaning on just our young cohort of readers, but it leaves little financial cushion.

So please dear reader, fax your boss, email your university, take your librarian to dinner. Whatever it takes. Our institutional subscriptions are $60 yearly. Wealthy people, subscribe at that rate too and we might be kind to you after the revolution.

By the way, did you see that shit Ezra Klein just wrote?

—Bhaskar Sunkara

AMERICAN JAC



by Seth Ackerman

In a recent broadside against the Occupy movement, Alexander Cockburn assailed, among other things, "the enormous arrogance which prompted the Occupiers to claim that they were indeed the most important radical surge in living memory. Where was the knowledge of, let alone the respect for, the past?"

Cockburn may be prone to rhetorical excess, but it is striking how little the Occupy movement has identified with any particular tradition of American radicalism. At the height of the southern Civil Rights Movement, it was common in New Left circles to refer to the Freedom Riders as "the new abolitionists," the title of a much-read 1964 book by Howard Zinn. No such cries of historical continuity were audible from Zuccotti Park.

If there is one political movement that has claimed kinship with an American revolutionary tradition these past few years, it has been the Tea Party, with its tricorn hats and its fetish for the Founders. The American Revolution, or at least its orderly, legalistic reputation, is no doubt congenial to the Right and often held up as proof of Americans' imperviousness to radical adventures. Whatever the historical facts, 1776 is remembered as a mere "political," and not a social, revolt: the solemn replacement of an imperial constitution with a republican one.

But the United States indisputably has a radical, indeed violent, social revolution in its past, one that expropriated, without compensation, almost one quarter of the productive wealth in the country and by the same act liberated four million human beings from bondage. That, of course, was the Civil War and Emancipation. And its political agents were Abraham Lincoln and the Republican Party.

This last observation would have once been considered unremarkable. But as James Oakes recounts in these pages, it has been submerged in recent decades by a new historical orthodoxy that attempts to sever the link between the Republican program and emancipation, portraying the latter as an accidental byproduct of the former.

In response, Oakes demonstrates that Republicans took power in March 1861 with a comprehensive antislavery policy of which emancipation was both the actual and the intended outcome. However unplanned their specific course, the Republicans were revolutionaries.

That is why, to quote the words that Marx's International addressed to Lincoln in 1864, the proletarian radicals of Europe "felt instinctively that the star-spangled banner carried the destiny of their class." Robin Blackburn details this transatlantic affinity in his essay on Marx's milieu during the Civil War era. Indeed, during the war, Radical Republicans in Congress were

BINS

commonly cursed as "Jacobins," and their unofficial leader, Thaddeus Stevens – soon to be buried in an interracial cemetery – was nominated by one British observer "the Robespierre, Danton, and Marat of America, all rolled into one."

It is worth asking, then, why the American left has lately neglected this revolutionary inheritance.

In the American system, no political party can durably exist without the ability to win at least half the vote in a meaningful number of elections, yet almost by definition, no truly radical program can ever quickly gain such broad assent.

In the mid nineteenth century, a faction of abolitionists understood this dilemma. Figures such as Charles Sumner, Salmon P. Chase, Joshua Giddings, and John P. Hale, rejecting the heavily prefigurative and antipolitical style of activism practiced by William Lloyd Garrison and his followers, saw that a strategic approach to abolition was required, one in which the "cause of the slave" would be harnessed to a wider set of appeals.

At each stage of their project, from the Liberty Party to the Free Soil Party and finally the Republican Party, progressively broader coalitions were formed around an emerging ideology of free labor that merged antislavery principles with the economic interests of ordinary Northern whites.

The outer layers of these coalitions attracted voters and politicians who lacked the hard abolitionist principles of the militants, and in a racist society it was inevitable that many of the converts to Free Soil would vaunt theirs as the "true white man's party."

But the original nucleus of radicals – despite their own time-bound attitudes – lent the project an inner egalitarian spirit, visible in party campaigns for black suffrage and civil rights across the North. And when the moment of mass radicalization finally arrived in the wake of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, these abolitionists stood triumphantly at the heart of the networks that became the new Republican Party. "Our position is now rather enviable," wrote Giddings in 1854. "We lead the hosts of freedom."

Today on the radical left, there is a widespread allergy to political strategy as such. There is far more communion with the countercultural legacy of Garrison than with the political acumen of Frederick Douglass, who by 1852 had become secretary of the Free Soil Party, commenting that "what is morally right is not at all times politically possible."

The Second American Revolution was tragically cut short, its unfinished work still visible on our streets and in our prisons. That's all the more reason to embrace the legacy of its most far-sighted champions. ■

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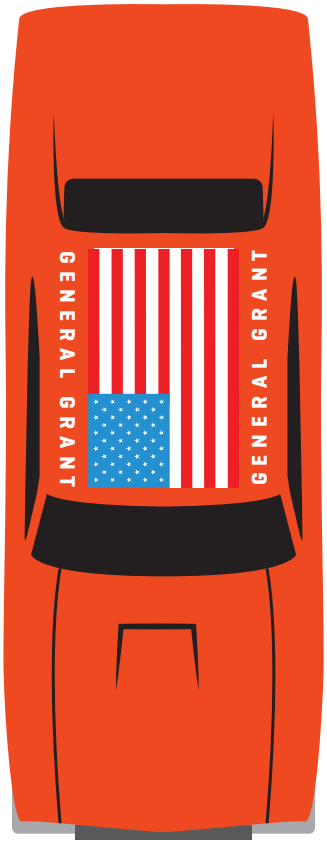
ESSAYS



Special Topic:
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EMANCIPATION

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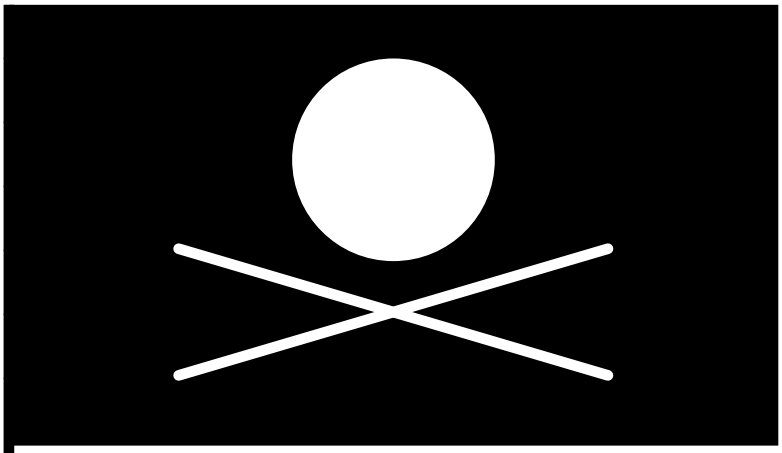
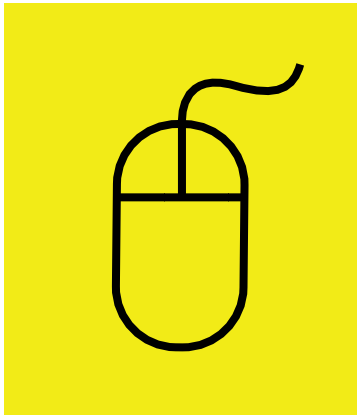
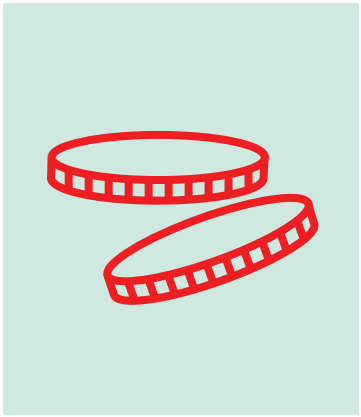
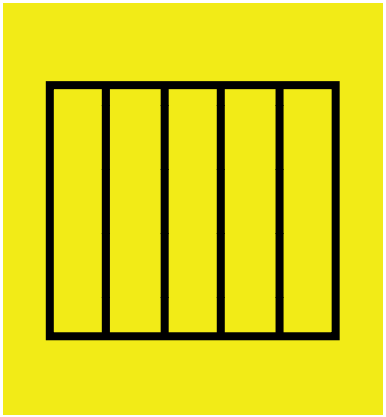


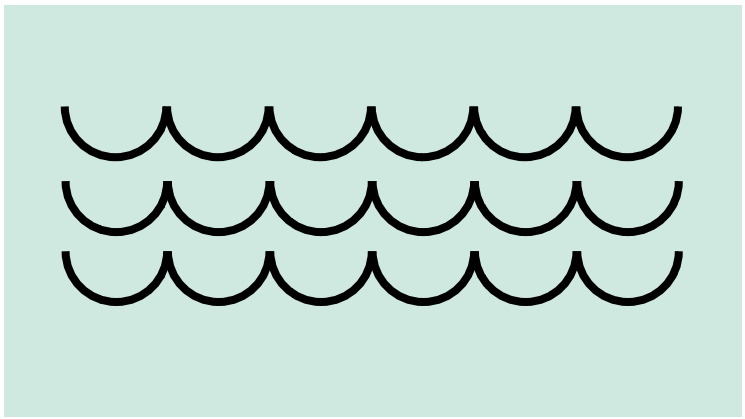
The Sea was given by God for the use of Men, and is subject to Dominion and Property… the Law of Nations was never granted to them a Power to change the Right of Property.

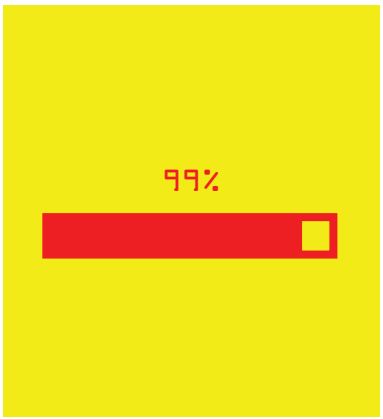
—Judge Nicholas Trott at the trial of Stede Bonnet and crew, 1718

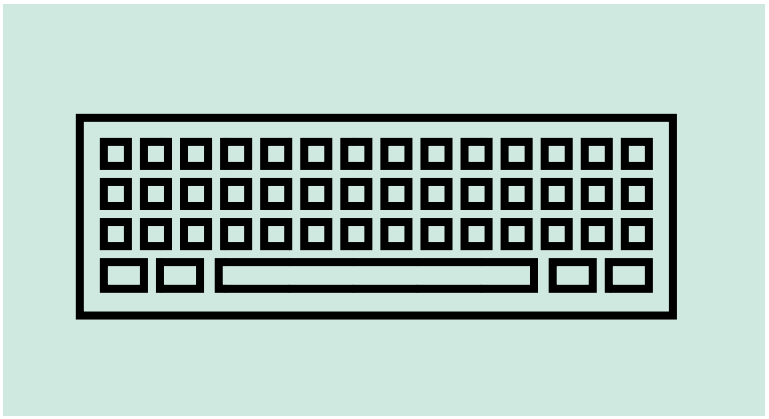












GIMME THE LOOT

by Gavin Mueller

FROM BLACKBEARD TO KIM DOTCOM, HAS PIRACY BEEN A RADICAL FORCE?

In an honest service there is thin commons, low wages, and hard labor; in [piracy], plenty and satiety, pleasure and ease, liberty and power; and who would not balance creditor on this side, when all the hazard that is run for it, at worst, is only a sour look or two at choking.

—Pirate captain Black Bart Roberts, circa 1720

The modern day pirates at issue in this litigation do not wear tricornes and extract their ill-gotten booty at cutlass point, but with a mouse and the internet. Nonetheless, their theft of property is every bit as lucrative as their brethren in the golden age of piracy.

—US District Judge Mark Bennett, after awarding the maximum judgment of $4 million to pornography company Private Media Group in a "shot across the bow" of online piracy, 2012

Just pirate it.

—Game designer Notch's advice to Minecraft fans who can't afford the full version, 2012

Once the heroes of nations, pirates went from being state-sponsored champions to tolerated annoyances to the basest sort of criminals. Henry Morgan was knighted after plundering Panama in 1674; fifty years later hundreds of pirates were dangling from the gibbet at remote trading posts along Africa's Gold Coast.

What changed?

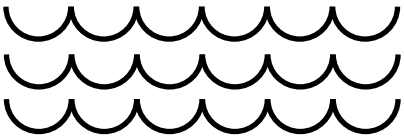
The change wasn't so much what pirates did as the context in which they found themselves: a global market economy with England at its head. England went from a plucky backwater to a capitalist empire in a century, and as its fortunes changed – or more specifically, as the way it made its fortunes changed – so, too, did the way the state treated piracy.

It was one thing when looted Spanish gold filled the Queen's meager treasury; it was quite another when pirates threatened to disrupt the increasingly disciplined circulatory system of the Atlantic Ocean, which had become the center of the British economy. Sugar, tobacco, slaves – these commodities needed to move and be exchanged as smoothly as possible. Pirates represented a dual threat to the Atlantic Ocean factory of early capitalism. They were not only thieves; they were also free.

Being a sailor has never been easy, and it was particularly tough in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. To maximize profits, sailors were forced to eat rotten food and bunk in cramped quarters, and were paid on credit – you didn't collect until you had completed your one-, two-, or three-year bid. And even then, you might not collect. You could die, of course. Or you might be pressed into military service, or forced to work an extra few years on another ship, or forfeit your wages as a punishment for insolence. It wasn't uncommon for sailors to go a decade without seeing a shilling. Ship captains had absolute authority over their crews in order to enforce discipline. Any complaining or shirking could be deemed "mutinous," and punishment could range from whipping to hanging to being dangled over the side of the ship to have your brains bashed in.

Pirate ships were different – they were under democratic worker control.

PIRATES REPRESENTED A DUAL THREAT TO THE ATLANTIC OCEAN FACTORY OF EARLY CAPITALISM.



Captains weren't absolute rulers, but elected leaders who commanded only during battle. Day-to-day operations were handled democratically by the entire crew. Loot was divided equally and immediately, and pirates ate – and drank – better than their law-abiding contemporaries. This was the major reason pirates were feared: it was easy to convince exploited sailors to join up with them. And join up they did.

Pirate crews were a polyglot, multiracial multitude (this isn't Hardt and Negri; this was the word used at the time) that included oppressed Irishmen, escaped slaves, French heretics, and members of Caribbean indigenous groups. Pirates hailed from all over the Atlantic and Mediterranean, and included a high proportion of blacks and mulattos, who often had leadership roles. Marcus Rediker notes in *Villains of All Nations* that sixty members of Blackbeard's crew of one hundred were black.

Pirates didn't just plunder ships; they enforced their own brand of justice across the Atlantic. Upon boarding a ship, pirates interviewed the crew to determine how their captain commanded. If he were said by his crew to be cruel, the pirates might beat or execute him; if he were fair, they treated him well and sometimes they sent him off with a bit of money of his own. Sometimes their justice was poetic, such as when pirates commandeered a slaver, armed the captured Africans with knives, then sent the hapless captain back on his merry way. Pirates also held grudges, assaulting trading posts and towns where authorities had executed their comrades. After a fellow pirate captain was executed at a Portuguese slave fortress, Walter Kennedy stormed the castle, captured it, and burned it to the ground. Not for nothing did so many pirate vessels contain the word "Revenge" in their names.

Media piracy, the now-mundane practice of streaming a TV show or downloading an MP3, seems a far cry from the life-or-death struggles of buccaneers on the high seas. But the history of media piracy in the US is similar to that of seafaring pirates. In the early days of the republic, lacking international copyright treaties, the US government encouraged pirating of British literary classics in order to promote literacy. Authors like Charles Dickens complained to no avail; not until American literature caught up in quality and appeal could authors like Mark Twain and Harriet Beecher Stowe persuade the US government to enforce copyright. By their time the US had become a scientific and cultural powerhouse in its own right, and it sought to protect its advantage by enforcing property rights more strictly than it had before. The book publishers who once flooded the continent with cheap copies of the great works of literature had to go legit.

A similar change has happened in our own era. Patents, copyrights, and trademarks are the legal apparatuses that turn music, movies, and medicines into "intellectual property." Infringements were once tolerated, or at least compromises were worked out. A small surcharge built into the price of every cassette was the tribute thousands of homemade mixtapes paid to the record industry cartel. But in the internet age, no quarter has been given. Fan remixes are summarily removed from the web, even if they fall under legally protected fair use. A grandmother displaced by Hurricane Rita and a disabled single mother have been terrorized with lawsuits; the young operators of NinjaVideo were prosecuted and given prison sentences merely for linking to – not hosting – copyrighted material.

Just as the demonization and eventual destruction of the Atlantic pirates stemmed from the growing importance of maritime trade, the crackdown on piracy is linked not just to the fortunes of any one industry such as music or film, but to the fate of the economic system as a whole. Intellectual property makes up 80 percent of the net worth of US corporations and 60 percent of their exports. These rights secure streams

of tribute from wherever our pharmaceuticals are purchased, wherever our software is used legally, wherever Hollywood films are shown, resold, or spun off into branded merchandise. This is the so-called "knowledge economy," a term that points less to global capitalism as a whole than to the American position in the international division of labor.

Piracy has been a part of the internet since it left the confines of the military-industrial complex and entered the worlds of commerce. Once people get hold of any new medium, they set about doing all the wrong things with it, experimenting with blasphemy, pornography, and political radicalism. And so it was with the internet. As soon as commercial software was available, groups of disciplined, organized volunteers emerged to destroy it. They were software pirates, and in their dialect they called their ill-gotten goods "warez." They called themselves The Scene.

Piracy, the appropriation of private property in the form of copyright infringement, threatens this economy, just as Atlantic pirates threatened slave-capitalism in the early eighteenth century. And the source of the threat is identical: the very workers crucial to those industries. The earliest software pirate groups were self-organized clusters of skilled programmers and computer enthusiasts who tested their abilities by reverse-engineering protections on proprietary software, "cracking" it and rendering it "warez," useable to anyone who downloaded it. Many of these individuals came from the software industry itself, where they were underpaid, unchallenged, or otherwise unfulfilled. They found their fulfillment in collaborating with others to release warez faster than any other pirate group. This organizational model has spread to the online piracy of other media, such as movies and music.

In all of these cases, the means of production, once they come under worker control, are used against the industry itself. Just as the old pirates used commandeered ships against Atlantic trade, online pirates use their workplace infrastructure to store and host the information they liberate. In 2004, Fox Entertainment busted six employees who were hosting movies on the Fox servers for a warez group. Movie studios are rife with pirates torrenting films. Low-level music industry workers (including journalists) are the most frequent source of pre-release music leaks. The culture industries rarely disclose how their goods get onto the internet before they've hit stores – it's embarrassing to admit that your own workforce is sabotaging you.

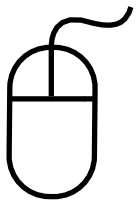
Few in the warez scene make any money from their piracy. Instead, they boast of their noncommercial motivations, which they counterpoise to the motivations of the software industry. They do it for status in their community, in an echo of Edward Bellamy's utopian novel *Looking Backward*, in which work is divorced from the wage, and incentives instead come from badges that reflect one's effort.

Pirates are self-consciously political. They justify themselves by disavowing an industry that releases shoddy products at high prices – the industry that employs many of them – and they will also tell you they buy the products they like. But they don't have to. Their decision to purchase is rooted in ethics, not in need. And as Marx reminds us, the realm of freedom begins where the realm of necessity ends.

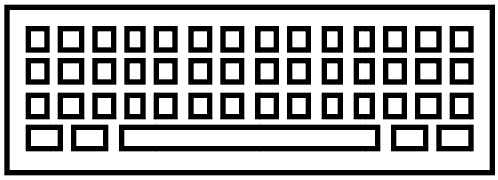
This is the fundamental difference between capitalists and pirates. Capitalists accumulate. Pirates archive. A capitalist wants profit from the sale of every commodity and will enforce scarcity to get it. Pirates work to create vast common spaces, amassing huge troves of content, much of it too obscure to be of much use to very many people. Piracy destroys exchange value, and pays little heed to use value.

In the early eighteenth century, business and empire came up with a strategy to destroy piracy: extreme public violence. Pirate ships were hunted down and pirates were hanged by the dozens, or sent off to die "lingeringly" doing hard labor in one of the colonies. The decaying corpses of executed pirates were chained to trading posts from Ghana to Virginia as warnings to others. Brutal examples were set. And so it goes today.

Megaupload's Kim Dotcom, a willfully tacky fat guy with a baby face and a vanity license plate that says "GUILTY," has styled himself as a kind of comic villain, a composite of everything people love to hate. He effectively serves as empire's face of piracy: an overweight



THE CRACKDOWN ON PIRACY IS LINKED TO THE FATE OF THE ECONOMIC SYSTEM AS A WHOLE.



CAPITALISTS ACCUMULATE.

PIRATES ARCHIVE.

nouveau-riche wannabe hacker who finally gets his comeuppance through the macho justice of Uncle Sam. It's so easy to hate Kim Dotcom that you almost forget that the US convinced the New Zealand government to send in an assault brigade, bereft of a valid warrant but outfitted with automatic weapons and helicopters, to arrest a Finnish citizen at the demand of Hollywood studios. If Kim Dotcom didn't exist, the FBI, with the help of the MPAA, would have invented him.

Megaupload, then the largest site for streaming pirated media, went offline in January. The second season of *Game of Thrones* aired from April to June of this year, and more viewers watched it illegally on laptops than on HBO. New hosting services, and the link compilers who organize them, spring up constantly. Take down one *Game of Thrones* stream, or even the entire hosting site; take down a dozen or a hundred of them and the same episode will pop up in a slew of other spots, hydra-like, as the pirate multitude continues to wage its decentralized battle against property.

The hydra was the preferred metaphor authorities used against all manner of resistance to the violent and tumultuous enclosures of common property in the early centuries of capitalism. Peasants thrown off the land vandalized enclosures, vagabonds robbed the well-to-do, egalitarian religious figures preached the destruction of hierarchy, writers blasphemed state churches, slaves murdered their masters. The powerful spoke of the need to summon a Hercules to restore order, via state terror, to destroy these beasts.

Today, the subversion of intellectual property is one of the hydra's heads, breathing poison and gnashing its teeth at power. It has a proven ability to sap the surpluses that capital requires for its reproduction. And this is occurring on a scale much larger than torrenting popular HBO costume dramas. National governments are in open revolt against US IP dominance: India has granted compulsory licenses on patented drugs, effectively nullifying proprietary claims by pharmaceutical companies. China's consumer goods sector is made up of increasingly realistic knockoffs of designer brands. European parliaments have rejected the onerous ACTA treaty, the most recent repressive telecom legislation the content industries have pushed on the increasingly skeptical electorate. If modernity in the global south has always been piratical, oppositional to the needs and desires of the corporations in wealthy countries, it is increasingly so worldwide.

While piracy is a frontline in the struggle against capitalism, it is not in and of itself "radical." It is structurally antagonistic to private property, but in contradictory ways. Kim Dotcom is the obvious example of the pirate capitalist; Google and the telecoms, which reap profits from the searching and bandwidth taken up by piracy, could be thought of as others. The warez scene and its offshoots in books, movies, and music are made up largely of white-collar professionals who rarely profess any opposition to capitalism (only occasionally to "corporatism" in that typically American fantasy of small independent business and markets without monopolies). The Pirate Party, born of the suppression of the openly property-hostile torrent site The Pirate Bay, shows its political naïveté in its inane techno-optimism and its members' disdain for antiracism and antisexism. The US Pirate Party tellingly gave up its own raison d'être, renouncing piracy itself!

But things could change. Anonymous quickly went from online pranksters to the Red Brigades of the Occupy movement, striking fear into cops caught beating protesters. More recently, the group defaced Japanese government websites in response to draconian antipiracy legislation. Though these are encouraging developments, we must remind ourselves there is nothing inevitable about the emergence of anticapitalist politics, in piracy or anywhere else. But anything that strikes terror into the hearts of the rich and powerful should be welcomed aboard with full honors. ■

WORKING FOR THE WEEKEND

by Chris Maisano

UNDER CAPITALISM, THE ONLY THING WORSE THAN HAVING A JOB IS NOT HAVING ONE.

Last spring, as the US economy entered yet another period of slowdown and unemployment levels in the Eurozone hit record highs, a meme called "Old Economy Steven" started making the rounds on the Internet. Most memes are frivolous endeavors, devoted to exploiting cats for comedic purposes or projecting feminist fantasies onto the empty signifier that is Ryan Gosling. But whoever came up with "Old Economy Steven," likely a recent college graduate with mountains of student loan debt and bleak prospects for reasonably gainful employment, was aiming for social critique.

The image used to depict Steven looks like a long-forgotten high school yearbook photo of somebody's "cool" uncle. With his feathered bangs, wispy mustache, and open-necked big-collared shirt, Steven looks the kind of guy who used to spend his Saturday nights cruising the main drag in his Trans-Am, scoping babes and blasting Bachman-Turner Overdrive at maximum volume.

Most iterations of the meme implicitly or explicitly contrast the postwar Golden Age of working-class prosperity with the straitened circumstances of today's young proletarians. Steven pays his yearly tuition at a state college – with his savings from a summer job! He graduates with a liberal arts degree – and actually finds suitable entry-level

employment! Eventually, he's retiring with five pensions and going on vacation whenever he damn well pleases.

But Steven doesn't just enjoy the material comforts of Old Economy abundance. He possesses a degree of everyday power scarcely imaginable by working people today. Steven can tell his boss to shove it, walk out and get hired at the factory across the street. If he gets fired at the new job, that's no big deal. He'll just pick up another on the way home. If he wants a raise, he can just walk into the boss's office, ask for one, and get it. Steven may be a working stiff, but he doesn't have to bow or scrape before anyone to make ends meet.

There's more than a whiff of second-hand nostalgia emanating from the Old Economy Steven meme. Proletarian life has never really been so easy, and not everyone got to taste the fruits of postwar abundance. There's a reason why a dorky-looking white dude named Steven is used as the avatar of working-class security and agency. Still, the meme resonates because it speaks to a very real sense of loss, a yearning for a time when the working class, particularly unionized workers, could expect a steadily increasing standard of living and the sense of security and freedom that came with it.

Steven's Old Economy was a full-employment economy, and the demand for full employment must be an integral component of a revitalized Left. This should not be interpreted, however, as a call to return to a time that was exceptional in the history of capitalist development. The Golden Age is irretrievably gone, and we shouldn't recreate it even if we could.

A full-employment vision for the twenty-first century can and must look very different from the full-employment realities of the postwar era. Nor is the call for full employment necessarily bound up with a set of normative assumptions about the virtues of work and the vices of idleness. We want full employment precisely because it weakens the disciplinary powers of the boss and opens up possibilities for less work and more leisure. A full-employment economy raises the bargaining power and living standards of the working class in the short run and erodes the social power of capital in the political economy as a whole, opening up possibilities for radical social transformation.

A LONGER LEASH

By full employment, I mean something fairly intuitive: an economy in which everyone who is willing and able to work has access to a job and where the unemployment rate is at or approaching zero. Mainstream economics, however, offers a rather different conception of full employment under the infelicitous acronym NAIRU, or Non-Accelerating Inflation Rate of Unemployment. Broadly speaking, NAIRU corresponds to an ostensibly "natural" level of unemployment that does not place any significant upward pressure on the rate of inflation. This is to say, it does not reflect the common-sense definition of full employment at all. It's merely a projection of the size of the "industrial reserve army" of the unemployed needed in a particular economy to keep wages and prices down and maintain business confidence in the investment climate.

The concept of NAIRU itself is an ideological response to the political ramifications of the postwar full-employment economy, where average unemployment levels across the advanced capitalist countries dipped below 3 percent in the period between 1960 and 1973. This state of near-full employment dramatically enhanced the power of the working class by eroding the disciplinary power of the boss, who could no longer control recalcitrant workers by pointing to the unemployed masses outside the factory gates or the office door. This strengthening of labor's power in relation to capital is reflected in the massive strike wave of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when workers sought not only higher wages and expanded benefits but a measure of control over the organization and management of the workplace itself. This dramatic shift in the balance of power also played out in innumerable small-scale confrontations between workers and bosses on the shop floor. In one telling anecdote from the period, an assembly-line worker at GM who skipped work nearly every Monday is confronted by his harried foreman. When asked why he should only work four days a week, the worker gave a wonderfully truculent response that captures the spirit of the time: "Because I can't make a living working three days." How many workers would have the audacity to say that today?

The Polish Marxist economist Michał Kalecki presaged these developments in his classic 1943 essay "The Political Aspects of Full Employment." A full-employment economy would, at least in theory, benefit capitalists by boosting the purchasing power of the masses and therefore the profits of companies looking to meet that demand. But as Kalecki observed, capital's resistance to full-employment policies derives from a different set of concerns. In a full-employment economy, the disciplinary effect exercised by the reserve army of the unemployed is fatally undermined. The power of the boss shrinks not only in the context of the individual workplace but in the political economy as a whole, giving workers a longer leash and raising their capacity to mount a challenge to the imperial prerogatives of capital. Though a full-employment economy would bolster bottom lines by boosting the purchasing power of the masses and making demand effective, the social and political relations of production that come with it are untenable from capital's point of view. Acceptance of a full-employment economy would be tantamount to unilateral disarmament in the class struggle.

Historical experience bears this argument out. The neoliberal order has not been very successful in restoring economic growth to the levels of the postwar era. But it restored the elite class power that was threatened politically by a rising tide of worker militancy and the radicalization of important sections of the historical parties of the Left.

At just over 8 percent, the US unemployment rate is currently too high to loosen the disciplinary constraints on the working class, and too low to spontaneously generate mass movements of the unemployed for jobs and income. It's up to those of us on the Left and in what remains of the labor movement to unite the employed and the unemployed, the organized and the unorganized, the secure and the precarious behind a political program that puts the right to work at the top of its banner.

THE HOURS ARE TOO DAMN LONG!

The call for full employment should not be confused with an affirmation of the work ethic at the expense of pleasure and leisure. We agree with Marx's contention that the "true realm of freedom" begins exactly where work ceases, and that "the shortening of the working-day is its basic prerequisite." For socialists, freedom is exclusively identified with the time we spend outside the sphere of material production. We cannot and should not "find ourselves" through work, but through the relationships we build with friends, neighbors, and lovers, the political struggles we engage in alongside our comrades, and the creative and artistic endeavors we pursue as ends in themselves.

Until the middle of the twentieth century, even the most conservative sections of the US labor movement embraced the progressive shortening of the working day and the working week as a basic demand of trade unionism. This aspiration united pure-and-simple unionists and revolutionary socialists, the AFL and the IWW, Samuel Gompers and Big Bill Haywood. During the Great Depression, the AFL was instrumental in supporting Alabama Senator Hugo Black's effort to pass a bill for a thirty-hour work week in Congress. The bill passed the Senate but was opposed by Roosevelt, so it had little chance of actually becoming law. It was

subsequently watered down and passed as the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, which established the forty-hour work week we know and love today.

The labor movement had traditionally perceived the demand for full employment and the demand for shorter hours as inextricably linked; progress toward one was simultaneously progress toward the other. Gompers made the case bluntly: "so long as there is one man who seeks employment and cannot obtain it, the hours of labor are too long."

As David Roediger and Philip Foner observe in *Our Own Time*, their survey of labor's struggle against the exigencies of capitalist time, the demand for shorter hours addressed three important goals. First, it tended to unite workers across divides of craft, skill, race, ethnicity, gender, age, and employment status in ways that struggles over wages could not. Second, it compelled the labor movement to take action in the political arena and broaden its appeal beyond its own members. And third, the demand for shorter hours encroached directly on the right of management to organize and control the labor process. If workers could have a say over when to work, what would stop them from eventually demanding control over how to work?

After World War II, when the bulk of informed opinion expected the global economy to fall into yet another slump, radicals and militants in unions like the United Auto Workers (UAW) placed the demand for shorter hours for the same pay at or near the top of their bargaining agendas. At Ford's colossal River Rouge plant near Detroit, the radical leaders of UAW Local 600 antagonized both the company and the union's leadership with their demand of "30 for 40" – thirty hours' work per week for forty hours' pay. UAW militants continued to demand less work for the same pay until the 1970s, when the neoliberal counterrevolution put an end to those aspirations.

The working day in the US has not been significantly altered, either through collective bargaining or legislative action, since the passage of the Fair Labor Standards Act in 1938. As the global economy continues its seemingly interminable stagnation, it's time to rediscover the lost history of labor's struggle for shorter hours. Unemployment remains stubbornly high while the average annual number of work hours in the US remains among the highest across the advanced capitalist countries. In 2010, the average US worker spent 1,778 hours on the job. By contrast, workers in many continental European nations and the Scandinavian social democracies enjoy a much larger amount of leisure time, and at higher rates of labor market participation. To a significant extent, they have averted the social disaster of mass unemployment through work-sharing schemes and other policies aimed at preventing workers from falling into long-term joblessness.

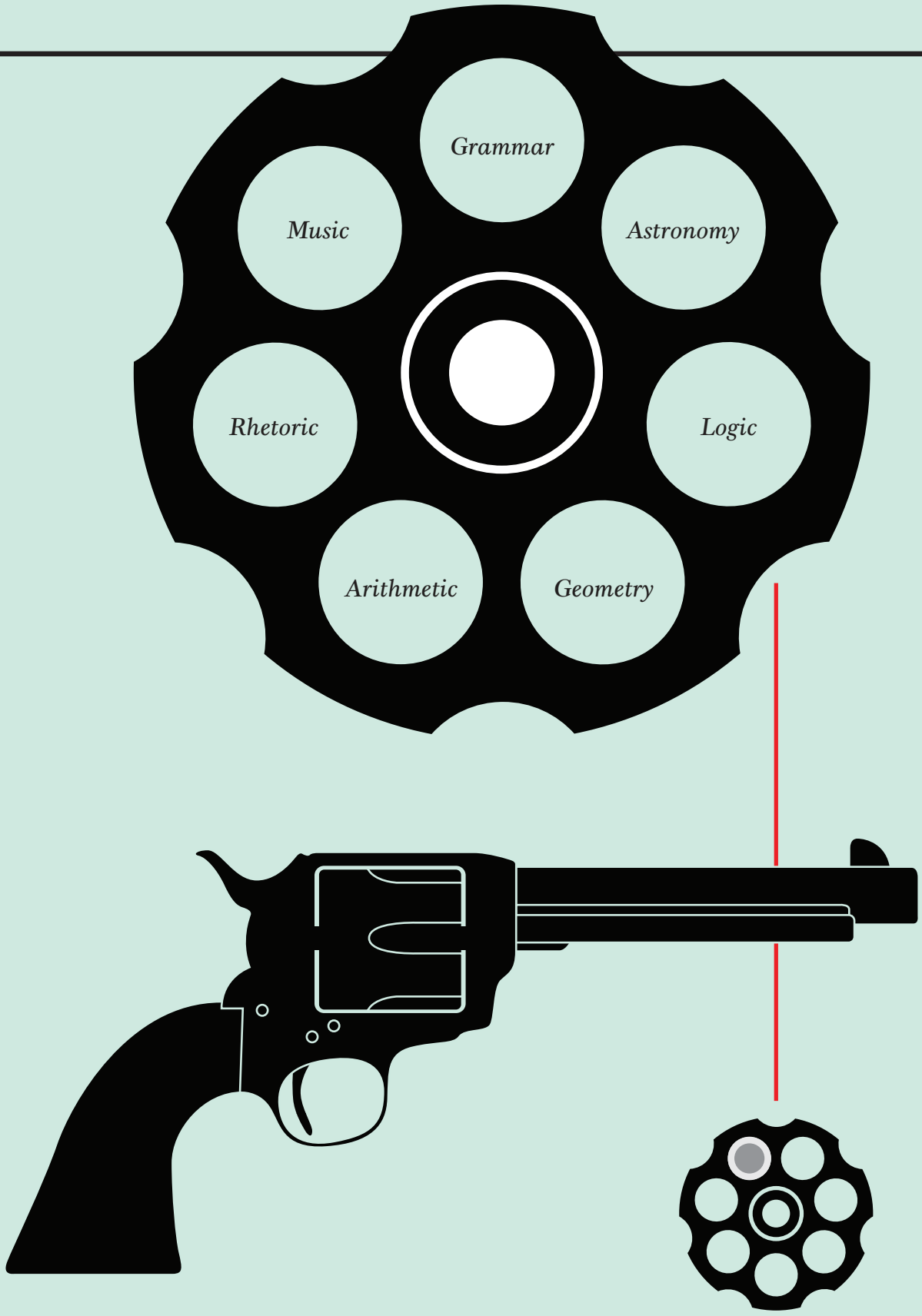
Scores of studies have demonstrated that unemployment and weak attachments to the labor force are deeply damaging to the physical and emotional well-being of those who experience them. Ending this plight should be among the main short-term goals of the Left, quite apart from any larger strategic agenda we may advance. So long as we remain within the coordinates of a capitalist political economy, the only thing worse than having a job is not having one. And as the experience of the social democracies has shown, it's possible to maintain high rates of employment, shorter working hours, and robust welfare states – even in a neoliberal era. Of course, the balance of political forces in those countries has long been much more favorable to the labor movement and the Left than the situation we confront in our own country. None of what we want is possible until we create the political forces we need to win them – but that's a subject for a different essay.

At the end of *The General Theory*, Keynes surveyed the dire political-economic scene of the mid 1930s and summed it up in a single, incisive phrase: "The outstanding faults of the economic society in which we live are its failure to provide for full employment and its arbitrary and inequitable distribution of wealth and incomes."

After the long detour of the postwar Golden Age, those thirty glorious years in which the advanced capitalist countries appeared to square the circle of economic growth and social welfare, is there any doubt that we find ourselves once again in the same predicament? Then as now, the program is clear: tax the rich, put people to work, shorten hours, and build the welfare state. These are the demands on which we might build a coalition of left-liberals, social democrats, and radicals while appealing to a broad and deeply insecure public. The current situation calls for nothing less.

Considering the paralysis and dysfunction of our political system, the seemingly impregnable dominance of our economic elites, and the drastic erosion in the size and strength of our labor movement, it seems hopelessly utopian to raise the demand for full employment as the rallying cry for a revitalized Left. But it's the precisely the utopianism of the demand that makes it so compelling – and necessary – in the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

The establishment of full employment is the sort of transitional demand that could appeal to the very real and immediate needs of millions. It could shift the balance of power between workers and capital and lay the groundwork for more radical and permanent changes in the basic structure of the political economy. It constitutes a central component of the strategy that should guide the theory and practice of a revitalized Left for the twenty-first century. ■


Grammar
Music
Astronomy
Rhetoric
Logic
Arithmetic
Geometry

SARAH LAWRENCE, WITH GUNS

by Anthony Galluzzo

WE ASKED A FORMER WEST POINT PROFESSOR ABOUT TEACHING LITERATURE AT THE NATION'S MOST PRESTIGIOUS MILITARY ACADEMY. WHAT HE TOLD US REVEALED THE TRUTH BEHIND THE COUNTRY'S MOST ELITE WARRIOR CASTE — AND HOW LIBERAL HEROES LIKE THOREAU AND THE BEATS INSPIRE THE NEXT GENERATION OF "RUNAWAY GENERALS."

GREG, a tall, lanky, and unusually thoughtful cadet, waited for me after class. While most West Point "plebes" (first-year students) ran out at the end of the fifty-five minute period, Greg almost always lingered, wanting to further parse this or that novel, play, or poem.

He regularly and passionately participated in class discussions while large groups of the cadets dozed. He took unpopular positions when I ventured into controversial territory and sought me out for "A.I." – additional instruction – whenever he wanted to discuss something above and beyond the curriculum.

But Greg was unusually silent that day during a debate about the value of "literature" and interpretation for our future military officers.

It hadn't gone well.

"No disrespect, sir, but I think this poetry crap is pretty useless." This was Troy, another very vocal cadet. Troy often sounded off about the worthlessness of "English." English was his catch-all term for the humanities, social sciences, and any mode of intellectual inquiry without one "right" answer and some solid practical application, like building a bridge or blowing one up. He was not a fan of APL classes. APL is the official United States Military Academy acronym for Art, History, Philosophy, and Literature: four separate disciplines all rolled into one department, ironically confirming Troy's worst assumptions about their interchangeability.

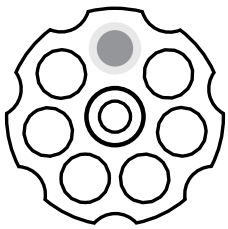
Despite Troy's many and frequent provocations in the classroom, I usually stuck to "facilitating debate," in the bloodless lingo of the USMA. But that day, I took the bait and countered Troy's swaggering declaration. He was, after all, talking shit about my vocation.

But rather than engage in Adornian jujitsu – agreeing that the humanities are useless and it is exactly their uselessness that is valuable – I instead reiterated the standard APL party line: literature is in fact very valuable for you, future wartime leaders, since it fosters empathy (or is it sympathy?) for various "others," as you imaginatively identify with the escaped slave or invisible man.

Consider, young cadet, that you will be serving in very different cultural environments, such as Afghanistan or Iraq, which requires a more expansive kind of understanding. I could hear my inner critic objecting to this soft imperialist instrumentalization of literary study – a kind of weaponized sentimentalism – but Troy was satisfied, or at least silent.

Just then, the section marcher politely signaled to me that class was

WHILE THE CADETS KNEW THEY WERE SUPPOSED TO HATE THIS COMMUNIST, HIS PROWESS AS A FIGHTER, HIS VIOLENT, SELF-SACRIFICING DEATH, AND THE DANGEROUS PROXIMITY OF HIS RHETORIC TO THEIR OWN ELICITED SEVERAL BEGRUDGING AND CONFLICTED EXPRESSIONS OF RESPECT.



over. The cadets rushed for the door, but Greg stayed behind. His uncharacteristic silence in class and the look on his face told me something was bothering him.

"I agreed with a lot of what you said today, Professor Galluzzo," he said. "But don't you think there's a difference between imaginary others and actual people you meet on the ground, in a place like Afghanistan? Can't fantasies also reinforce stereotypes?" He articulated my own misgivings. I suggested he read Edward Said.

Although Greg didn't know the book, his questions reminded me that *Orientalism* – a text and term often invoked by many of my West Point colleagues at the time as what "we" weren't doing over there – is very much about the ideological misuse of imaginative literature in the service of nineteenth-century imperialism.

Impressed, I asked him why he didn't participate in that day's debate. Greg and Troy often went at it. Troy would voice his disapproval of some text or topic with a "*hooah*," that all-purpose West Point exclamation. Greg would almost always counter with a thorough and levelheaded response.

They were a study in contrasts – lanky and thoughtful Greg versus stocky and insouciant Troy. Troy was loud, inappropriate, and always surrounded by a group of admirers as a result. Entranced by his outspokenness, they seconded his views in class while Greg was usually alone in his opinions. "I wanted to say something, sir, but I thought, after the 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' discussion the other day, I'd give it a rest."

No one had vocally supported Greg's liberal stance on DADT, while several cadets had echoed Troy's opposition, and a few others had remained silent. Silence at West Point doesn't necessarily entail indifference or disengagement; I know that Greg had his supporters. At the time, I drew the obvious conclusion – while Troy's views were typical, Greg was challenging the conservative consensus of these aspiring Army officers and many of the leaders they will one day replace.

Greg questioned many of the heroic values central to the West Point ethos and certainly rejected both the unthinking obedience and the thoughtless self-congratulation that I sometimes observed in the corps of cadets. In other words, he is the kind of critical thinker that the twenty-first century Army needs for America's forever wars, according to its more enlightened spokesperson. And he is exactly what West Point has promised to the American public.

BACK IN 2009, before I ever set foot on West Point's campus, I interviewed at the Modern Language Association Convention for an assistant professorship with the Citadel, the Military College of South Carolina.

The Citadel is an unforgiving military academy affiliated with the South Carolina Militia, rather than any of the US armed forces. The college gained notoriety in the nineties when its hidebound leadership refused to admit women – twenty years after the volunteer military and its five service academies went coed. Shannon Faulkner, the prospective cadet denied admission due to her sex, sued the school and the case went all the way to the Supreme Court, where she prevailed. She was eventually driven out of the place by a relentless campaign of harassment, intimidation, and torment.

My interview with them was off-putting, to say the least.

Two civilians, a man and a woman, kept me waiting in the hallway of a San Francisco hotel for over an hour. They finally emerged from the suite after a friend stopped by with a bottle of champagne. We sat down for the interview. I told them about my dissertation while they kept asking if I was *really* okay with wearing the required military uniform. It clearly wasn't the place for me and they wanted me to know it.

My first encounter with West Point couldn't have been more different. The job interview was conducted in a large room in one of the many impressive granite buildings that comprise Thomas Jefferson's military academy on the Hudson. I was to meet with the APL department's most senior civilian professor, New Republic regular and recent Guggenheim fellow Dr Elizabeth D. Samet.

Although West Point doesn't offer tenure, Professor Samet had achieved de facto job security. I read her 2006 memoir, *Soldier's Heart: Reading Literature Through Peace and War at West Point*, to prepare, and was heartened to discover that literature had value in what I still imagined to be the most pragmatically minded of American institutions.

Samet and Colonel Scott Krawczyk, the vice chair of the department, were waiting for me with another civilian academic, who, I learned, was an expert on modern and contemporary American poetry. Both Samet and her colleague appeared more Columbia than West Point. I felt at ease. Krawczyk, an imposing figure, is a military officer with a PhD – which is required of the senior faculty – and some academic reputation as a romantic scholar. This is certainly not the Citadel, I thought to myself.

"We like to think that this is a liberal arts college. Which also happens to be a military school," the colonel said.

Elizabeth followed, in a half-joking tone. "Like Bard or Sarah Lawrence. With uniforms."

The mood lightened, so I confessed my leftist and antimilitarist convictions. I wanted to get it all out on the table. "Do you see this as a problem here?"

The colonel responded by saying that while officers are "obliged to avoid explicit expressions of political belief, the US Military Academy is an institution that prides itself on academic freedom in the classroom."

Samet echoed her book in stressing the need for different, challenging, and even explicitly critical perspectives in military education.

I accepted the position, telling myself that I would voice those challenging perspectives and foster a different kind of officer in doing so.

Although these liberal character traits might seem unsuitable for a soldier, West Point is ostensibly dedicated to shaping "leaders of character" for an American Army that, in Samet's words, "prides itself on the soldier's ability to recognize immoral or unlawful orders: 'I was just doing what I was told' isn't a satisfactory excuse. That is why the abuses of Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib, for example, have been such a crushing betrayal to military professionals, especially, perhaps, to those who teach ethics at West Point."

But my student Troy was also very much an iconoclast, bucking authority in the approved fashion, showing his COs that he, too, will one day assume command. On the surface, Troy isn't a follower, or in any way a good soldier-automaton, as I could hear in the forced – and often "fuck you" – tone of his "yes, sir – no, sir"s. He wore his rebellious streak on his dress grey sleeve, often bragging about how he shirked this or that duty and suffered the consequences for it: marching back and forth across a muddy field for hours on weekends, or losing privileges, including the passes he needed to leave "post" – the West Point campus. The campus, for most cadets, is little more than a grey, gothic prison on the picturesque Hudson River.

Troy was willing to suffer the consequences for his open defiance of the rules, even as he reiterated a certain version of "duty, honor, country" that endeared him to his peers as a rebel in the grand West Point tradition of "the Goat."

The Goat is the name for the mischief-making cadet who graduates last in his class. Famous Goats have included George Custer and Dwight Eisenhower, while more recent luminaries like Stanley McChrystal aspired to the position, as one account of the great man's time at the academy recounts: "McChrystal is a dissident ringleader on campus. One classmate, who asked not to be named, describes finding McChrystal passed out in the shower after he drank a case of beer he'd hidden under the sink. He viewed the tactical officers, sort of like glorified residential advisors at West Point, as the enemy."

In *The Operators*, journalist Michael Hastings tells the story of one of McChrystal's most elaborate campus pranks: "McChrystal and five others borrow old weapons from the campus museum, including a French MAT-49 submachine gun and dummy hand grenades made from socks. At 22:15 hours, dressed in full commando gear and with painted faces, they storm Greg Hall. The main intent, says Barno (who didn't participate in the raid) was to 'create chaos.'" As the managing editor of West Point's literary magazine, McChrystal subsequently published a short story about the raid with the title "Where Goats Dare."

My colleagues at other colleges and universities found my reports of this behavior surprising, wanting to maintain the fantasy of perfectly behaved students somewhere, anywhere, at the very least in the Army. Yet this *hooah* flavor of disobedience is, in many ways, not inconsistent with West Point's mission to produce "leaders of character" – in other words, to institutionally and ideologically reproduce the Army officer corps elite.

The military requires standardization, regimentation, and subservience to the chain of command, even as its leaders seek to groom the next generation of MacArthurs and Pattons, those exemplars of macho initiative who give orders rather than simply following them. Even the bureaucratic rituals imposed on cadets, which I initially understood in terms of breaking down

the civilian and building up the soldier, nonetheless pale beside the orgies of affirmation and self-congratulation showered on the cadets by their commanding officers. This was a far cry from popular images of the sadistic, ego-demolishing drill sergeant apotheosized by Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket*. In this way, West Point is like Sarah Lawrence or even the Ivies: "You're the best!" is the dominant message to students.

The mandatory Dean's or Superintendent's "briefings" that I attended with my students were exalted pep rallies – the leaders telling their charges how "excellent" they were, as they embodied the "excellence" of this most "excellent" of places. Cadets *hooahing* in raucous agreement, in what amounted to a collective high-five between current and future Army leaders. The faculty briefings weren't much different, as we were informed that West Point is the "best liberal arts school in the country" ad nauseam, according to a methodologically dubious 2009 *Forbes* college rankings report.

This exceptionalist posture is curiously reinforced through institutional coddling, at odds with both the Spartan rigors of military training and the self-reliance presumably required in a war zone. While acting out is to be expected from teenagers in such a rule-bound environment as they react to an often misconceived and outdated paternalism, Troy's *hooah* rebelliousness is a direct extension of the demeanor fostered by the leadership. Some cadets thus break or bend the rules they deem unimportant.

Most officers and cadets understand, usually by their third year, the overwhelmingly performative dimension of military culture: showing up and jumping through the hoops that you have to in order to get by. There is a deep vein of cynicism that reminded me of the Catholic Church of my childhood.

It is against this background that certain circumscribed acts of rebellion – signs of decision, acts of manly self-assertion – make sense. They mark the cadet as a future leader, willing to buck bureaucratic protocols if the exigencies of battle call for such a thing or even push back against a certain authority, insofar as that line of action is dictated by the nebulous imperatives of "honor."

Those great West Point iconoclasts Patton, MacArthur, and Robert E. Lee best exemplify this phenomenon. All three of them are wildly popular among the West Point corps of cadets, as each represents in his own way an ideal-type of the warrior as rebel against elected executive authority, or, in the case of Lee, the Union itself.

This selective disrespect sometimes manifests as a troubling contempt for the American public and its political representatives which I observed among some cadets and even their Army officer instructors. To them, we're a part of a flaccid civilian world at odds with West Point ideals of martial and heroic individualism. Several of my students were even offended by the "support the troops" rhetoric trumpeted by a jingoistic US media, which they saw as expressions of bad faith or guilt.

At the same time, many cadets – and several of my Army colleagues – pledge allegiance to popular American political viewpoints, such as libertarianism. This despite the fact that they are servants of the state at its most coercive, which feeds, clothes, houses, educates, and employs them in what is an admirably successful example of central planning on a mass scale. One former colleague sometimes indignantly invoked Murray Rothbard, the "anarcho-capitalist" who dismisses the state as an "armed gang," or attacked public-sector workers and their pensions, without the slightest bit of self-awareness or irony. In *Soldier's Heart*, Samet describes another institutionally approved form of iconoclasm.

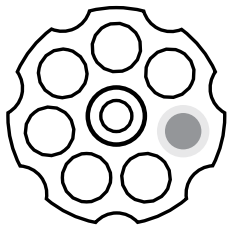
She recounts a cadet's report on Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience," for which he deliberately showed up late and was subsequently punished for it, cleverly illustrating Thoreau's method, while the principles that animated the antislavery and antiwar protests were reduced to "radical individualism," without much further elaboration.

During my initial campus visit, I was asked to teach a few chapters from *On The Road* to the introductory literature class. I was, at the time, surprised by the cadets' enthusiasm for this material. In retrospect, the appeal of Kerouac's masculine and frequently adolescent vision of rebellious self-assertion makes sense in that environment. The course reading list for the class included Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*, Thoreau's *Walden*, Melville's *Typee*, Kerouac's novel, and Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild*.

The Colonel who designed the syllabus around American individualism and American individualists' various "errands in the wilderness" later spent some time at the Afghan Military Academy, which is being organized on the USMA model. In one mandatory briefing, he concluded his own tale of adventure by mentioning that Emerson and Thoreau are just what the religiously-minded Afghans need.

The cadets' reaction to Che Guevara's "Man and Socialism" stood out, since the guerrilla's vision is a martial and masculine one in which Cubans are asked to sacrifice for their new revolutionary society, which Che describes in language redolent of the battalion.

While the cadets knew they were supposed to hate this communist, his prowess as a fighter, his violent, self-sacrificing death, and the dangerous proximity of his rhetoric to their own elicited several begrudging and conflicted expressions of respect: "He was a bastard, but…." This class, chock-full of rebels in the mold of Troy, wrestled with the specter of the revolutionary fighter.



DISOBEDIENCE IS AMBIGUOUS IN ITS IMPLICATIONS, SINCE, THE AUTHORITY THAT IS DISOBEYED COULD JUST AS WELL BE THE DEMOCRATICALLY ELECTED EXECUTIVE AS THE ROGUE CO WHO BARKS "ILLEGAL AND IMMORAL" ORDERS.

At West Point, the rebellious gesture is presented as nearly synonymous with the popularity of the abovementioned writers, so that confederate Lee joins hands with abolitionist Thoreau. Disobedience is ambiguous in its implications, since, devoid of any specific ethical or political content, the authority that is disobeyed could just as well be the democratically elected executive as the rogue CO who barks "illegal and immoral" orders.

In a chapter entitled "To Obey or Not to Obey," Samet describes her own cadets' disobedient behavior and iconoclastic impulses, which she automatically identifies with a critical moral outlook certain to reassure those readers who crave a more enlightened form of militarism.

She recounts the story of a former student who declares in an email that in light of his experience in Iraq, he wants to study military law in order to uphold the "laws of war," informed by "humanitarian principles," in the "murky wars" the United States will apparently prosecute in perpetuity.

We are made to recognize how this ex-student's disobedient streak, as demonstrated in the classroom, is sublimated into moral awareness through an engagement with modernist poetry and its ambiguities, which, more than his experience in the Sunni Triangle, led him to this career choice.

Samet never fully considers how disobedience, which is not coextensive with critical thinking, moral scruple, or healthy irreverence, could produce "incidents" such as Haditha or Fort Nama, as well as prevent them.

Samet's book is, among other things, a long apologia for the value of literary study at the military academy, which is described as providing an intellectual space for the cultivation of these critical and reflective faculties, a space for students like Greg. She presents the humanities in general – a marginal course of study that most cadets encounter in the form of the four required APL courses – and English Literature in particular as fostering those habits of mind necessary for the exercise of "moral courage."

She distinguishes moral courage from mere bravery, which "sometimes consists in speaking up, sometimes in stoic silence, sometimes in forging ahead, sometimes in circumspection, and sometimes in preserving nothing less than our humanity."

Yet Samet's account of the uses of literature in an officer's education takes on a decidedly eighteenth-century character, recalling how certain defenders of the novel, among other genres, argued it was useful tool for the cultivation of readers' moral sensibilities, massaging our sentimental capacities into such a state where we would more easily identify with the lowly, the alien, and, in this case, the enemy. Or at least the civilian populations, often indistinguishable from America's various opponents, in counterinsurgency warfare.

This very old discourse overlaps with the counterinsurgency doctrine championed by General David Petraeus, among other prominent West Point alumni, and was all the rage at West Point when I arrived in the summer of 2009.

While Samet highlights the aberrant monstrosity of American militarism and takes issue with the troubling growth of evangelical belief in the service academies, the basic structure of American militarism and the heroic values she celebrates in a thoughtfully literary and thoroughly secular fashion remain uninterrogated.

Moral courage, and the questioning it entails, has its limits.

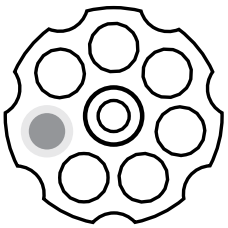
COLONEL Gian Gentile, a West Point professor of military history – and an admirably scathing critic of the Petraeus doctrine – wrote recently that "at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point,

where I teach history, intellectual freedom is fiercely encouraged and protected."

Conservative critics have derided what they see as the growing influence of left-leaning civilian academics at the various service academies, exemplified for them by the Naval Academy at Annapolis, where half of the faculty is civilian and a tenure system is in place far exceeding the Clinton-era Congressional mandate to increase the civilian makeup of the faculty to at least 20 percent.

John Miller gives voice to this line of thinking in a 2002 *National Review* article on bringing "Babylon" to Sparta where he writes: "One of the aims of a general education is to teach students how to think on their own. A military education, on the other hand, requires officers-in-the-making to absorb the stern discipline of accepting orders without questioning them." Against this narrow and reactionary perspective, Samet articulates a seemingly liberal position, which she also ascribes to USMA leadership, sounding almost like a former cadet: "The department doesn't tell us what to think; it teaches us how to think."

Certainly no one ever told me what I could or couldn't teach in some crudely coercive fashion. But conservatives are often ineffective when defending their own institutions. West Point liberalism is, in spite of some genuine conviction on the part of several former colleagues, at least partly designed for public consumption. As David Petraeus once wrote in a policy paper that long precedes his counterinsurgency fame, "it's not what happens, it's what policymakers think happens – the key is 'perception.'"



WEST POINT LIBERALISM IS, IN SPITE OF SOME GENUINE CONVICTION ON THE PART OF SEVERAL FORMER COLLEAGUES, AT LEAST PARTLY DESIGNED FOR PUBLIC CONSUMPTION.

WEST POINT cadets have until the summer between their "yearling" (sophomore) and "cow" (junior) years to leave the academy without penalty. After that, they owe the Army several years of service for their approximately $300,000 education. Those cadets who would not rather be there than anywhere else leave, and a few former students did ask me for letters of recommendation.

Greg had already decided to transfer when he approached me for a letter.

He intimated that he'd been ostracized by many classmates when the liberal views he articulated in class were made known, which I had always assumed to be the case. Greg and the other dissident thinkers I taught always struck me as case studies in moral and intellectual courage, willing to suffer potentially greater consequences than a lost weekend pass or six hours worth of pacing to and fro across a muddy field.

He also informed me that neither tactical noncommissioned officers nor military instructors look kindly on a cadet with a reputation for intellectual nonconformity, and it is the military education that weighs the most heavily among the three pillars of the West Point experience, official claims to parity notwithstanding.

He recently sent me an email: he's decided to take time off and is living in California. Greg and the many cadets like him whom I taught are as intellectually curious as any civilian students I have encountered. These cadets all report the same thing: their intellectual curiosity was stifled at USMA in myriad ways. Even while the Dean brags that "we're better than Harvard, better than Princeton," most cadets learn to "beat the Dean," or do just enough to get by academically, with a wink and a nod.

I ran into Troy this past spring, at the end of my contract, when he told me how much he dreaded "EN 302," that he looked forward to his "cow" year, and then ultimately graduation. He hopes to go on to Ranger school. ■

TERROR VERDE

by Belén Fernández

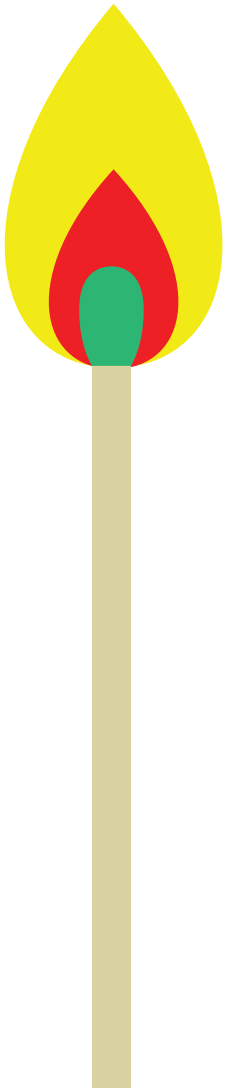
LATIN AMERICA'S PINK TIDE INVENTS GREEN TERROR.

In December 2011, Mary Anastasia O'Grady, editorial board member at the *Wall Street Journal* and patron saint of the Latin American far right, cautioned that the ongoing anti-mining protests in Peru highlighted "risks to development coming from a hard left operating under the guise of 'environmentalism.'"

The sinister designs of protesters "calling themselves environmentalists" were exposed via the following factoid: "Wilfredo Saavedra, president of something called the 'Environmental Defense Front,' also happens to be a former member of the terrorist Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement, which advocates Cuban-style communism."

Given that O'Grady's previous warnings of Cuban-style communism have suggested that the current US State Department is in cahoots with Fidel Castro, political observers might be forgiven for not lapsing into panic-induced seizures.

Of far more legitimate concern than the impending subversion of world order by greenwashed commie terrorists is, of course, that the fabrication of such threats contributes to a blanket delegitimization of environmental activism. More concerning still is that Peruvian President Ollanta Humala, elected last year with the support of leftist movements, earned the applause of none other than O'Grady herself when he militarized his cabinet in response to protests in the northern Peruvian city of Cajamarca, coveted by Colorado-based Newmont Mining Corporation.



Despite having committed during his election campaign to the idea that water is more important than gold, Humala appears to have reworked his priorities to favor the eradication of local water supplies in accordance with Newmont's proposed $4.8 billion gold and copper mine project. The intransigence of those Peruvian citizens who have not arrived at the conclusion that environmental degradation by foreign resource extractors is consistent with "development" has resulted in deadly police crackdowns on protesters, cast by the government as self-defense maneuvers forced on police by extremists.

The state's response to the organization of an anti-mining "march of expectant mothers" in Cajamarca on June 19 was described by Reuters as follows:

> Ana Jara, Peru's minister of women and vulnerable populations, said pregnant protesters would be putting their unborn babies at risk by going to [the] rally.... She accused organizers of using pregnant women as shields to prevent police from breaking up protests.

DESPITE MORALES'S IMAGE AS A STAUNCH DEFENDER OF THE RIGHTS OF MOTHER EARTH AND OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, HIS GOVERNMENT HAS DENOUNCED OPPONENTS OF THE ROAD AS IMPERIALIST AGENTS.

According to the news agency, Jara also warned that the Peruvian penal code stipulates a punishment of three years in prison for mistreatment of a fetus. The purported concern for fetal well-being in this case is difficult to reconcile with the fact that one of the effects of cyanide used in mining operations is an increase in spontaneous abortions and birth defects in surrounding communities.

While Reuters reported a turnout of dozens of pregnant women in Cajamarca in spite of Jara's threats, Peru's *El Comercio* insisted that in fact only five out of forty protesters who appeared to be pregnant were actually expecting and that the rest had disguised their non-pregnancy with pillows and other materials.

Humala is not the only regional leader who has had to contend with political saboteurs feigning environmental concern, pregnancy, and other conditions. Earlier this year in Bolivia, I watched a protest of disabled persons in wheelchairs and on crutches – some of them missing limbs – arrive in La Paz after a thousand-mile march in pursuit of an annual disability subsidy of approximately 400 USD. Sure enough, following a session of police repression in the city center, the state-run newspaper *Cambio* reported that the marchers had attacked the police in an operation coordinated by *infiltrados* posing as disabled people.

In lieu of an assessment of the legitimate desires of legitimately disabled citizens, *Cambio* offered an array of elaborate photographic spreads delegitimizing all manifestations of opposition to Evo Morales's government. In one, the caption "Activist beats up policeman at disabled protest" corresponded to a photo of a man in a striped sweater standing in front of a policeman in riot gear. Two more photographs purported to highlight the presence of the same man at previous protests against the proposed highway through Bolivia's Isiboro Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory (TIPNIS).

Despite Morales's image as a staunch defender of the rights of Mother Earth and of indigenous peoples, his government has denounced opponents of the road as imperialist agents and, in response to far-reaching public support for anti-road marchers, has engaged in the liberal use of tear gas, rubber bullets, and more hands-on forms of police violence.

Indigenous leader Fernando Vargas, president of the TIPNIS Subcentral, was recently quoted in the Bolivian paper *Los Tiempos* as registering the following complaint:

> I thought that 500 years of colonization had already ended, but it turns out that [the process] is being carried forward in Bolivia by President Evo Morales himself, who personally goes to indigenous communities bearing gifts [in an effort to decrease resistance to the road].

Gifts are said to consist of motors, solar panels, and electric generators. Similar methods of placating indigenous opinion have been implemented in Ecuador. During a visit to the eastern Amazonian region in 2009, I was invited by a member of the Huaorani tribe to view a film on a DVD player that had been bestowed on her family by an international oil company. The film centered on the gifts bestowed on Huaorani civilization by evangelical Christian missionaries, whose modus operandi in the 1950s involved dropping cooking pots on the tribe from helicopters and encouraging indigenous relocation to protectorates in less oil-rich areas.

As for indigenous groups that have thus far remained outside the grasp of missionaries and oil companies, Ecuador's Tagaeri and Taromenane tribes are known as *pueblos no contactados* and exist in voluntary isolation in Yasuní National Park, a biosphere reserve also containing tens of millions of animal and plant species and a number of oil blocks. One of these is the Ishpingo-Tambococha-Tiputini (ITT) block, subject of the Yasuní-ITT proposal, according to which Ecuador will refrain from exploiting ITT oil reserves in exchange for billions of dollars in international compensation and freedom to unrestrainedly exploit all other blocks.

Shortly after presenting the proposal to the United Nations, Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa enjoined: "Don't believe the romantic environmentalists; everyone who is against the country's development is a terrorist." Given the resemblance between this statement and Mary O'Grady's alert about the "risks to development" emanating from terrorists disguised as environmentalists, we should ask why the rhetoric of Latin American leftist leaders mirrors that of the US ultraright.

In the event that the Yasuní-ITT arrangement proves untenable, the Ecuadorian government could always capitalize on the allegations, backed by oil companies, that *pueblos no contactados* don't actually exist. It might even be argued that imaginary people are faking their own existence for political purposes. ■

TWO HURRICANES

by Alex Gourevitch

WHY ENVIRONMENTALISTS' FEAR OF BIGNESS DOOMS THE DEVELOPING WORLD — AND THE LEFT.

I COME FROM the minority on the Left that is skeptical of environmentalism. This is not skepticism of the science, but of the politics and ideology of environmentalism.

Consider the difference between Hurricane Mitch, a Category 4 hurricane, and Hurricane Andrew, a Category 5.

1992's Andrew was a more powerful storm than Mitch, but Andrew hit Florida, where it killed about 80 people and left about 125,000 temporarily homeless. Due to the wealth and social organization of the region, most people had a place to take refuge, and nearly everybody had found a new place to live within a year.

Mitch hit Central America – mainly Honduras, Guatemala, and Nicaragua – in 1998. It was catastrophic, killing 11,000 people, with just as many missing, and it left 2.7 million people homeless. The economic devastation led to a cholera outbreak.

Why the difference?

The answer lies with Central America's poverty and underdevelopment. Honduras, Nicaragua, and Guatemala are much less industrialized countries, with bad roads, poor communication networks, weak construction, and so on.

The lesson here is that our most urgent environmental priority should be helping the Global South industrialize, so that it has more protection from the vicissitudes of nature. After all, there are always going to be natural disasters. So better to redistribute resources to the South so that it can scale up its ability to control nature, rather than to roll back that project in the developed countries.

That, to me, is the radical position on the environment. It calls for a large-scale industrial development and a massive redistribution of wealth. And yet, it is almost entirely at odds with the politics and ideology of environmentalism. Environmentalists consistently tend to see the development of industry, and the wider attempt to dominate nature, as wrong, perverse, and the source of man's domination over man.

The control and manipulation of nature is a good thing. It is potentially emancipatory. Such technological control is certainly a condition of possibility for any of the aims regarding the reduction of necessary labor and enjoyment of leisure time that the Left used to be committed to and which have been consistently defended in *Jacobin*'s pages.

I may be more pessimistic than others about the ability to transform environmentalism, especially its tendencies toward misanthropy and despair, into something more affirmative and humanistic. These pessimistic and conservative tendencies are rooted very deeply in environmentalism itself. To see the way these tendencies play out, let's look at the ideological and political affinities between environmentalism and Occupy.

Ideologically, there is a shared view regarding the dangers of size. Throughout Occupy, there was a common argument against corporations on the grounds that they are large-scale human enterprises, which destroy communities and nature simply by virtue of their size.

That critique taps into the environmentalist tendency to be hostile to the industrial revolution and the aspiration to control nature for human purposes that lay at the heart of that revolution. A strain of antihumanism has been prominent in environmentalism for a long time. This antihumanism is rooted in that very premise – that it is wrong to control nature for human purposes, and that the attempt to control nature lies at the root of contemporary problems. The problem with large-scale human enterprises like corporations is not their size or relationship to nature, but who controls them. If anything, the hostility to controlling nature displaces a concern with the relations of production onto the forces of production. The most problematic thing about

corporations is the way the distribution of ownership and control ends up socializing costs while privatizing benefits. But those benefits could be socialized and put into a more rational relationship to human needs.

The other ideological affinity is that while Occupy has been global in its perspective, it has been very local in its utopian vision and prefigurative politics. That's also true of environmentalism, which has had trouble giving us an alternative social vision that could be international in scope. At least, it has not given us anything that would be more than a bunch of federated, small-scale, self-sufficient production communities. I don't think there is anything attractive in that vision, and it is not something that I identify with the forward-looking, universalistic aspirations of the Left.

On the political side, Occupy has been a kind of cipher for a number of movements that have had trouble connecting with mass politics. It seemed to offer a mass political moment to which various groups could attach themselves. Environmentalism is one of those movements that have had trouble finding and establishing majoritarian connections.

There are a number of reasons why it has faced these obstacles. One is the social pessimism of environmentalism itself. Its narrative is one of despair. It is hard to convince many to sign on to a political project that is pessimistic and verges on misanthropy, or at least tends toward the view that, on the whole, human will and intention have largely led to destruction rather than production. After all, a basic premise running through much of environmentalism is that the past three hundred years teach us a particular lesson: when we try to control nature, the unintended consequences of human action are far more destructive than the intended ones.

The problem here is not merely that you are going to have trouble appealing to mass interests when you begin by telling people they should consume less – it is deeper than that. When you are trying to mobilize people to engage in large-scale political action, but the lesson is that whenever we engage in large scale international action there are even worse unintended consequences, it is hard to see why anyone would be willing to sign up. It's no wonder environmentalists find themselves in a certain kind of political impasse vis-à-vis mass politics.

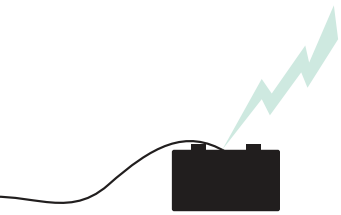
There are two other self-limiting aspects of environmentalism. One is the "crisis" mode of politics. This "we must act now, we don't have time to reflect" that we find in much climate activism is deeply problematic. As I have written elsewhere, it is a politics of fear. Our existence is threatened (by natural catastrophe); we don't have time to argue or disagree; we must act now; politics has been reduced to the quest for survival – this all sounds exactly like the War on Terror.

This appeal to fear will limit the appeal to mass politics. It is debilitating, not invigorating. In the face of a crisis of this magnitude and immediacy, why act? Why would anyone think action can make a difference? Moreover, the appeal to fear is a way of supplanting rather than articulating more robust human aspirations. Survival alone is not much to aspire to.

Environmentalists have attempted to overcome these limitations by appealing to the authority of science. It is very common to hear that "the science is in," as if that tells us what we ought to do. But even if the science is in, the science does not tell us how to act.

Scientists can tell us about the complex things happening in the natural world. But before we can act, we have to find agreement on a host of political, economic and ideological questions about which scientists have nothing to say. Scientists often know very little about political and economic questions.

THE CONTROL AND MANIPULATION OF NATURE IS A GOOD THING. IT IS POTENTIALLY EMANCIPATORY.



Should we adapt to effects or mitigate the causes? Who should bear the burdens of adaptation or mitigation to climate change? Which economic and political institutions are the most desirable? Which risks and natural changes are acceptable? These are social questions, not scientific ones. But the appeal to science is an end run around trying to resolve them – it dresses up ideological concerns in the garb of unimpeachable scientific authority.

Even some of the more outlandish versions of "denialism," or rejection of the science, should be understood as a reaction to this authoritarian attempt to use science to force certain policies and projects down people's throats. People can tell when science is being used as a stick to silence legitimate disagreement. And this holds not just for certain elements of right-wing populism, but even within and amongst lefties themselves.

This appeal to "the science" is a last-ditch reaction to the failure to convince the public of environmental aims. It is, moreover, where the background ideological and political issues – is environmentalism antihumanistic? does it really articulate progressive aspirations? can it do more than appeal to fear? – matter. The turn to science registers these ideological problems and weaknesses.

In the talk on which this essay is based, someone made the observation that when Israelis destroyed a power generator in Gaza, Palestinians turned to bicycle generators. They produced their own energy in their own homes. The Palestinian bicycle generators were offered as an example of how carbon-free energy technology could also serve as a moment of resistance to domination. The sympathetic audience welcomed this example.

This kind of argument exemplifies a very dangerous and conservative tendency in environmentalism. There was nothing subversive about the Palestinian response. It was accommodation to necessity – a necessity imposed by Israeli occupation and the authoritarian destruction of cheaper, more efficient sources of energy.

The virtue of a power plant is that it frees all but the few who run it from having to dedicate labor to power generation, or having to rely on costlier energy sources. That Palestinians were forced to produce energy in their own homes was a further sign of their unfreedom, as they had to devote more of their labor to producing bare necessities than they had previously. Any celebration of bicycle generators ignores actual power relations by turning the radically unequal relations of power between Palestinians and Israelis into a question of the Palestinian relationship to nature.

If this were an aberrant and misguided example, it would mean little. But environmentalist arguments frequently rationalize conditions that the Left ought to criticize. I remember being in San Diego, where I grew up, during the California energy crisis of 2000–1. I would be sitting at home in the middle of the summer and suddenly the lights would go out and the air conditioning shut off. This was the richest state in the richest country in the world and it couldn't supply energy properly to its citizens.

As it turned out, this had to do with market manipulation by energy companies and traders, mainly Enron, who were creating artificial shortages to drive prices up and overcharge the public.

What I distinctly remember is that many California environmentalists argued that this was an opportunity to learn to conserve, and spent most of their time either recommending conservation strategies or arguing that this was further proof that we shouldn't demand such cheap energy. Many people followed suit, and various conservation efforts sprang up across the state.

Now, I don't think there was anything very positive about these efforts, and I think the environmental arguments were downright pernicious. Both in practice and in theory, environmentalist efforts were rationalizing a major market failure. Like the defenders of Palestinian bicycle generators, these environmentalists turned a situation that was the product of radically unfair and unfree social relations into a moral story about our relationship to nature.

Not only do is there a tendency to rationalize relations of political and economic irrationality, but this tendency steers debates in a dangerous direction. Cheap energy is a good thing. It frees people from all kinds of mundane tasks, allows for the production and use of machines that could eliminate necessary labor, and makes possible much better standards of living.

There seems to be a strong environmentalist impulse to reverse that trend, to get us to spend more, not less, of our day having to waste our time with mundane tasks, even generating our own power. There's a better way. ■

CHINA IN REVOLT

by Eli Friedman

FEW IN THE WEST ARE AWARE OF THE DRAMA UNFOLDING IN TODAY'S "EPICENTER OF GLOBAL LABOR UNREST." A SCHOLAR OF CHINA EXPOSES ITS TUMULTUOUS LABOR POLITICS AND THEIR LESSONS FOR THE LEFT.

The Chinese working class plays a Janus-like role in the political imaginary of neoliberalism. On the one hand, it's imagined as the competitive victor of capitalist globalization, the conquering juggernaut whose rise spells defeat for the working classes of the rich world. What hope is there for the struggles of workers in Detroit or Rennes when the Sichuanese migrant is happy to work for a fraction of the price?

At the same time, Chinese workers are depicted as the pitiable victims of globalization, the guilty conscience of First World consumers. Passive and exploited toilers, they suffer stoically for our iPhones and bathtowels. And only we can save them, by absorbing their torrent of exports, or campaigning benevolently for their humane treatment at the hands of "our" multinationals.

For parts of the rich-world left, the moral of these opposing narratives is that here, in our own societies, labor resistance is consigned to history's dustbin. Such resistance is, first of all, perverse and decadent. What entitles pampered Northern workers, with their "First World problems," to make material demands on a system that already offers them such abundance furnished by the wretched of the earth? And in any case, resistance against so formidable a competitive threat must surely be futile.

By depicting Chinese workers as Others – as abject subalterns or competitive antagonists – this tableau wildly miscasts the reality of labor in today's China. Far from triumphant victors, Chinese workers are facing the same brutal competitive pressures as workers in the West, often at the hands of the same capitalists. More importantly, it is hardly their stoicism that distinguishes them from us.

Today, the Chinese working class is fighting. More than thirty years into the Communist Party's project of market reform, China is undeniably the epicenter of global labor unrest. While there are no official statistics, it is certain that thousands, if not tens of thousands, of strikes take place each year. All of them are wildcat strikes – there is no such thing as a legal strike in China. So on a typical day anywhere from half a dozen to several dozen strikes are likely taking place.

More importantly, *workers are winning*, with many strikers capturing large wage increases above and beyond any legal requirements. Worker resistance has been a serious problem for the Chinese state and capital and, as in the United States in the 1930s, the central government has found itself forced to pass a raft of labor legislation. Minimum wages are going up by double digits in cities around the country and many workers are receiving social insurance payments for the first time.

Labor unrest has been growing for two decades, and the past two years alone have brought a qualitative advance in the character of worker struggles.

But if there are lessons for the Northern left in the experience of Chinese workers, finding them requires an examination of the unique conditions those workers face – conditions which, today, are cause for both great optimism and great pessimism.

Over the past two decades of insurgency, a relatively coherent catalog of worker-resistance tactics has emerged. When a grievance arises, workers' first step is often to talk directly to managers. These requests are almost always ignored, especially if they relate to wages.

Strikes, on the other hand, do work. But they are never organized by the official Chinese unions, which are formally subordinate to the Communist Party and generally controlled by management at the enterprise level. Every strike in China is organized autonomously, and frequently in direct opposition to the official union, which encourages workers to pursue their grievances through legal channels instead.

The legal system, comprising workplace mediation, arbitration, and court cases, attempts to individualize conflict. This, combined with collusion between state and capital, means that this system generally cannot resolve worker grievances. It is designed in large part to prevent strikes.

Until 2010, the most common reason for workers to strike was nonpayment of wages. The demand in these strikes is straightforward: pay us the wages to which we are entitled. Demands for improvements above and beyond existing law were rare. Given that legal violations were and are endemic, there has been fertile ground for such defensive struggles.

Strikes generally begin with workers putting down their tools and staying inside the factory, or at least on factory grounds. Surprisingly, there is little use of scab labor in China, and so pickets are rarely used.*

When faced with recalcitrant management, workers sometimes escalate by heading to the streets. This tactic is directed at the government: by affecting public order, they immediately attract state attention. Workers sometimes march to local government offices or simply block a road. Such tactics are risky, as the government may support strikers, but just as frequently will resort to force. Even if a compromise is struck, public demonstrations will often result in organizers being detained, beaten, and imprisoned.

Even more risky, and yet still common, is for workers to engage in sabotage and property destruction, riot, murder their bosses, and physically confront the police. Such tactics appear to be more prevalent in response to mass layoffs or bankruptcies. A number of particularly intense confrontations took place in late 2008 and early 2009 in response to mass layoffs in export processing due to the economic crisis in the West. As will be explained, workers

may now be developing an antagonistic consciousness vis-à-vis the police.

But the least spectacular item in this catalog of resistance forms the essential backdrop to all the others: migrants, increasingly, have simply been refusing to take the bad jobs they used to flock to in the export processing zones of the southeast.

A labor shortage first arose in 2004, and in a nation that still has more than 700 million rural residents, most assumed it to be a short-term fluke. Eight years later, there is clearly a structural shift taking place. Economists have engaged in intense debate about the causes of the labor shortage, a debate I will not recap here. Suffice it to say that a large swath of manufacturers in coastal provinces such as Guangdong, Zhejiang, and Jiangsu has not been able to attract and retain workers.

Regardless of the specific reasons, the salient point is that the shortage has driven up wages and strengthened workers' power in the market – an advantage that they have been exploiting.

THE WORKING CLASS IS POLITICAL, BUT IT IS ALIENATED FROM ITS OWN POLITICAL ACTIVITY.

A TURNING POINT came in the summer of 2010, marked by a momentous strike wave that began at a Honda transmission plant in Nanhai.

Since then, there has been a change in the character of worker resistance, a development noted by many analysts. Most importantly, worker demands have become *offensive*. Workers have been asking for wage increases above and beyond those to which they are legally entitled, and in many strikes they have begun to demand that they elect their own union representatives. They have not called for independent unions outside of the official All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), as this would surely incite violent state repression. But the insistence on elections represents the germination of political demands, even if the demand is only organized at the company level.

The strike wave was detonated at Nanhai, where for weeks workers had been grumbling about low wages and discussing the idea of a stoppage. On 17 May 2010, hardly any of them knew that a single employee – whom many reports have since identified by the pseudonym Tan Zhiqing – would call the strike on his own initiative by simply hitting the emergency stop button, shutting down both of the plant's production lines.

Workers walked out of the factory. By that afternoon, management was pleading with them to return to work and open negotiations. Production was in fact resumed that day. But the workers had formulated their initial demand: a wage increase of 800 RMB per month, amounting to a 50 percent hike for regular workers.

More demands followed: for the "reorganization" of the company's official union, which was offering the workers virtually no support in their struggle, as well as the reinstatement of two fired workers. During the talks workers again walked out, and one week into the strike all of Honda's assembly plants in China had been shut down due to lack of parts.

Meanwhile, news of the Nanhai strike began to spark widespread unrest among industrial workers around the country. Chinese newspaper headlines told the story: "One Wave Is Higher Than the Next, Strike Also Erupts At Honda Lock Factory"; "70 Thousand Participate in Dalian Strike Wave Affecting 73 Enterprises, Ends With 34.5% Wage Increases"; "Honda Wage Strikes Are a Shock to the Low-Cost Manufacturing Model." In each strike, the main demand was for major wage increases, although in many of them demands for union reorganization were also heard – a political development of great importance.

One of these copycat strikes was especially notable for its militancy and organization. Over the weekend of June 19-20, a group of up to two hundred workers at Denso, a Japanese-owned auto parts maker supplying Toyota, met secretly to discuss plans. At the meeting, they

**It is not immediately apparent why employers have only infrequently attempted to use scab labor. One explanation is that the government would not support such a move, as it could heighten tensions and lead to violence or greater social disruptions. Another factor is simply that strikes rarely last for more than a day or two, as strikers do not have the institutional support of a union and often come under intense pressure from the state. The result is that there is perhaps less need for scabs on the part of employers.*

decided on a strategy of "three nos:" for three days there would be no work, no demands, and no representatives.

They knew that by disrupting the supply chain, the neighboring Toyota assembly plant would be forced to shut down in a matter of days. By committing to strike for three days without demands, they anticipated mounting losses both for Denso and for Toyota's larger production chain.

Their plan worked. On Monday morning, they kicked off the strike by walking out and blocking trucks from leaving the plant. By that afternoon, six other factories in the same industrial zone had closed, and the next day the lack of parts forced a shutdown in the Toyota assembly plant.

On the third day, as they had planned, workers elected twenty-seven representatives and went into negotiations with the central demand of an 800 RMB wage increase. After three days of talks involving the CEO of Denso, who had flown in from Japan, it was announced that they had won the full 800 RMB increase.

If the summer of 2010 was characterized by radical but relatively orderly resistance to capital, the summer of 2011 produced two mass insurrections against the state.

In the same week in June 2011, immense worker riots rocked the suburban manufacturing areas of Chaozhou and Guangzhou, both leading to widespread and highly targeted property destruction. In the Chaozhou town of Guxiang, a Sichuanese worker seeking back wages was brutally attacked by knife-wielding thugs and his former boss. In response to this, thousands of other migrants began demonstrating at the local government offices, many of them having suffered years of discrimination and exploitation by employers working in collusion with officials.

The protest was purportedly organized by a loosely organized Sichuan "hometown association," one of the mafia-like organizations that have proliferated in an environment where open association is not tolerated. After surrounding the government offices, the migrants quickly turned their ire on local residents who they felt had discriminated against them. After they burned dozens of cars and looted stores, armed police were required to put down the riot and to disband locals who had organized into vigilante groups.

Just one week later, an even more spectacular uprising took place on the outskirts of Guangzhou in Zengcheng. A pregnant woman from Sichuan hawking goods on the side of the street was approached by police and violently shoved to the ground. Rumors immediately began circulating among factory workers in the area that she had miscarried as a result of the altercation; whether or not this was actually the case quickly became irrelevant.

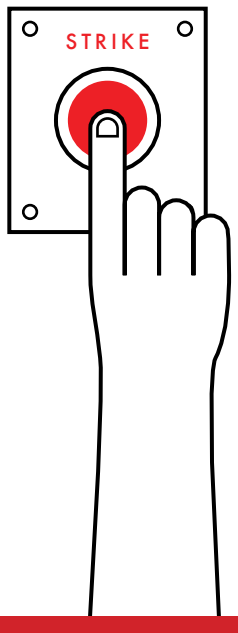
Enraged by another incident of police aggression, indignant workers rioted throughout Zengcheng for several days, burning down a police station, battling riot cops, and blockading a national highway. Other Sichuanese migrants reportedly poured into Zengcheng from around Guangdong to join in. Eventually the People's Liberation Army was called in to put down the insurrection and engaged the militants with live ammunition. Despite denials from the government, it is likely that a number of people were killed.

In just a few years, worker resistance has gone from defensive to offensive. Seemingly small incidents have set off mass uprisings, indicative of generalized anger. And ongoing labor shortages in coastal areas point to deeper structural shifts that have also changed the dynamics of labor politics.

All of this presents a severe challenge to the model of export-led development and wage repression that has characterized the political economy of China's southeastern coastal regions for more than two decades. By the end of the 2010 strike wave, Chinese media commentators were declaring that the era of low-wage labor had come to an end.

But if such material gains are cause for optimism, entrenched depoliticization means that workers cannot take much satisfaction from these victories. Any attempt by workers to articulate an explicit politics is instantly and effectively smashed by the Right and its state allies by raising the specter of the Lord of Misrule: do you really want to go back to the chaos of the Cultural Revolution?

If in the West "there is no alternative," in China the two official alternatives are a frictionless and efficient



capitalist technocracy (the Singaporean fantasy) or unmitigated, feral, and profoundly irrational political violence. As a result, workers self-consciously submit to the state-imposed segregation of economic and political struggles and present their demands as economic, legal, and in accordance with the stultifying ideology of "harmony." To do otherwise would incite harsh state repression.

Perhaps workers can win a wage hike in one factory, social insurance in another. But this sort of dispersed, ephemeral, and desubjectivized insurgency has failed to crystallize any durable forms of counter-hegemonic organization capable of coercing the state or capital at the class level.

The result is that when the state does intervene on behalf of workers – either by supporting immediate demands during strike negotiations or passing legislation that improves their material standing – its image as "benevolent Leviathan" is buttressed: it has done these things not because workers have demanded them, but because it cares about "weak and disadvantaged groups" (as workers are referred to in the official lexicon).

Yet it is only through an ideological severing of cause from effect at the symbolic level that the state is able to maintain the pretense that workers are in fact "weak." Given the relative success of this project, the working class is political, but it is alienated from its own political activity.

It is impossible to understand how this situation is maintained without grasping the social and political position of today's working class. The Chinese worker of today is a far cry from the heroic and hyper-masculinized proletarians of Cultural Revolution propaganda posters. In the state-owned sector, workers were never really "masters of the enterprise" as claimed by the state. But they were guaranteed lifetime employment, and their work unit also bore the cost of social reproduction by providing housing, education, health care, pensions, and even wedding and funeral services.

In the 1990s, the central government began a massive effort to privatize, downsize, or desubsidize many state-owned enterprises, which led to major social and economic dislocations in northeastern China's "Rust Belt." While material conditions for workers in the remaining state-owned companies are still better in relative terms, today these firms are increasingly run in accordance with the logic of profit maximization.

Of greater immediate interest is the new working class, composed of migrants from the countryside who have flocked to the "Sun Belt" cities of the southeast. With the transition to capitalism beginning in 1978, farmers originally fared well, as the market provided higher prices for agricultural goods than the state had. But by the mid 1980s, these gains began to be wiped out by rampant inflation, and the rural population started to look for new sources of income. As China opened its doors to export-oriented manufacturing in the southeast coastal regions, these farmers were transformed into migrant workers.

At the same time, the state discovered that a number of institutions inherited from the command economy were useful for enhancing private accumulation. Chief among these was the *hukou* or household registration system, which tied an individual's social benefits to a particular place. The *hukou* is a complex and increasingly decentralized instrument of administration, but the key thing to note is that it institutionalizes a spatial and social severing between migrant workers' productive and reproductive activities – between their work life and their home and family life.

This separation has shaped every aspect of migrant workers' labor struggles. Young migrants come to cities to work in factories, restaurants, and construction sites, to engage in petty crime, sell street food, or earn a living as sex workers. But the state never made any pretense that migrants are formally equal to urban residents or that they are welcome for the long term.

Migrants do not enjoy access to any of the public services that urban residents have, including health care, housing, and education. They require official permission to be in the city, and during the 1990s and early 2000s there were many instances of migrants being detained, beaten, and "deported" for not having papers. For at least a generation, migrant workers' primary aim has been to earn as much money as they could before returning to the village in their mid twenties to get married and have a family.

Other formal arrangements ensure that migrants are not able to make a life in the city. The system of social insurance (including health insurance, pensions, unemployment insurance, maternity insurance, and workplace injury insurance) is organized at the municipal level. This means the migrants who are lucky enough to have employer-supported social insurance – a small minority – are paying into a system that they will never benefit from. If pensions are not portable, why would a migrant demand a better one? Worker demands therefore focus quite rationally on the most immediate of wage issues.

Thus, subjectively, migrants do not refer to themselves as "workers," nor do they think of themselves as part of the "working class." Rather, they are *mingong*, or peasant-workers, and they engage in "selling labor" (*dagong*) rather than having a profession or a career. The temporality of this relationship to work is perhaps the norm under neoliberal capitalism, but rates of turnover in many Chinese factories are astonishing, sometimes exceeding 100 percent a year.

The implications for the dynamics of worker resistance have been immense. For example, there are very few recorded struggles over the length of the working day. Why would workers

want to spend more time in a city that rejects them? The "work-life balance" of HR discourse means nothing to an eighteeen-year-old migrant worker toiling in a suburban Shanghai factory. In the city, migrants live to work – not in the self-actualizing sense but in the very literal sense. If a worker assumes that they are just earning money to eventually bring back home, there is little reason (or opportunity) to ask for more time "for what one will" in the city.

Another example: every year just before the Chinese New Year, the number of strikes in the construction sector surges. Why? This holiday is the only time of the year that most migrants will return to their hometowns, and is often the only time that they can see family members, often including spouses and children. Construction workers are generally paid only when a project is completed, but nonpayment of wages has been endemic since the deregulation of the industry in the 1980s. The idea of going back to the village empty-handed is unacceptable for workers, since the reason they left for the city in the first place was because of the promise of marginally higher wages. Hence the strikes.

In other words, migrant workers have not attempted to link struggles in production to struggles over other aspects of life or broader social issues. They are severed from the local community and do not have any right to speak as citizens. Demands for wages have not expanded into demands for more time, for better social services, or for political rights.

Capital, meanwhile, has relied on several tried-and-true methods to prop up profitability.

Within the factory, the biggest development of the past few years is one that will be drearily familiar to workers in the US, Europe, or Japan: the explosive growth of various kinds of precarious labor, including temps, student interns, and, most importantly, "dispatch workers."

Dispatch workers are directly employed by a labor contracting firm – many of which are owned by local labor bureaus – which then "dispatches" its workers to sites where they will be put to work. This has the obvious effect of obscuring the employment relationship, and enhancing flexibility for capital. Dispatch labor now constitutes a huge percentage of the workforce (often more than 50 percent in a given workplace) in an incredibly diverse array of industries, including manufacturing, energy, transportation, banking, healthcare, sanitation, and the service industry. The trend has emerged in domestic private, foreign private, joint-venture, and state-owned enterprises.

But the big story in recent years has been the relocation of industrial capital from the coastal regions into central and western China. There are huge social and political consequences that derive from this "spatial fix," and they present the working class with a new and potentially transformative set of possibilities. Whether or not these possibilities will be realized is of course a question that can only be resolved in practice.

The case of Foxconn, China's largest private employer, is instructive here. Foxconn moved from its original home in Taiwan to coastal Shenzhen more than a decade ago, but in the wake of the 2010 worker suicides and the ongoing public scrutiny of its highly militarized and alienating work environment, it is now being forced to move once again. The company is currently in the process of drawing down its manufacturing workforce in Shenzhen, having built massive new facilities in inland provinces. The two largest of these are in the provincial capitals of Zhengzhou and Chengdu.

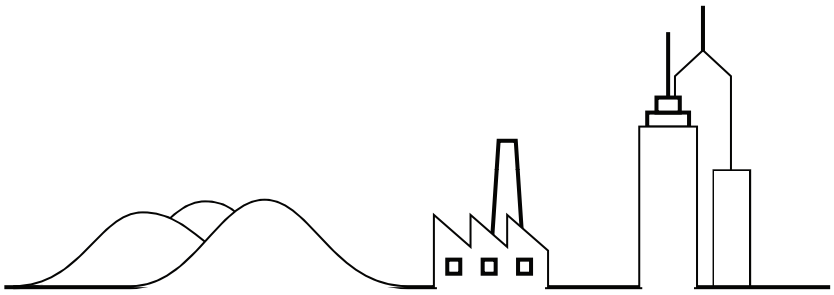
It isn't hard to understand the attraction that the interior holds for such companies. Although wages in Shenzhen and other coastal areas are still quite low by global standards (less than 200 USD a month), wages in interior provinces such as Henan, Hubei, and Sichuan can be almost half that. Many employers also assume, perhaps correctly, that more migrants will be available closer to the source, and a looser labor market also has immediate political advantages for capital. This, too, is a familiar story of capitalism: the labor historian Jefferson Cowie identified a similar process at work in his history of electronics manufacturer RCA's "seventy-year quest for cheap labor" – a quest that took the company from New Jersey to Indiana to Tennessee, and finally to Mexico.

If coastal China has offered transnational capital highly favorable social and political conditions for the past two decades, things will be different in the interior. The antagonism between labor and capital may be universal, but class conflict proceeds on the terrain of particularity.

So what is particular about the Chinese interior, and why might it be grounds for cautious optimism? Whereas migrants in coastal regions are necessarily transitory – and their struggles therefore ephemeral – in the interior they have the possibility of establishing durable community. Theoretically, this means that there is a greater possibility to fuse struggles in the spheres of production and reproduction, something that was not possible when these two arenas were spatially severed.

Consider the issue of *hukou*, the household registration. The huge eastern megalopolises to which migrants have flocked in the past have very tight restrictions on gaining local residency. Even white-collar workers with graduate degrees can have a difficult time getting a Beijing *hukou*.

But smaller cities in the interior have set a much lower bar for gaining local residency. While it is admittedly speculative, it is worth thinking about how this will change the dynamics of



THE ANTAGONISM BETWEEN LABOR AND CAPITAL MAY BE UNIVERSAL, BUT CLASS CONFLICT PROCEEDS ON THE TERRAIN OF PARTICULARITY.

worker resistance. If, before, migrants' presumed life trajectory was to go work in the city for a few years to earn money before returning home and starting a family, workers in the interior may have a very different perspective. Suddenly they are not just "working," but also "living," in a particular place.

This implies that migrants will be much more likely to settle permanently in their places of work. They will want to find spouses, have their own places of residence, have kids, send those kids to school – in short, engage in social reproduction.

Previously, employers did not have to pay migrant workers a livable wage, and there was no pretense that this was to be expected, since it was clear that workers would go back to the village to settle down. But in the interior, migrants will likely demand all the things one needs for a decent life – housing, health care, education, and some protection against the risks of unemployment and old age. They may also want time for themselves and for their community, a demand that has been conspicuously absent up to the present.

This raises the possibility of the politicization of worker unrest. Decent public services were never an expectation of migrants on the coast. But if they can establish residence rights in the interior, demands for social services could easily be generalized, providing the opportunity to escape the isolation of workplace-based struggles. Demands for social protection are more likely to be aimed at the state than at individual employers, establishing the symbolic foundation for a generalizable confrontation.

Although it is easy to romanticize the brave and sometimes spectacular resistance of migrant workers, the reality is that the most frequent response to bad working conditions has simply been to quit and find another job or return home. This, too, may change if they work where they live. The conditions may now be in place for migrants to stand their ground and fight for their community and in their community rather than simply fleeing.

The biographies of workers in the interior may also present opportunities for enhanced militancy. Many of these migrants have previous experience working and fighting in coastal regions. Older workers may lack the militant passion of youth, but their experience in dealing with exploitative bosses and their state allies could be an invaluable resource.

Finally, workers will have greater social resources at their command. In large coastal cities, they would be unlikely to garner much sympathy from local residents, a fact made painfully clear in the Guxiang riots. But in the interior, workers may have friends and family nearby, people who are not just inclined to side with labor but who may in a very direct way depend on increased wages and social services. This presents the possibility of expanding struggles beyond the workplace to incorporate broader social issues.

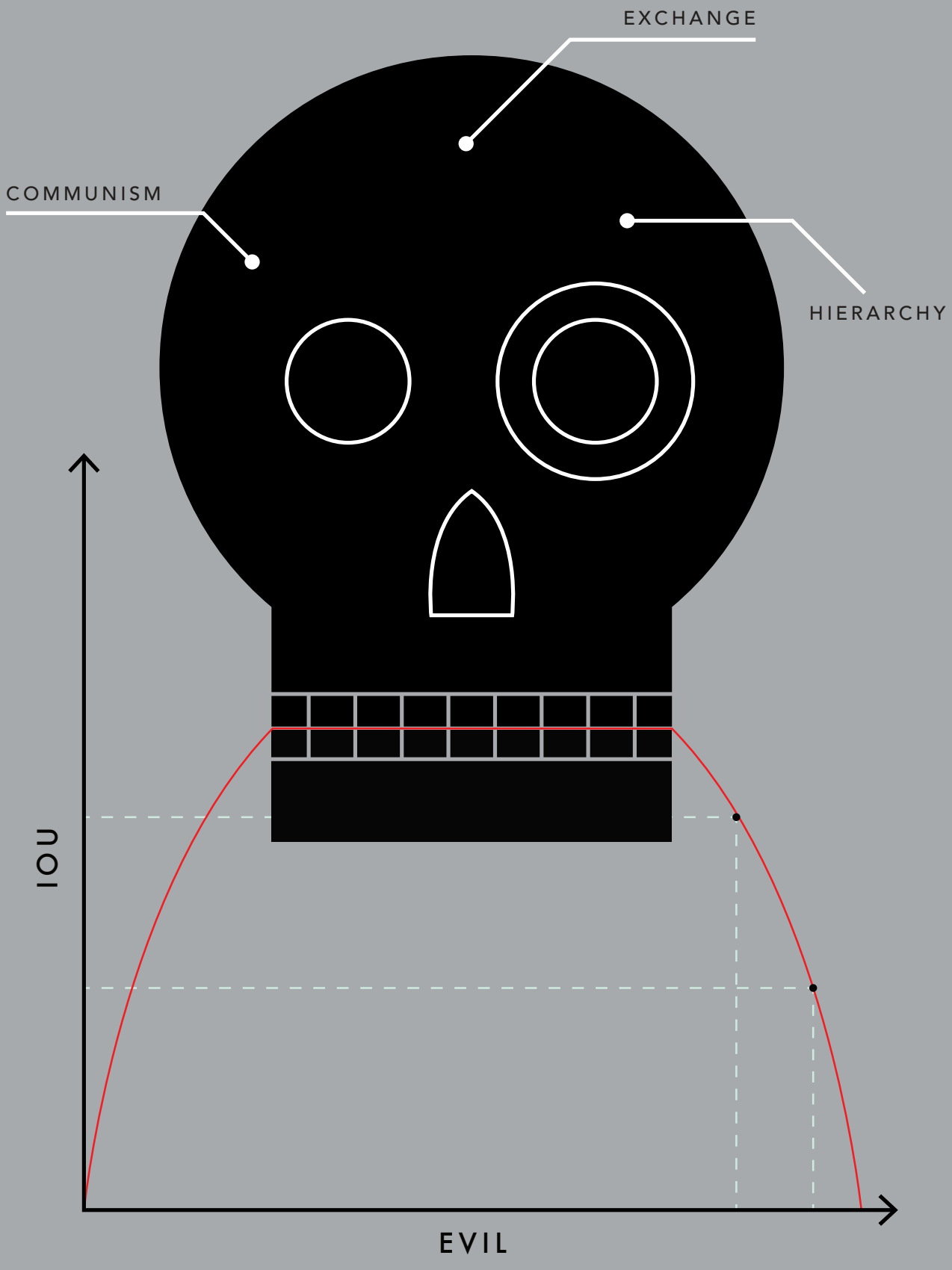
THERE MAY BE some on the Left who are sanguine about perpetual resistance in and of itself. And the form of class conflict that has prevailed in China *has* caused major disruptions for capital accumulation.

But workers are alienated from their own political activity. A profound asymmetry exists: workers resist haphazardly and without any strategy, while the state and capital respond to this crisis self-consciously and in a coordinated manner.

So far, this fragmented and ephemeral form of struggle has been unable to make any major dent in the basic structures of the party-state and its ruling ideology. And capital, as a universal tendency, has proven its ability to subdue militant particularities over and over again. If militant worker resistance simply forces capital to destroy one working class and produce a new (antagonistic) working class somewhere else, can we really consider this a victory?

The new frontier of capital accumulation presents the Chinese working class with opportunities to establish more enduring forms of organization capable of expanding the domain of social struggle and formulating broad-based political demands.

But until that happens, it will remain a half-step behind its historical antagonist – and ours. ■


EXCHANGE
COMMUNISM
HIERARCHY
IOU
EVIL

DEBT THE FIRST 500 PAGES

WE NEED MORE GRAND HISTORIES, BUT 5,000 YEARS OF ANECDOTES IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR REAL POLITICAL ECONOMY.

by Mike Beggs

David Graeber's *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* is an ambitious book. The title tells us that, and so does its author. At the anthropology blog Savage Minds, Graeber reports that a friend, on reading a draft, told him, "I don't think anyone has written a book like this in a hundred years." Graeber is too modest to take the compliment, but admits his friend has a point. He did intend to write "the sort of book people don't write any more: a big book, asking big questions, meant to be read widely and spark public debate, but at the same time, without any sacrifice of scholarly rigor."

So it is a book in which endnotes and references make up almost 20 percent of the page count, but also one that makes liberal use of contractions and includes the occasional personal anecdote. It is, as Graeber says, "an accessible work, written in plain English, that actually does try to challenge common sense assumptions." The style is welcome, akin to that of the best interdisciplinary scholarly blogs (like Crooked Timber, where *Debt* has been the subject of a symposium): clear, intelligent, and free of unexplained specialist jargon.

It has had great success in finding a popular audience and accumulated glowing press reviews: "one of the year's most influential books," "more readable and entertaining than I can indicate," "a sprawling, erudite and provocative work," "fresh … fascinating … not just thought-provoking, but also exceedingly timely," "forced me to completely re-evaluate my position on human economics, its history, and its branches of thought." It has also found the desired political audience: Graeber became a guru of the Occupy movement, not only as a participant but as an intellectual presence, his book in encampment libraries everywhere.

Debt, then, does not need any more kind words from me. It's enough to say that there is a lot of fantastic material in there. The breadth of Graeber's reading is impressive, and he draws from it a wealth of insightful fragments of history. The prospect of a grand social history of debt from a thinker of the radical left is exciting. The appeal is no mystery. I wanted to love it.

Unfortunately, I found the main arguments wholly unconvincing.

The very unconvincingness poses the question: What do we need from our grand social theory? The success of the book shows there is an appetite for work that promises to set our present moment against the sweep of history so as to explain our predicament and help us find footholds for changing it. What is wrong with Graeber's approach, and how could we do better?

Debt is about much more than debt. A history of debt, Graeber writes, is also "necessarily a history of money." The difference between a debt and an obligation is that the former is quantified and needs some form of money. Money and debt arrived on the historical scene together, and "the easiest way to understand the role that debt has played in human society is simply to follow the forms that money has taken, and the way money has been used, across the centuries." But to make debt the guiding thread of your history of money gives "necessarily a different history of money than we are used to."

And a history of money must also be a history of nothing less than social organization – not because monetary exchange has always been so central to social organization, but precisely because it has not. Graeber uses such a wide historical and geographical canvas because it shows us the sheer variety of shapes in which society has been formed, and this broadens our vision of the possible. The history of debt and money gives us "a way to ask fundamental questions about what human beings and human society could be like."

Throughout the book, Graeber presents himself as a maverick overturning convention. Partly, his maverick status rests on his politics – he is the anarchist saying things about debt, money, markets, and the state that the powers-that-be would rather not look squarely in the face. But largely his argument is a move in an interdisciplinary struggle: anthropology against economics.

Economics, he complains, "is treated as a kind of master discipline," its tenets "treated as received wisdom, as basically beyond question." And yet it is a kind of idiot discipline: its assumptions have been shown again and again to be false, but it keeps on keeping on, secure in its dominance like a stupid rich man sought out by sycophants for his ideas on the issues of the day.

If there is one argument that provides a thread through the whole narrative, it is Graeber's view that money has its origins in debt and not exchange, and that economics has always got this the wrong way around. He establishes (1) that economics texts typically present the need for money as rising out of the inefficiencies of barter; and (2) that nevertheless there is no historical record of money rising out of a prior system of generalized barter.

Graeber considers the "myth of barter" so central to economics that to point out its status as myth is to pull out the Jenga block that brings the whole structure down. Economics has little worth saying on money, and so economists can safely be pretty much ignored for the rest of the book:

"Can we really use the methods of modern economics, which were designed to understand how contemporary economic institutions operate, to describe the political battles that led to the creation of those very institutions?" Graeber's answer is negative: not only would economics mislead us, but there are "moral dangers."

> This is what the use of equations so often does: make it seem perfectly natural to assume that, if the price of silver in China is twice what it is in Seville, and

> inhabitants of Seville are capable of getting their hands on large quantities of silver and transporting it to China, then clearly they will, even if doing so requires the destruction of entire civilizations.

Economics' lack of moral sense is not only dangerous, corrupting our sensibilities, but prevents it from understanding the social reality it pretends to describe. It starts from the false premise "that human beings are best viewed as self-interested actors calculating how to get the best terms possible out of any situation, the most profit or pleasure or happiness for the least sacrifice or investment."

Graeber's alternative is to recognize the diversity of motives that guide people's economic interactions. He proposes that there are three "main moral principles" at work in economic life: communism, exchange, and hierarchy. "Communism" describes sharing relationships based on the principle of "to each according to their needs, from each according to their abilities." "Exchange" relationships are based on reciprocity and formal equality, while "hierarchical" relationships are unequal and tend to work by a logic of social precedent rather than reciprocity.

These are not different kinds of economies, but principles of interaction present in all societies in different proportions: for example, capitalist firms are islands of communism and hierarchy within a sea of exchange. We can untangle history by looking at the shifting boundaries between the different kinds of relationships. Debt shakes things up by inserting hierarchical relationships into the sphere of exchange – an "exchange that has not been brought to completion," which suspends the formal equality between parties in the meantime. If the meantime stretches out because the debt becomes unpayable, the equality may be permanently suspended and the relationship become a precedent-based hierarchy – though Graeber warns against making too much of this, which would fall into the economists' trap of assuming reciprocal exchange to be the baseline against which all other relationships should be measured.

The most simplistic renditions of neoclassical economics may reduce all human interactions to self-interested exchange. But the idea that society is made up of different but interdependent levels is hardly new in social theory. Neither is Graeber's view that to talk of a society as a unit may be misleading, since people are involved in social interactions across multiple horizons that may not fit together into a coherent whole. One could cite, for example, Althusser's "decentered structure" and Michael Mann's "multiple overlapping and intersecting sociospatial networks of power." Indeed, it could almost be seen as a constant in social theory since the classics.

But most of these other approaches to grand socio-history differ from Graeber's in treating these levels as *structures*, and not simply as the practices that create them. They are made up of complex, evolving patterns of relationships that cannot be reduced to or derived from deliberate individual or interpersonal action. They emerge, as Marx put it, "behind the backs" of the very people who collectively create them. They become the social contexts that frame our actions, the circumstances not of our choosing within which we make history. They are collective human products, but not of ideological consensus – rather, they are the outcome of often competing, contradictory pressures.

Graeber, in contrast, stays mainly at the level of conscious practice and gives a basically ethical vision of history, where great changes are a result of shifting ideas about reality. I cannot do justice here to the whole sweep of his history, but let's look at his section on the rise of capitalism. If we can't use modern economics to explain the rise of the modern institutions it is designed to study – a fair point – what is Graeber's alternative?

First, we get a story about Cortés and the conquistadors. Economics would have us "treat the behavior of early European explorers, merchants, and conquerors as if they were simply rational responses to opportunities." Graeber replaces this explanation with another: they were especially greedy, and "we are speaking not just of simple greed, but of greed raised to mythic proportions." The greed of the Europeans is contrasted with the inscrutable warrior honor of Moctezuma, who would not object when he saw Cortés cheat at gambling. Also, Cortés and his fellows were drowning in debt, and so was Emperor Charles V, who sponsored his expeditions.

Meanwhile, back in Europe, Martin Luther is coming to terms with usury and urging rulers to "compel and constrain the wicked … to return what they borrow, even though a Christian ought not to demand it, or even hope to get it back." Graeber tells us the story of the Margrave Casimir of Brandenburg, who burned and pillaged his way through his own realm to put down one of the great peasant rebellions of 1525. Casimir, too, was deep in debt and had farmed out offices to his creditors, who squeezed the population into revolt. For Graeber, the violence of Cortés and Casimir "embod[ies] something essential about the debtor who feels he has done nothing to be placed in his position: the frantic urgency of having to convert everything around oneself to money, and rage and indignation at having been reduced to the sort of person who would do so."

From there we are off to jolly, rustic early modern England, to witness feudalism's replacement by capitalism. Graeber intends to "upend our assumptions" about the rise of capitalism as the extension of markets. English villagers were quite happy with market transactions in their place, as part of a moral economy of mutual aid. This is

symbolized by the fact that they didn't use much gold and silver, but tended to carry on everyday transactions on credit, based on mutual trust. But this economy came to be undermined by the encroachment of a cash-focused economy that criminalized debt. This was a deliberate effort by a coalition of the wealthy and the state, who were at the same time foolishly deluded into believing that the real nature of money lay in the intrinsic value of precious metals.

> The story of the origins of capitalism, then, is not the story of the gradual destruction of traditional communities by the impersonal power of the market. It is, rather, the story of how an economy of credit was converted into an economy of interest; of the gradual transformation of moral networks by the intrusion of the impersonal – and often vindictive – power of the state.

And that is Graeber's explanation for the rise of capitalism. *Evil: the root of all money.*

Of course, there is a lot of insight in the detail, fascinating interpretations of the writings of merchants and political philosophers. Graeber is a wonderful storyteller. But the accumulation of anecdotes does not add up to an explanation, and certainly not one that would overturn the existing wisdom on the subject, conventional or otherwise. It is a story told almost entirely in the realm of political and moral philosophy, and told essentially from a populist liberal or even libertarian perspective: it was the state and big business stepping all over the little guys and their purer exchange relationships.

Graeber approvingly cites the great social historian Fernand Braudel's distinction between markets and capitalism (which draws on Marx) – the former being about exchanging goods via money, and the latter about using money to make more money. For Braudel, capitalism is the domain of the big merchants, bankers, and joint stock companies that feed off the market and reorganize it. For Graeber, the easiest way to make money with money is to establish a monopoly, so "capitalists invariably try to ally themselves with political authorities to limit the freedom of the market."

But Graeber is no Braudel. The latter's epic history of the rise of capitalism (with the luxury, it must be said, of covering just four centuries in three volumes) also takes a pointillistic approach, but is full of actual data, diagrams, and maps, organized to give us a real sense of the material conditions of life and the operations of economic networks. Graeber stays almost entirely within the domain of "moral universes" and discourse. We don't get a sense of just how the moral economy of Merrie England was undermined, except that the powers-that-were didn't get it, didn't like it, and imposed their own morality somehow. He engages very selectively with the literature on the "rise of capitalism" – how else to explain his portrayal of the news that sophisticated banking and finance long predated the rise of the factory system and wage labor as if it were a challenge to all preconceptions? This "peculiar paradox" has been a commonplace of the Marxian literature since Marx.

In place of a materialist economic history, Graeber's 5,000 years are organized according to a purported cycle of history in which humanity is perpetually oscillating between periods of "virtual money" – paper and credit-money – and periods of metal money. The emergence and rise of capitalism up to 1971 has to be shoehorned into this quasi-mystical framework as a turn of the wheel back toward metallism. The spectacular development of the capitalist banking and financial system in this period, seemingly "a bizarre contradiction" to the overarching frame of the narrative, turns out to be just what proves the rule – for just as monetary relations began to sprout in all kinds of weird and wonderful directions we might call "virtual money," governments redoubled their commitment to the metallic base, and economists developed their barter theories of money as king of commodities.

Let's turn now to what Graeber thinks this all means for debt and money today – since, in his reading, our present chaos reflects another revolution of the wheel back to virtual money.

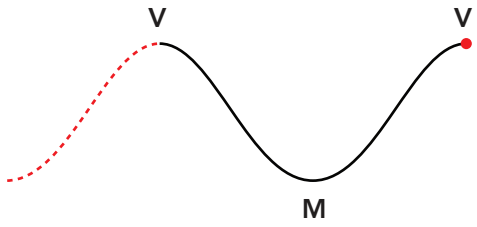
In place of the "myth of barter," Graeber champions alternative stories which economists have kept "relegated to the margins, their proponents written off as cranks." These are the state and credit theories of money, which he rightly sees as overlapping.

Credit theorists insist that "money is not a commodity but an accounting tool":

> In other words, it is not a "thing" at all. You can no more touch a dollar or a deutschmark than you can touch an hour or a cubic centimeter. Units of currency are merely abstract units of measurement, and as the credit theorists correctly noted, historically, such abstract systems of accounting emerged long before the use of any particular token of exchange.

What do these units of measurement measure? Graeber's answer is: debt. Any piece of money, whether made of metal, paper, or electronic bits, is an IOU, and so "the value of a unit of currency is not the measure of the value of an object, but the measure of one's trust in other human beings."

How is trust in particular kinds of money established? Clearly we don't accept just anyone's IOU in payment. This is where the state theorists of money, the chartalists, come in. Graeber draws on what is still the classic statement of chartalism, G. F. Knapp's *State Theory of Money* (1905). States, Knapp argued, have historically nominated the unit of account, and by demanding that taxes be paid in a particular form, ensured



AND THAT IS GRAEBER'S EXPLANATION FOR THE RISE OF CAPITALISM. EVIL: THE ROOT OF ALL MONEY.

that this form would circulate as means of payment. Every taxpayer would have to get their hands on enough of the arbitrarily defined money, and so would be embroiled in monetary exchange.

Economists have never been able to face up to these arguments, says Graeber, because they would undermine the precious myth that money emerged naturally out of private barter, and make all too visible the hand of the state in the construction of markets. Credit and state theorists of money have therefore always been dismissed as cranks.

A big exception here, as Graeber acknowledges, is Keynes. The opening chapter of his *Treatise on Money* (1930) is heavily influenced by Knapp's book, which had been translated into English only a few years before. Keynes writes that the state enforces contracts denominated in money, but more importantly, "claims the right to declare *what thing* corresponds to the name, and to vary its declaration from time to time," a right "claimed by all modern States and … so claimed for four thousand years at least."

For Keynes, part of the appeal of chartalism was surely the political implication: if states created money, they could do what they liked with their creation; there was no need for superstitious attachment to that barbarous relic gold. The foolhardy attempt to restore sterling to its pre–World War I parity with gold had wreaked havoc on 1920s Britain, so Knapp's was a message of major contemporary significance dressed in the ancient robes of the Kings of Lydia.

For an anarchist like Graeber, the appeal of a state theory of money is precisely the opposite: money is a creature of the state, and so tainted. But the then-orthodox view Keynes enlisted chartalism to oppose – the notion that money is naturally a commodity, and that states break the link to metal at our peril – is now the doctrine of cranks.

The idea that money may be backed by nothing more than the writ of a state functionary and yet function perfectly well is hardly a radical notion anymore. It is, in fact, typical in monetary economics textbooks. (See, for example, the opening chapter of Charles Goodhart's standard text *Money, Information and Uncertainty*.) Yet it doesn't seem to have made much difference to monetary theory. Texts have no problem acknowledging that money is not a commodity, and then going on to claim that money exists because barter is inefficient.

The reason, to be blunt, is that unlike Graeber's critique, not much of monetary theory itself rests on the historical origins of money. Economics deals with the operation of a system. It attempts to explain the system's stability, how the parts function together, and why dysfunctions develop. The origins of the parts may say little about their present shape or roles within the system. Modern monetary economics has been concerned above all else with explaining the *value* of money, and the conditions of its stability or instability. This is a problem that concerns the role of money in organizing exchange via prices. The imaginary barter economy without money but somehow still with a highly developed division of labor is a counterfactual, a tool of abstraction, which in fact the textbooks are often careful *not* to describe as actual history.

As for arguments that money is *essentially* about debt, or *essentially* a creature of the state: this is to make the mistake of reducing something involved in a complicated set of relationships to one or two of its moments. Economics has generally met the challenges of credit and state theories of money not with fear or incomprehension, but with indifference: if credit or the state is the answer to the riddle of money, the wrong question may have been posed.

Joseph Schumpeter captures the basic reason for chartalism's unpopularity in his discussion of the "tempest in a teacup" surrounding the original reception of Knapp's famous book:

> Had Knapp merely asserted that the state may declare an object or warrant or token (bearing a sign) to be lawful money and that a proclamation to this effect that a certain pay-token or ticket will be accepted in discharge of taxes must go a long way toward imparting some value to that pay-token or ticket, he would have asserted a truth but a platitudinous one. Had he asserted that such action of the state will *determine* the value of that pay-token or ticket, he would have asserted an interesting but false proposition. [*History of Economic Analysis*, 1954]

In other words, chartalism is either obvious and right or interesting and wrong. Modern states are clearly crucial to the reproduction of money and the system in which it circulates. But their power over money is quite limited – and Schumpeter puts his finger exactly on the point where the limits are clearest: in determining the value of money.

The mint can print any numbers on its bills and coins, but cannot decide what those numbers refer to. That is

determined by countless price-setting decisions by mainly private firms, reacting strategically to the structure of costs and demand they face, in competition with other firms. Graeber interprets Aristotle as saying that all money is merely "a social convention," like "worthless bronze coins that we agree to treat as if they were worth a certain amount." Money is, of course, a social phenomenon. What else would it be? But to call its *value* a social convention seems to misrepresent the processes by which this value is established in an economy like ours – not by general agreement or political will, but as the outcome of countless interlocking strategies in a vast, decentralized, competitive system.

Keynes understood this, and it is why, as Graeber complains, he "ultimately decided that the origins of money were not particularly important." After a few pages at the outset of the *Treatise*, Keynes moved on from chartalist theory, hardly to mention it again. The bulk of the remaining 750 pages is devoted to explaining the determination of the value of money, with respect both to commodities and to other currencies, and to problems of state management of the value of money.

Where does this leave Graeber's other alternative approach, the credit theories of money? In asserting that debt is the essence of money, Graeber seems to be saying two quite different things. First, there is the argument we have already seen that money is not a thing but an abstract unit of measurement. Now, on the economists' list of money's functions, "unit of account" is an absolutely standard item, alongside "store of value" and "means of payment" or "medium of exchange" (views differ as to whether these are one function or two).

Few would deny that money is, among other things, a unit of measurement. But Graeber apparently means more than this – that this is money's *essence*.

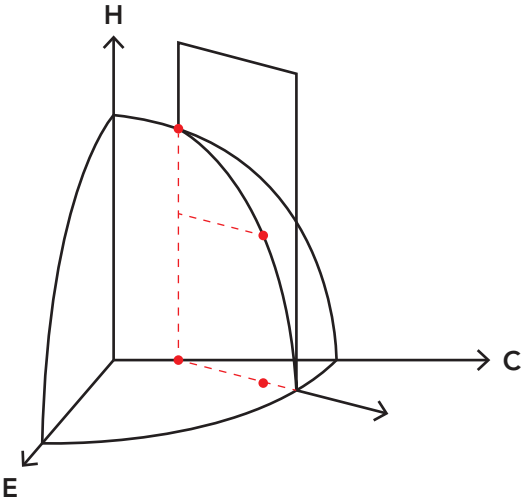
As with state theories of money, this is to reduce money to one of its aspects. Problems become clear as soon as we start to think about how money does its measuring. It is odd that Graeber claims that "you can no more touch a dollar or a deutschmark than you can touch an hour or a cubic centimeter" – because there actually are things called dollars you *can* touch, carry around in your wallet, and spend.

And they are not measuring instruments like rulers or clocks that we take out to measure the value of something that would exist without them. Without actually-circulating money, there would be no value to measure, because the price system only emerges out of innumerable strategic price-setting decisions, each aiming to attract actual purchases: money changing hands. What circulates in this way need not be a physical thing, but it is a thing in the sense that it cannot be in two places at once: when a payment is made, a quantity is deleted from one account and added to another. That the thing that is accepted in payment may be a third party's liability does not change this fundamental point.

The second thing Graeber seems to mean by saying that debt is the essence of monetary relations is that exchange often is, and has been, mediated by credit relations rather than through the actual circulation of money. This is undeniably true: credit relationships transform exchange so that payments do not coincide with transactions and reciprocal relationships may mean that some debts balance without ever needing to be cleared by monetary payment. Debt instruments may circulate as means-of-payment even among people not party to the original debt – and in fact most of our modern money is of this kind: we pay each other with bank liabilities.

But however far credit may stretch money, it still depends on a monetary base: people ultimately expect to get paid in some form or other. There are times in *Debt* when Graeber implies otherwise. He portrays credit in early

FOR AN ANARCHIST LIKE GRAEBER, THE APPEAL OF A STATE THEORY OF MONEY IS PRECISELY THE OPPOSITE: MONEY IS A CREATURE OF THE STATE, AND SO TAINTED.



modern rural England, for example, as a system of mutual aid – debt is all about trust, after all – ultimately undermined by the incursions of cold hard cash, the nexus of suspicious, calculating relationships among strangers. He takes this duality between debt and cash quite literally, to the extent that he seems to see credit relationships as a kind of charity. He claims that Adam Smith's line about not expecting our dinner from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker "simply wasn't true" because "most English shopkeepers were still carrying out the main part of their business on credit, which meant that customers appealed to their benevolence all the time."

Graeber's general reading of Smith's worldview is quite tendentious: Smith was blind to the flourishing credit economy of mutual aid all around him, had hang-ups about debt, and "created the vision of an imaginary world almost entirely free of debt and credit, and therefore, free of guilt and sin." The gold standard was a strategy by the powerful to undermine the informal rustic credit economy. He portrays Smith as an archmetallist, morally opposed to debt and blind to his society's mutual bonds of credit. In fact, Smith wrote glowingly in *The Wealth of Nations* about Scotland's laissez faire approach to letting private banks issue paper money: "though the circulating gold and silver of Scotland have suffered so great a diminution during this period, its real riches and prosperity do not appear to have suffered any."

Smith's treatment of the relationship between bank credit-money and the precious metals is far too complex to fit into Graeber's framework. The same can be said for the whole tradition of classical monetary theory, which was building steam at exactly the point where Graeber's history of it breaks off, the turn of the nineteenth century. The Bank of England's suspension of gold convertibility in 1797 and the ensuing inflation, or "high price of bullion," sparked a theoretical and political controversy which continued sporadically across much of the century: first the so-called Bullionist Controversy, and later, the battle between the Currency and Banking Schools.

These did indeed revolve around the relationships between the value of gold, the value of national currencies, and the value of central and private banknotes. But they are not resolvable at all into Graeber's moralistic framework. They were not ultimately questions about the "true nature of money," but about how a system operated and the limits and potentials of state and central bank action within that system.

It was not necessarily because people were under illusions about the timeless intrinsic money-ness of metals that the gold standard lasted so long, but because it actually took a very long time for the state to build up trust in the *value* of its money, in circumstances where it was easy for individuals to engage in arbitrage between different forms of money, bullion and different national currencies. This trust was threatened by every inflation and banking crisis. The mint could print money, but it couldn't print the price lists. Banks could exchange deposits for merchants' bills of exchange, but their ability to convert deposits into central banknotes or gold depended on the state of the network of monetary flows and their position within it.

The value of gold acted as an anchor for the value of any currency convertible into it. This was not due to any inherent goldness to money, and people didn't have to believe in any such thing to support the gold standard. There was a big difference, as Schumpeter put it, between theoretical and practical metallism, a difference which does not register in Graeber's picture.

In the modern period, state after state committed to metallic anchors as strategic decisions to enhance trust in their national currencies. Gold eventually beat out the other metals on a world scale thanks to various accidents and a snowballing network effect. The point was never to drive out state paper money, but to promote its acceptance as a stable standard of value. Neither was it intended to wipe out credit-money, but to tend and grow it by taming the wild fluctuations of bank credit.

These were problems that could not be answered with metaphysical ideas about the true nature of money. They were problems of social science.

The ultimate killer of the gold standard in the twentieth century was not changing minds about the nature of money, but the rise of the labor movement and collective bargaining: deflations became more painful and politically unacceptable. Money-wages and prices could no longer adjust so easily to shifts in the economic flux; employment no longer sacrificed on the "cross of gold." But the further the capitalist monetary system stretched away from its anchor in the precious metals, the more states found it necessary to have other ways of sustaining confidence in the value of their currencies by targeting inflation. An anchor to one commodity was, in fits and starts, replaced by a moving, flexible anchor to a whole basket of commodities averaged together. It is no accident that the period since the formal gold tie was finally cut has seen inflation become the overriding priority of economic policy. States print the money, but not the price lists. We live in an era not of fiat money, but of what Keynes called "managed money." Unemployment disciplines money-wages and central banks have become the queens of policy, technocratic institutions isolated from democracy, their jobs too important and technical for that.

None of that story appears in *Debt*. Instead, Graeber has little to say about capitalism's Golden Age except this:

> The period from roughly 1825 to 1975 is a brief but determined effort on the part of a large number of very powerful people – with the avid support of many of the least powerful – to try to turn that vision into something like reality. Coins and paper money were, finally, produced in sufficient quantities that even ordinary people could conduct their daily lives without appeal to tickets, tokens, or credit.

Any history covering 5,000 years is inevitably going to gloss over the odd century and a half. But you would think this century and a half fairly important for understanding our present situation.

And so we come to the final chapter, where Graeber cashes out what all this means for us, living near the "beginning of something yet to be determined." Our present era begins precisely in 1971, when the US unilaterally suspended its Bretton Woods obligation to exchange gold for dollars at $35 per ounce. Disappointingly, for a period in which debt and credit take so many fascinating forms and seem so close to the center of life, Graeber chooses to focus almost entirely on a single kind of debt – US Treasury bonds – and an argument that the large and sustained national debt of the US government constitutes a kind of imperial tribute.

Out of the whole book, this argument has received the most criticism from reviewers, so I will not go over the territory again. (Henry Farrell's at Crooked Timber is comprehensive and on target.) But both the decision to make *this* the focus of the conclusion, and the mode in which the argument is made, highlight again Graeber's aversion to economic analysis. It is certainly true that the position of the US dollar in the world economy allows the American state to sustainably fund a large debt more cheaply than others. But Graeber's understanding of the reasons for that position is entirely geopolitical.

To understand the position of the dollar requires an understanding of international macroeconomics, finance, and policy. Graeber believes that the US public debt is "a promise … that everyone knows will not be kept," but the truth is exactly the opposite: Treasury bonds are considered the safest, surest, most *liquid* store of value in the world. The central banks of the surplus countries whose currencies are managed relative to the dollar accumulate their reserves as a byproduct of exchange rate management, and have to hold them somewhere.

THE ANSWER TO BAD ECONOMICS IS GOOD ECONOMICS, NOT NO ECONOMICS. WE NEED A GENUINE POLITICAL ECONOMY.

It is in this chapter that Graeber's blithe dismissal of economics – really, a willful ignorance – grates the most. Mainstream economics comes in for another lashing – but the examples of economics he cites are from Ludwig von Mises, an Austrian far from the mainstream and forty years dead, and Niall Ferguson, a conservative historian!

Monetary policy is dismissed as "endlessly arcane and … intentionally so"; central bank strategy after the 2008 crisis described as "yet another piece of arcane magic no-one could possibly understand." A chart – one of four in the chapter, and in the entire book – is a welcome attempt to present some quantitative data, but it compares government debt (a stock) to the military budget (an annual flow) – they happen to have a similar shape when the axes are scaled just so.

An attack on economics evidently goes down well with Graeber's target audience. It is not a hard sell to anger the average leftist about the power and arrogance of the discipline, or to flatter them that they can see through it all. But it is an unfortunate attitude. "For – though no one will believe it," as Keynes once wrote, "economics is a technical and difficult subject."

Modern society has a complex, impersonal structure by which goods and services are produced and distributed. Explaining this structure is economics' primary problem. The neoclassical strategy for solving it through methodological individualism led to the unrealistic assumptions Graeber derides. He is perfectly right to reject that solution. But it still leaves the problem, which will not be solved just by thinking in terms of a wider range of human motivations. There is an economics-sized gap in Graeber's history, which he cannot fill. The answer to bad economics is good economics, not no economics. We need a genuine political economy.

Pierre Berger, a French economist responding to a previous incursion by the anthropologists, wrote in 1966: "With no disrespect to history, one is obliged to believe that an excessive concentration on research into the past can be a source of confusion in analyzing the present, at least as far as money and credit are concerned." He meant that economics studies a system, and the origins of its parts might mislead about their present functions and dynamics.

Of course, he is quite wrong that history must confuse: it is just that we need the right kind of history, which seeks to explain the evolution of a material system. Stringing together 5,000 years of anecdotes is not enough. ■

SPECIAL TOPIC

AMERICAN JACOBINS

THE WAR OF NORTHERN AGGRESSION

by James Oakes

A LEADING CIVIL WAR HISTORIAN CHALLENGES THE NEW ORTHODOXY ABOUT HOW SLAVERY ENDED IN AMERICA.

On 6 November 1860, the six-year-old Republican Party elected its first president. During the tense crisis months that followed – the "secession winter" of 1860–61 – practically all observers believed that Lincoln and the Republicans would begin attacking slavery as soon as they took power.

Democrats in the North blamed the Republican Party for the entire sectional crisis. They accused Republicans of plotting to circumvent the Constitutional prohibition against direct federal attacks on slavery. Republicans would instead allegedly try to squeeze slavery to death *indirectly*, by abolishing it in the territories and in Washington DC, suppressing it in the high seas, and refusing federal enforcement of the Slave Laws. The first to succumb to the Republican program of "ultimate extinction," Democrats charged, would be the border states where slavery was most vulnerable. For Northern Democrats, this is what caused the crisis; the Republicans were to blame for trying to get around the Constitution.

Southern secessionists said almost exactly the same thing. The Republicans supposedly intended to bypass the Constitution's protections for slavery by surrounding the South with free states, free territories, and free waters. What Republicans called a "cordon of freedom," secessionists denounced as an inflammatory circle of fire.

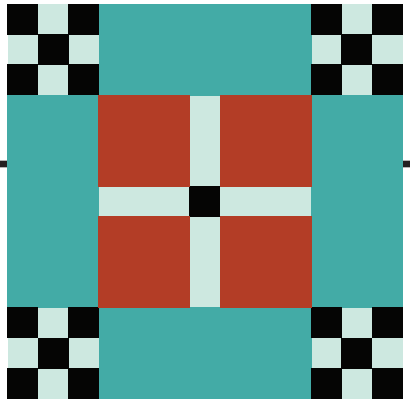
The Southern cooperationists – those who opposed immediate secession – agreed with the secessionists' and Northern Democrats' analysis of Republican intentions. But they argued that the only way the Republicans would actually have the power to act on those intentions was if the Southern states seceded. If the slave states remained within the Union, the Republicans would not have the majorities in Congress to adopt their antislavery policies. And if the South *did* secede, all bets would be off. The rebellious states would forfeit all the constitutional protections of slavery. The South would get something much worse than a cordon of freedom. It would get direct military intervention, leading to the immediate and uncompensated emancipation of the slaves.

The slaves themselves seem to have understood this. They took an unusual interest in the 1860 election and had high hopes for what Lincoln's victory would mean. They assumed that Lincoln's inauguration would lead to war, that war would bring on a Union invasion of the South, and that the invading Union army would free the slaves.

But to read what historians have been saying for decades is to conclude that all of these people – the Democrats, the secessionists, the cooperationists, and the slaves – were all wrong. The Northern Democrats were just demagogues. The secessionists were hysterical. And the slaves were, alas, sadly misguided.

Unwilling to take seriously what contemporaries were saying, historians have constructed a narrative of Emancipation and the Civil War that begins with the premise that Republicans came into the war with no intention of attacking slavery – indeed, that they disavowed any antislavery intentions. The narrative is designed to demonstrate the original premise, according to which everyone at the time was mistaken about what the Republicans intended to do.

It's a familiar chronology: Under the terms of the First Confiscation Act of August 1861, disloyal masters would "forfeit" the use of their slaves, but the slaves were not actually freed. Lincoln ordered General John C. Frémont to rescind his decree of that September freeing the slaves of rebels in



Missouri, and several months later the President rescinded General Hunter's order abolishing slavery in three states. As late as the summer of 1862, we are reminded, Lincoln was writing letters to Horace Greeley saying that if he could end the war without freeing a single slave, he would do so. Even after the President finally promised an emancipation proclamation, in September 1862, several months elapsed until the proclamation actually came on 1 January 1863.

Only then, according to the standard narrative, was the North committed to emancipation. Only then did the purpose of the Civil War expand from the mere restoration of the Union to include the overthrow of slavery.

In one form or another, this narrative is familiar to all scholars of the period. Historians who agree on little else will agree on this version of the story, even when they have entirely divergent interpretations of what it means.

But what if the original premise is wrong? What if, during the secession winter of 1860–1861, everybody was right about what the Republicans intended to do about slavery? What if the Republicans came into the war ready and willing to destroy slavery? What does that do for a narrative of emancipation?

For one thing, it flies in the face of the prevailing neo-revisionism in contemporary Civil War scholarship. The old revisionist interpretation, which reached its zenith of influence in the 1930s and 1940s, came in many varieties. But it always rested on an essentially negative proposition: whatever else the war was about, it was not about slavery. This viewpoint required one set of claims about the South, and another about the North.

BUT ONCE THE SOUTH SECEDED, ALL BETS WOULD BE OFF — IT WOULD LOSE THE CONSTITUTIONAL PROTECTIONS THAT IT HAD PREVIOUSLY ENJOYED. THE REPUBLICANS WOULD THEN IMPLEMENT THE SECOND POLICY: DIRECT MILITARY EMANCIPATION, IMMEDIATE AND UNCOMPENSATED.

Revisionists claimed that slavery was already dying in the South, that it was unprofitable, that it wasn't important to Southern economy and society, that it had reached the natural limits of its expansion, and that Southern leaders were more concerned about defending state rights than protecting slavery. Most contemporary historians, though not all of them, now reject these old revisionist claims. Slavery was thriving and the Southern states seceded to protect it.

But revisionists also claimed that the North did not go to war over slavery. If there were "interests" involved, they were the interests of Northern capitalists against Southern agrarians. The Civil War was an accident brought on by bungling politicians. The abolitionists were a tiny, beleaguered minority; most Northerners shared the general conviction of black racial inferiority. The South had slavery, the argument went, but the North was racist too. This argument, in turn, was really just a revival of the antebellum Democratic Party's relentless efforts to shift the terms of debate from slavery to race.

Today, this revisionist interpretation of the North is alive and well. Indeed, it is pervasive among historians. We are repeatedly told that the North did not go to war over slavery. The Civil War is once again denounced as morally unjustified on the grounds that the North was not motivated by any substantial antislavery convictions. Emancipation itself is described as an accidental by-product of a war the North fought for no purpose beyond the restoration of the Union. A recent study of the secession crisis states that during the war, slavery was abolished "inadvertently."

Contemporary scholarship is saturated by this neo-revisionist premise. Like the antebellum Democrats and the Civil War revisionists, neo-revisionists have insistently shifted the terms of the debate from slavery to race. Virtually

any Republican in 1860 would have recognized this argument as Democratic Party propaganda.

If I sound skeptical, that's because I am. On the basis of my research, I can no longer accept the thesis that the Union did not begin emancipating slaves until 1 January 1863.

It was never my intention to overturn the conventional narrative. I began by accepting the standard assumption that that the first Confiscation Act achieved nothing. But I still wanted to know what Republicans *thought* they were doing when they passed the law. Why did the Act turn out to be so toothless? Why did it fail to free any slaves? Secondary accounts usually pass over this question; they couldn't provide me with the answers I needed: who wrote the law, where did it come from, how did people talk about it?

To my astonishment, I discovered that Section Four of the Act, the clause specifically authorizing the forfeiture of slaves, was written by Senator Lyman Trumbull, chair of the Judiciary Committee, as an emancipation clause. Indeed, it was understood by everyone in Congress to be an emancipation clause. Trumbull's proposal was denounced by Democrats and border-state congressmen as an emancipation clause, defended almost unanimously by congressional Republicans as an emancipation clause. These men thought they were writing an emancipation bill. That's what they said at the time.

A full-scale congressional debate erupted in July of 1861, focusing on the legitimacy of the emancipation that Republicans were undertaking. When I read those debates I wondered where the arguments for emancipation had come from.

I went back to the secession debates. And sure enough, everything critics had accused the Republicans of planning to do was exactly what Republicans themselves were saying they were going to do.

The great mistake that historians have made, I realized, was a misreading of the constitutional premises of the Republican antislavery agenda. I doubt anything Lincoln said is more commonly repeated by historians than the promise he made in his inaugural address not to interfere with slavery in the states where it already existed. That little quotation is all the proof historians seem to require to demonstrate that when the war began, neither Lincoln nor the Republicans had any idea of emancipating slaves.

In fact, nearly every abolitionist (and just about every historian I can think of) would agree with Lincoln: the Founders had made a series of compromises resulting in a Constitution that did not allow the federal government to abolish slavery in any state where it existed.

William Lloyd Garrison wrote that consensus into the founding document of the American Anti-Slavery Society, the 1833 Declaration of Sentiments, which flatly declared that the power to abolish slavery rested exclusively with the states. Theodore Dwight Weld said the same thing. So did Joshua Giddings, Salmon Chase, and Charles Sumner. The federal government had no power to interfere with slavery in the states where it already existed.

Which raises the obvious question: how did the abolitionists expect to get slavery abolished? A small group of nonpolitical abolitionists argued for moral suasion. An even smaller faction of antislavery radicals argued that the Constitution was an antislavery document. But most abolitionists believed, on the one hand, that the Constitution did not allow the federal government to abolish slavery in the states, but that on the other hand, *political action was necessary for slavery to be abolished*. Given the Constitution's restrictions, what did opponents of slavery think could be done?

Coming out of the 1860 election, Republicans declared that there were two possible policies. The first was to make freedom national and restrict slavery to the states where it already existed. Republican policymakers would seal off the South: they would no longer enforce the Fugitive Slave Clause; slavery would be suppressed on the high seas; it would be abolished in Washington DC, banned from all the Western territories, and no new slave states would be admitted to the Union. A "cordon of freedom" would surround the slave states. Then Republicans would offer a series of incentives to the border states where slavery was weakest: compensation, subsidies for voluntary emigration of freed slaves, a gradual timetable for complete abolition.

Slavery was intrinsically weak, Republicans said. By denationalizing it, they could put it on a course of ultimate extinction. Surrounded on all sides, deprived of life-giving federal support, the slave states would one by one abolish slavery on their own, beginning with the border states. Each new defection would further diminish the strength of the remaining slave states, further accelerating the process of abolition. Yet because the decision to abolish slavery remained with the states, Republican policies would not violate the constitutional ban on direct federal interference in slavery.

The South would simply have to accept this. And if it couldn't tolerate such a federal policy, it could leave the Union. But once it seceded, all bets would be off – it would lose the Constitutional protections that it had previously enjoyed. The Republicans would then implement the second policy: direct military emancipation, immediate and uncompensated.

Republicans said this openly during the secession crisis. And that's what they were saying in Congress as they debated the Confiscation Act. It's time to start rethinking our fundamental assumptions about the causes as well as the trajectory of the Civil War. And we can start by taking the perceptions of its contemporaries a great deal more seriously. ■

LINCOLN AND MARX

by Robin Blackburn

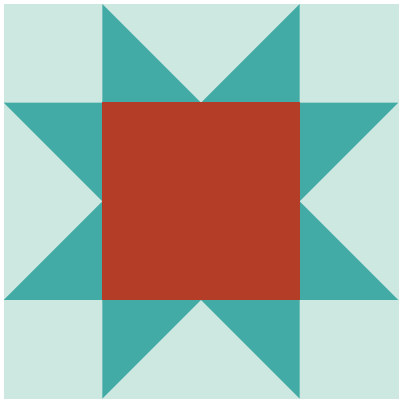
THE TRANSATLANTIC CONVERGENCE OF TWO REVOLUTIONARIES.

Abraham Lincoln, as president, chose to reply to an "Address" from the London-based International Workingmen's Association. The "Address," drafted by Karl Marx, congratulated Lincoln on his reelection for a second term. In some resonant and complex paragraphs, the "Address" heralded the world-historical significance of what had become a war against slavery. The "Address" declared that victory for the North would be a turning point for nineteenth-century politics, an affirmation of free labor, and a defeat for the most reactionary capitalists who depended on slavery and racial oppression.

Lincoln saw only a tiny selection of the avalanche of mail he was sent, employing several secretaries to deal with it. But the US Ambassador in London, Charles Francis Adams, decided to forward the "Address" to Washington. Encouraging every sign of support for the Union was central to Adams's mission. The Emancipation Proclamation of January 1863 had made this task much easier, but there were still many sections of the British elite who sympathized with the Confederacy and some who favored awarding it diplomatic recognition if only public opinion could be brought to accept this.

The "Address" carried, beside that of Marx, the signatures of several prominent British trade unionists as well as French socialists and German social democrats. The Ambassador wrote to the IWA, explaining that the president had asked him to convey his response their "Address." He thanked them for their support and expressed his conviction that the defeat of the rebellion would indeed be a victory for the cause of humanity everywhere. He declared that his country would abstain from "unlawful intervention" but observed that "The United States regarded their cause in the present conflict with slavery-maintaining insurgents as the cause of human nature, and they derived new encouragement to persevere from the testimony of the working men of Europe."

Lincoln would have wished to thank British workers, especially those who supported the North despite the distress caused by the Northern blockade and the resulting "cotton famine." The appearance of the names of several



BUT SOMETHING OF THE CONSERVATIVE SPIRIT OF THE ANTEBELLUM REPUBLIC, WITH ITS AVERSION TO FEDERAL TAXATION, LINGERED ON IN THE WEAKNESS OF THE FEDERAL POWER.

German revolutionaries would not have surprised him; the defeat of the 1848 revolutions in Europe had swelled the flood of German migrants arriving in North America. At an earlier date – in 1843 – Marx himself had thought of immigrating to Texas, going so far as to apply to the mayor of Trier, his birthplace, for an immigration permit.

What path would world history have taken if Marx had become a Texan? We will never know. What we do know is that Marx remained in touch with many of the exiles. His famous essay on "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon" was first published in New York in German. Not all German émigrés were radicals, but many were. With their beer halls, patriotic songs, and kindergartens, they helped to broaden the distinctly Puritan culture of Republicanism. They had been educated to despise slaveholding, and eventually nearly two hundred thousand German Americans volunteered for the Union army.

There was an affinity between the German democratic nationalism of 1848 and the free labor doctrine of the newly-established US Republican Party, so it is not surprising that a number of Marx's friends and comrades not only became staunch supporters of the Northern cause but received senior commissions. Joseph Weydemeyer and August Willich, both former members of the Communist League, were promoted first to the ranks of Colonel and then to General.

Lincoln may have recognized the name Karl Marx when he read the IWA "Address," since Marx had been a prolific contributor to the *New York Daily Tribune*, the most influential Republican newspaper of the 1850s. Charles A. Dana, publisher of the *Tribune*, first met Marx in Cologne in 1848 at a time when he edited the widely read *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*. In 1852, Dana invited Marx to become a correspondent for the *Tribune*. Over the next decade he wrote – with some help from his friend Engels – over five hundred articles for the *Tribune*. Hundreds of these pieces were published under Marx's name, but eighty-four appeared as unsigned editorials. He wrote on a global range of topics, sometimes occupying two or three pages of a sixteen-page newspaper.

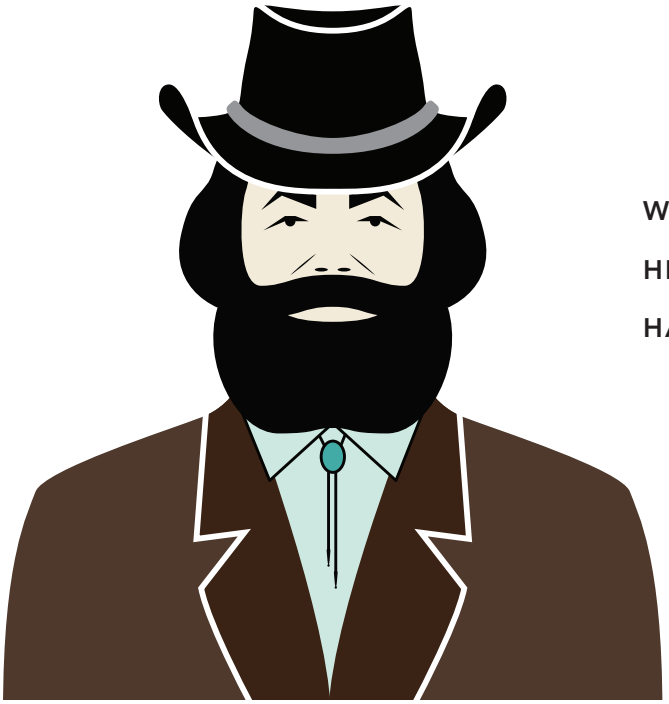
Once the Civil War began, US newspapers lost interest in foreign coverage unless it directly related to the war. Marx wrote several pieces for European papers explaining what was at stake in the conflict and contesting the claim, widely heard in European capitals, that slavery had nothing to do with the conflict. Important sections of the British and French elites had strong commercial ties to the US South, buying huge quantities of slave-grown cotton. But some European liberals with no direct link to the slave economy argued that secession by the Southern states had to be accepted because of the principle of self-determination. They attacked the North's option for war and its failure to repudiate slavery.

In Marx's eyes, British observers who claimed to deplore slavery yet backed the Confederacy were simply humbugs. He attacked the visceral hostility to the North evident in the *Economist* and the *Times* (of London). These papers claimed that the real cause of the conflict was Northern protectionism against the free trade favored by the South. Marx rebutted their arguments in a series of brilliant articles for *Die Presse*, a Viennese publication, which caustically demolished their economic determinism, and instead sketched out an alternative account – subtle, structural, and political – of the origins of the war. Marx insisted that secession had been prompted by the Southern elite's political fears. They knew that power within the Union was shifting against them. The South was losing its tight grip on federal institutions because of the dynamism of the Northwest, a destination for many new immigrants. As the Northwest Territory matured into free states, the South found itself outnumbered; the North was loath to recognize any new slave states. The slaveholders had alienated Northerners by requiring them to arrest and return fugitive slaves, yet they knew they needed the wholehearted support of their fellow citizens if they were to defend their "peculiar institution." Lincoln's election was seen as a deadly threat because he owed Southerners nothing and had promised to oppose any expansion of slavery.

Marx gave full support to the Union cause, even though Lincoln initially refused to make emancipation a war goal. Marx was confident that the clash of rival social regimes, based on opposing systems of labor, would sooner or later surface as the real issue. While consistently supporting the North, he wrote that the Union would only triumph if it adopted the revolutionary anti-slavery measures advocated by Wendell Phillips and other radical abolitionists. He was particularly impressed by Phillips's speeches in 1862 calling to strike down all compromises with slavery. He approvingly quoted Phillips's dictum that "God had placed the thunderbolt of emancipation" in Northern hands and they should use it.

Marx continued to correspond with Dana and sent him his articles (Dana was fluent in German). By this time Dana had left the world of journalism to become Lincoln's "eyes and ears" as a special commissioner in the War Department, touring the fronts and reporting to the White House that Ulysses Grant was the man to back. Marx argued in *Die Presse* in March 1862 that the Union armies should abandon their encirclement strategy and seek to cut the Confederacy in two. Dana may have noticed that Grant had reached the same conclusion by instinct and experience. In 1863, Dana became Assistant Secretary of the War Department.

Marx was delighted when Lincoln – emboldened by the abolitionist campaign and a radicalization of Northern



WHAT PATH WOULD WORLD HISTORY HAVE TAKEN IF MARX HAD BECOME A TEXAN?

opinion – announced his intention to issue an Emancipation Proclamation in January 1863. The Proclamation would make it difficult for the British or French governments to award diplomatic recognition to the Confederacy. It also allowed for the enrollment of freedmen in the Union army.

Marx and Lincoln had very divergent opinions on business corporations and wage labor, but from today's perspective they shared something important: they both loathed exploitation and regarded labor as the ultimate source of value. In his first message to Congress in December 1861, Lincoln criticized the "effort to place capital on an equal footing with, if not above, labor in the structure of government." Instead, he insisted, "labor is prior to and independent of capital. Capital is only the fruit of labor.... Labor is the superior of capital, and deserves much the higher consideration."

Lincoln believed that in America the wage laborer was free to rise by his own efforts and could became a professional, or even an employer. Marx held that this picture of social mobility was a mirage, and that only a handful could succeed in acquiring economic independence.

For Marx, the wage worker was only partly free since he had to sell his labor to another so that he and his family might live. But, since he was not a slave, the free worker could organize and agitate for, say, a shorter working day and free education. Weydemeyer had launched an American Labor Federation in 1853 which backed these objectives and which declared its ranks open to all "regardless of occupation, language, color, or sex." These themes became central to the politics of Marx's followers in America.

Lincoln's assassination led Marx to write a new "Address" from the IWA to his successor, with a fulsome tribute to the slain president. In this text, Marx described Lincoln as "a man neither to be browbeaten by adversity, nor intoxicated by success, inflexibly pressing on to his great goal, never compromising it by blind haste, slowly maturing his steps, never retracing them ... doing his titanic work as humbly and homely as heaven-born rulers do little things with the grandiloquence of pomp and state. Such, indeed, was the modesty of this great and good man that the world only discovered him a hero after he had fallen a martyr." However, the tragic loss could not prevent Northern victory opening the way to a "new era of the emancipation of labor."

Marx and Engels were both soon troubled by the actions of Andrew Johnson, the new president. On 15 July 1865, Engels wrote to his friend attacking Johnson: "His hatred of Negroes comes out more and more violently.... If things go on like this, in six months all the old villains of secession will be sitting in Congress at Washington. Without coloured suffrage, nothing whatever can be done there." Radical Republicans soon came to the same conclusion.

In the immediate aftermath of the war, and thanks in part to the publication of the IWA addresses, the

International attracted much interest and support in the United States.

Marx was putting the finishing touches on *Capital: Volume 1*, in 1866–67, and included a new section at this late stage on the determinants of the length of the working day. The call for an eight-hour day had emerged as a key demand in several US states. In 1867, the IWA welcomed the appearance of a National Labor Union in the US, formed to spread the demand as a unifying goal. At its first conference the NLU declared: "The National Labor Union knows no north, no south, no east, no west, neither colour nor sex, on the question of the rights of labor." Within the space of a year, eight different Northern states adopted the eight-hour day for public employees.

The regions of the United States offered very different possibilities for political action. Only the presence of Union troops in the South prevented white vigilantes, many of them Confederate veterans, from terrorizing the freedmen. In Tennessee, South Carolina, and Louisiana, there were black congresses that drew up a "Declaration of Rights and Wrongs," insisting that freedom would be a mockery if it did not entail equal access to buses, trains, and hotels, schools and universities.

In the North and West, the boldest radicals organized sections of the International; by the late 1860s there were about fifty sections and a membership of perhaps five thousand. In December 1871 the IWA in New York organized a seventy-thousand-strong demonstration of sympathy with the victims slaughtered in the suppression of the Paris Commune. The throng prominently featured a black militia called the Skidmore Guards; many trade unionists with their banners; Victoria Woodhull and the feminist leaders of Section 12; an Irish band; and a contingent marching behind the Cuban flag. Many of the unions founded at this time included the word "International" in their name.

But by the early 1870s Northern support for Reconstruction, with its expensive occupation of the South and its bold affronts to racial prejudice, was beginning to ebb. A wave of corruption scandals sapped Republican morale. The real problem, however, was that the Republican program had come apart at the seams. Lincoln had hoped to build a strong and authoritative federal government in Washington, and thus obtain respect for the rule of law throughout the restored Union. In Marx's eyes, Lincoln would have built the sort of "bourgeois democratic republic" that would have allowed for the emergence of a labor party dedicated to free education, progressive taxation, and an eight-hour work day.

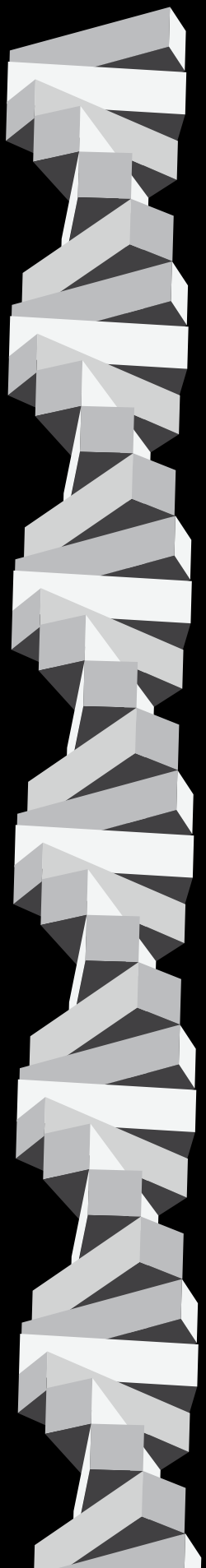
These hopes were dashed. Lincoln's assassination, the chaos and reaction of the Johnson presidency, and the failure of Ulysses Grant, his successor, to impose moral leadership all undermined or compromised the promise of an authoritative, undivided federal government. Marx was not surprised by the emergence of "robber baron" capitalists, nor by the bitter class strife they unleashed. He had expected – indeed predicted – as much.

But the failure of the federal state to impose its authority on the South was another matter, as was the Northern bosses' ability to crush strikes by deploying thousands of special constables and Pinkerton men.

The end of slavery certainly validated the momentary alignment of Lincoln and Marx. During Reconstruction (roughly 1868–76), freedmen could vote, their children could go to school, and there were many black elected officials. In the North, there were gains for the eight-hour movement and the first attempts to regulate the railroad corporations. But something of the conservative spirit of the antebellum republic, with its aversion to federal taxation, lingered on in the weakness of the federal power. In an ominous development, the Supreme Court declared that the progressive income tax, introduced by the Lincoln administration in 1862, was unconstitutional. Without the income tax, paying for the war would be much harder and future redistribution impossible. Another retrograde step was a Supreme Court ruling that construed the promise of equal treatment of "all persons" in the Fourteenth Amendment of 1868 – a measure introduced to protect the freedmen – as offering protection to the new corporations, since they were also deemed to enjoy the status of "persons." The direct result of this decision was to make it far more difficult for federal or local authorities to regulate corporations (the ruling is still in force).

Reconstruction ended with a deal between Republicans and Democrats that resolved the deadlocked Electoral College of 1876 by confirming the fractured authority of the state. This deal allowed the candidate with fewer votes to enter the White House while requiring the withdrawal of all federal troops from the South. This gave free reign to the lynch mobs. Within a few months, Grant himself complained, the federal troops that had been prevented from tackling the Ku Klux Klan were sent against the railworkers during the Great Strike of 1877, suppressing it at the cost of a hundred lives. American workers fought back tenaciously, but often on a regional or state-by-state basis. To many, syndicalism made more sense than the labor party that Marx and Engels advocated, though Marx's penetrating analysis of capitalism still had an impact on people as diverse as Samuel Gompers (founder of the AFL), Lucy Parsons (syndicalist, feminist, founder of the IWW), and Eugene Debs (Socialist).

The defeat of Lincoln's vision of a unified, democratic, and authoritative republic was a defeat for the socialists too. Not for the last time, the genius of the US Constitution, with its multiple checks and balances, was to frustrate the plans of progressives. ■



HOW THE LEFT HAS WON

by James Livingston

OR, WHY IS THERE STILL SOCIALISM IN THE UNITED STATES?

"WHEN DID you stop beating your wife?" "Why can't Johnny read?" "Why did the Harlem Renaissance fail?" "Why is there no socialism in the United States?"

What happens when we refuse to answer leading questions like these, which contain conclusions that should be in contention?

What happens when we stop looking for socialism in all the wrong places?

Start here. When we think about the transition from feudalism to capitalism, we take the long view – we scan the four centuries from 1400 to 1800, looking for signs of fundamental but incremental change. To be sure, we assume that the great bourgeois revolutions of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries were both symptoms and causes of this transition; in that sense, we proceed in our thinking as if capitalism were created by social movements, political activism, ideological extremism. Still, we know these early modern movements can't be compared to the communist parties that created state socialism in twentieth-century Russia, China, and Cuba, because in these more recent instances, self-conscious revolutionaries organized workers and peasants to overthrow capitalism and create socialism.

In the mid seventeenth century, John Milton, John Lilburn, and Gerrard Winstanley clearly understood that they

were overthrowing something, but they didn't know they were creating the conditions of capitalism; neither did Thomas Paine a century later, as he made his way from the American to the French Revolution, from *Common Sense* to *The Rights of Man*. Not even Maximilien Robespierre, the mastermind of the Terror, was prophet enough to see this improbable future. And when Theodore Weld, Angelina Grimke, Frederick Douglass, and Abraham Lincoln set out to overthrow slavery, they didn't know they were making "The Last Capitalist Revolution," as Barrington Moore, Jr called it in *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (1966).

In short, capitalism was the *unintended consequence* of bourgeois revolutions, whereas socialism has been the avowed purpose, or at least a crucial component, of every revolution since 1911. This difference has become so important that when we think about the transition from capitalism to socialism, we take the short view: we look for ideological extremes, social movements, vanguard parties, self-conscious revolutionaries, radical dissenters, armed struggles, extra-legal methods, political convulsions – as if the coming of socialism requires the abolition of capitalism by cataclysm, by insurgent, militant mass movements dedicated to that purpose. As a result, we keep asking Werner Sombart's leading question, "Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?" And we keep answering defensively, on our way to an apology.

II

Look at it this way. We don't measure the transition from feudalism to capitalism only by assessing the social origins and political-economic effects of bourgeois revolutions – we'd have to be daft to do so. Instead we ask when, how, where, and why social relations were transformed, over many years, so that a new mode of production and new modes of consciousness, emerged to challenge (if not supplant) the old. Or rather, in keeping with what Raymond Williams, Antonio Gramsci, and Stuart Hall have taught us, we ask *when* capitalism became the hegemonic mode in a mongrel social formation that contained fragments of a residual feudalism and harbingers of a precocious socialism. We don't think that capitalism was created overnight by revolutionary parties – Independents, Jacobins, Federalists, or Republicans – because we know from reading Marx that, as a mode of production, it reaches beyond the scope of any state power or legislative act. We know from reading Smith and Hegel that the development of capitalism means the articulation and expansion of civil society against the (absolutist) state.

Why, then, would we look for evidence of socialism only where a state seized by radicals of the Left inaugurates a dictatorship of the proletariat? Or, to lower the rhetorical volume and evidentiary stakes, why would we expect to find socialism only where avowed socialists or labor parties contend for state power? We should instead assume that socialism, like capitalism, is a cross-class cultural construction, to which even the bourgeoisie has already made significant contributions – just as the proletariat has long made significant contributions to the cross-class construction we know as capitalism. What follows?

We typically assume that socialism is the exclusive property of "the" working class, despite the simple fact that there has never been a socialist movement or system based on this one stratum. Why do we deny the historical evidence? We also typically assume that socialism requires the seizure or overthrow of the state, as in a Bolshevik "war of maneuver," rather than a cultural revolution, as in the "war of position" Gramsci proposed as an alternative to the Leninist template. Why do we think that socialism is, in this sense, the economic effect of political actions?

We typically assume that socialism is something signified by state command of civil society, rather than the other way around. Why? Why do we assume, in other words, that markets and socialism don't mix, that private enterprise and public goods – commutative and distributive justice – are always at odds? And why do we think, accordingly, that socialism must repudiate liberalism and its attendant, modern individualism, rather than think, with Eduard Bernstein and Sidney Hook, that socialism is their rightful heir?

Let's uproot our assumptions, in keeping with our radical calling. Let's look for the evidence of socialism in the same places we've always looked for the evidence of capitalism: in changing social relations of production *as well as* legislative acts and political actions, in the marketplace of ideas *as well as* porkbellies, in everyday life and popular culture *as well as* learned assessments of the American Dream, in uncoordinated efforts to free the distribution of information and music – the basic industries of a postindustrial society – from the "business model" quotes of the newspapers and record companies *as well as* social movements animated by anticapitalist ideas. By now we're accustomed to studies of the "culture of capitalism," or the culture of the market, which of course aren't the same thing – you can't have capitalism without markets, but you can have markets without capitalism – so let's get used to studying the culture of socialism *in* the market.

While we're at it, let's stop assuming that socialism is by its very nature democratic or progressive, and realize, accordingly, that sometimes we'll find it where we don't want to, in strange, unlikely, and regressive places – for example, in the teaching of the Catholic Church on economic justice, or in neoconservative tracts sponsored by the

American Enterprise Institute, or in the All-Volunteer Army.

III

In history as in theory, socialism, like capitalism, has no predictable political valence. It can be liberal and democratic, as in the policies of the Labour Party, the welfare states of Scandinavia, and the second New Deal. But it can be viciously illiberal, as in the practices of fascist and communist states in the mid-to-late twentieth century, or those of contemporary China and Cuba. It can be quaintly Aristotelian, as in the US Bishops' *Letter on the Economy* (1982), or vaguely communitarian, as in Michael Novak's *Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (1981), a book that came with a subvention from the American Enterprise Institute. In fact, like capitalism, socialism can be both progressive and reactionary, liberal and conservative, at the same time.

Take, for example, the US military since 1975, since the advent of the All-Volunteer Army. I know what you're thinking. But let's stop assuming that socialism is a systemic totality that necessarily appears and operates as a closed, national, political regime – Cuba is a socialist country, the US is not – and start thinking of it as a constituent element of centrifugal social formations and international relations. In these terms, the US has a more socialist culture than China (and this according to senior Chinese officials) because it has many more viable social, intellectual, and political constraints on market forces which reach beyond the state-centered institutional powers of a central bank or a central committee.

In the same terms, the All-Volunteer Army looks like an enclave of socialism in a country where the still-hegemonic mode of production is more or less capitalist. The US military is now the farthest outpost of the New Left or the Great Society, where affirmative action has worked to turn a once profoundly racist institution into job training, higher education, and social mobility for working-class kids of every color. It's the last stand of that once-upon-a-time War on Poverty: a public works program that, within its limited purview, has redeemed MLK's promissory note of equality. It's the site of rigorous historical consciousness and training, where the most searching critiques of American empire have become routine: since 1992, it's become our most reliable intellectual opposition to imperial idiocy. It's an antimetaphysical rendition of debates on masculinity and femininity, where homosexuality and combat readiness can no longer appear as the terms of an either-or choice. It's the cutting edge of practical solutions to workplace issues and public policy conundrums on sexual orientation. It's also the late-imperial rendition of the workhouse, where fragile souls go to die in the name of a "national" security that acknowledges neither geographical nor ethical limits.

Or take Irving Kristol, the founding father of neoconservatism and Michael Novak's mentor. Nobody would call him a socialist, but his opposition to what now goes by the name of neoliberalism sounds very much like the contemporary Left's opposition to the arbitrary inequities of deregulated capitalism and its offspring, globalization; it also sounds like a critique of what the New Left learned, in the 1960s, to call corporate liberalism. Kristol made his bones by picking a fight with Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, who insisted that socialism was preposterous because it supposed that the market could be subordinated to reason. For Hayek, as for Friedman, market forces were the source of freedom precisely because they couldn't be manipulated by individuals or companies or governments. From this premise, they argued that only capitalist societies could be free societies. They also argued that the citizens of a free society could not even try to create a just society, because to do so would be to modify the arbitrary results of anonymous market forces in the name of justice, and thus to staunch the economic source of political freedom.

Kristol blasted this righteous indifference to justice on the grounds that it denied modernity itself, the moment when *consent* – not force and not chance – became the principle of social order and political innovation. "But can men live in a free society," he asked, "if they have no reason to believe that it is a just society?" His answer was *no*, in thunder. The "historical accidents of the marketplace cannot be the basis for an enduring and legitimate entitlement to power, privilege, and property," he exclaimed, not any more than the historical accidents of birth could make the claims of hereditary aristocracy seem reasonable.

He tried to detach conservatism from its schizophrenic devotion to free markets on the one hand and tradition on the other. A "combination of the reforming spirit with the conservative ideal," he declared, "is most desperately wanted." He cited Herbert Croly, the original big-government liberal from the Progressive Era – he was what we would now call a social democrat – as his source of inspiration.

Kristol also knew that the compeatitive entrepreneurial economy Friedman and Hayek posited as the source of freedom was a mere fantasy: "There is little doubt that the idea of a 'free market', in the era of large corporations, is not quite the original capitalist idea." Some producers had more market power than others; some legal persons were more equal than others. Corporate capitalism was therefore a pressing moral problem, at least in view of the American commitment to both liberty and equality, for in "its concentration of assets and power – power to make decisions affecting the lives of tens of thousands of citizens – it seems to create a dangerous disharmony between the economic system and the political."

So even within the language of the original neoconservative, we can find the same serious doubts about capitalism more typically expressed by the liberal and socialist left – doubts about markets and price systems as the appropriate means of distributing public goods like justice, and doubts about the quasi-political powers of large corporations.

IV

Socialism resides in and flows from markets as modulated and administered by corporations, trade unions, consumer associations, and other interest groups as well as from public policy, executive orders, regulatory agencies, court decisions, or five-year plans. In its original nineteenth-century definitions, and in later translations by Solidarity in Poland and Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia, "socialism" signified a demand for the supremacy of civil society over the state; it thus carried profoundly liberal, pro-market, yet anticapitalist connotations. It meant the "self-management" of society as well as the workplace – the sovereignty of the people – and by the late twentieth century it was profoundly realistic in view of new thinking about markets and new intellectual capacities enabled by universal education and mass communications.

Reputable economists in Eastern Europe such as Włodzimierz Brus, who studied with Oskar Lange and Michał Kalecki – Brus and Radoslav Selucký were the de facto theorists of the Prague Spring – argued in the 1960s that the Soviet Bloc would stagnate, and socialism would expire, if it didn't enact a dispersal of power from state to society by using market devices to enfranchise consumer demand as the source of "intensive" growth (as against the "extensive" pattern of state plan-driven, investment-led growth). Daniel Bell and Georges Bataille meanwhile argued the very same thing about capitalism in Western Europe and the United States, suggesting that Americans were farther down the road to a postbourgeois regime – a consumer culture – than the Europeans.

They were right. Social democracy is impossible without political and cultural pluralism, but such pluralism is inconceivable in the absence of markets geared toward decentered consumer choices, which are in turn dependent on price systems, advertisements, novelty, and fashion; in other words, on the bad taste, bad faith, and bad manners that come with "reification," aka consumer culture. When the economic future is left in the hands of the oligarchs – the best and the brightest, those who know what's good for us, whether they're from the Politburo, Harvard, or Goldman Sachs – the political future will be theirs, too. Like capitalism, and like democracy, socialism needs markets to thrive, and vice versa. As Brus put it in 1969, in a subversive little essay called "Commodity Fetishism and Socialism": "In given socioeconomic circumstances an increase in the scope and importance of commodity relations may, for a number of reasons, facilitate the development of a socialist society."

The question for socialists, then, is not whether whether we want markets or not, but what kind of markets we need to maximize the utility we call self-determination? What kind of markets (and what forms of property) would enable the sovereignty of the people, as against the oligarchs? What degree of perestroika shall we require?

V

Individualism isn't the antithesis of community or socialism. To think so is to assume that attaining autonomy as an individual requires the denial of all tradition and solidarity, whether inherited or invented, or it is to assume that economic self-assertion through liberty of contract is the path to genuine selfhood. We know better – we know without consulting Aristotle that selfhood is a social construction – but we keep claiming that our interests as individuals are by definition in conflict with larger public goods like social mobility and equal access to justice and opportunity.

We keep urging our fellow Americans to "rise above" a selfish attachment to their own little fiefdoms, whether these appear as neighborhoods or jobs, and their cherished consumer goods. In doing so, we're asking them to give up their local knowledge, livelihoods, and identities on behalf of an unknown future, a mere abstraction, a canvas stretched to accommodate only the beautiful souls among us: we're asking them to get religion. Either that or we've acceded to the anti-American fallacy cooked up by the neoclassical economists who decided in the 1950s that liberty and equality, or individualism and solidarity – like capitalism and socialism – are the goals of a zero-sum game.

By now we know what the founders did: that equality is the enabling condition of liberty, and vice versa. There were two "cardinal objects of Government," as James Madison put it to his friend and pupil Thomas Jefferson in 1787: "the rights of persons and the rights of property." Each constitutional purpose permitted the other, not as an "allowance" but rather as a premise. One is not the price of the other, as in a cost imposed on and subtracted from the benefit of the other. Instead, liberty for all has been enhanced by our belated approach to equality, our better approximations of a more perfect union; for example, by the struggles and victories of the civil rights movement, the women's movement, and the gay rights movement. By the same token, democratic socialism enhances individuality. By equipping more people with the means by which they can differentiate

themselves, if they choose, from their origins – income and education are the crucial requisites here – socialism becomes the solvent of plainclothes uniformity and the medium of unruly, American-style individualism.

VI

By now we can also see that Gramsci was right: as the relation between state and society changed in the twentieth century, so did the nature and scope of politics, and with these the meaning of revolution as such. Accordingly, we can adopt a new perspective on the transition from capitalism to socialism, one that corroborates Marx's anti-apocalyptic narrative of this transition in *Capital: Volume III*.

Most informed and interested observers of early-twentieth-century politics, regardless of their affiliations, noticed three salient trends. First, and most obvious, the state's regulatory power and authority grew remarkably, whether under revolutionary or reformist or reactionary auspices, but the sources of its sovereignty became questions rather than premises, as the inherited liberal opposition between state and society stopped being self-evident, and with it the boundary between the public sphere and the private sector. Second, and almost as obvious, the atomic particles of politics became groups, associations, collectives – in the US, corporations and labor unions, to be sure, but also cross-class organizations like the NAACP and the Women's Trade Union League – rather than unbound individuals, those self-contained, omnicompetent bourgeois citizens of nineteenth-century lore. Third, and nowhere near obvious, even as the state's powers grew, so too did the capacities of these new groups, associations, and collectives to regulate or administer the market, and to shape civil society, in their own interests. Think of them as local precursors of NGOs, those transnational organizations without diplomatic standing or immunity which nonetheless have profound economic and political effects.

YOU HAVE TO BELIEVE THAT YOUR POLITICAL PURPOSE IS SOMETHING LIKE A SACRED VOW THAT EXEMPTS YOU FROM THE CORRUPTIONS OF THIS WORLD.

Taken together, these trends made for what Gramsci (also Harold Laski, Mary Follett, Jessie Taft, G. H. Mead, Horace Kallen, Georges Sorel, and Carl Schmitt, among others) identified as a *dispersal of power* from the state to society (pragmatists like Laski, Mead, and Kallen called it pluralism). On these empirical grounds, Gramsci suggested that the overthrow of the state by a vanguard party – a "war of maneuver" waged according to the Leninist blueprint – was, practically speaking, beside the point, and that a long-term ideological struggle for cultural hegemony – a "war of position," which would effect a "passive revolution" – was the proper vocation of the organic intellectual. (Schmitt of course used the same empirical grounds to propose a redefinition and reassertion of the state's sovereignty.)

Apart from any vocational agenda for intellectuals, Gramsci's argument implied at the very least that revolution would hereafter be the cultural cause rather than the political effect of state power: the "war of position" he advocated was a theoretical forecast of the Popular Front, and what we have more recently come to know as cultural politics. Revolution in the name of socialism (or anything else) would have no headquarters, no mastermind, no center; it would be conducted not on many fronts, as with guerilla warfare, but from nowhere, because its advocates and participants – never the same thing – could honestly refuse the role and the designation of political opposition, dissidence, or exile. So conceived, the possession of state power, the holy grail of Leninists then and now, is neither here nor there; it's an afterthought. Vaclav Havel was the epitome of this Gramscian attitude toward revolution until Occupy Wall Street did him one better in 2011.

In Gramsci's terms, revolution in the name of socialism was not something to be measured by Jacobin or Bolshevik standards, as a function of state-centered politics animated by mass movements and organized by disciplined parties. The transition from capitalism to socialism would be as prolonged, boring, and mundane as the transition from feudalism to capitalism. But its secret history would begin in the twentieth century.

Marx said pretty much the same thing in *Capital: Volume III*. Here he suggested, without rhetorical flourish, that the late-nineteenth-century combination of modern corporations and modern credit, both predicated on a separation of ownership and control of assets, had created remarkable new realities. It signified "the abolition of capital as private property within the boundaries of capitalist production itself." It also entailed the "transformation of the actually functioning capitalist into a mere manager, an administrator of other people's capital." In short, the combination of modern corporations and modern credit had inaugurated the transition to a new "socialised mode of production," in other words, socialism. This volatile combination would

inevitably create a "new aristocracy of finance" – promoters, speculators, and merely nominal directors – and "a whole system of swindling and cheating by means of corporation juggling, stock jobbing, and stock speculation."

From this standpoint, the evidence of transition from capitalism to socialism might be found in yet another strange, unlikely, and regressive place: the socialization of private property effected by modern corporations and modern credit – the process we now call the "financialization of assets" – and its results, the economic crises caused by a new aristocracy of finance dedicated to stock jobbing and speculation.

VII

Marx suggested, however, that the separation of ownership and control required by corporate enterprise is a revolution in itself, because when the mere manager performs all real functions, "the capitalist disappears from the process of production as a superfluous person."

Let me stretch this insight to fit the economic history of the twentieth century, as a way of claiming that social relations of production have changed so fundamentally in the last hundred years that we can plausibly equate the coming of a postindustrial society with the emergence of a postcapitalist society – in other words, that we're living through an evident yet unrecognized transition from capitalism to socialism which, if we're lucky, will never be complete.

The corporations didn't just put functionaries in charge, thus setting them loose, as nominal capitalists, to speculate at will. The economies of scale and the technological innovations enabled by corporations in the early twentieth century extricated capital and labor from the "process of production," making both factors superfluous.

On the one hand, net private investment from profits became less and less important as a determinant of growth – after 1919, simple replacement and maintenance of existing assets improved output and productivity. To the same extent, capitalists and their criteria of investment became less and less important: growth happened in their absence, and so the customary rewards, prerogatives, and incentives accruing to capital began to look like archaic rents paid to absentee landlords, like income without work, just another inherited entitlement. The profit motive began to look like a "somewhat disgusting morbidity," as Keynes put it in 1930.

On the other hand, those same corporate economies and innovations expelled labor from goods production, to the point where the industrial working class stopped growing except when and where war ("defense spending") sustained demand for labor. Since the 1920s, all growth in the labor force has been driven either by state, local, and federal public spending or consumer spending for services, not goods, apart from the component of the National Income and Product Accounts labeled "residential investment" (that is, home-building).

The upshot of these changes, which I would summarize as the decomposition of capitalism, is a situation in which the extraction of surplus value from labor by capital has lost its *investment* function, and the production of value by labor has lost its *income* function. In short, capitalism has stopped making moral sense because it has stopped making economic sense. It's not a technical issue. Capitalists and their political functionaries continue to extract surplus value from labor however they can – these days by fierce assertion of their prerogatives, as if they're Charles I defending the divine right of kings against a dubious Parliament, as if the rights of property as such are at stake – but the profits that result have no purpose, no outlet, no investment function. Growth will happen with or without them, whether they're invested in goods production or not, and so they pile up, waiting for another bubble to inflate.

Meanwhile, proletarians of all kinds continue to go to work because they know that if they don't their incomes will disappear. But as they buy the right not to die on a daily basis, they also know that the hours they spend on the job are a waste of their time and talents: unlike the "aristocracy of finance," they know that their incomes have no relation to the value they create while at work, because they know that their increased productivity has gone, literally, to waste. They know that what the functionaries of capital call "entitlements" and "transfer payments" are justifiable supplements to or substitutes for income that can't be earned by working for it, either because there aren't enough good jobs or because there aren't enough labor unions. These supplements or substitutes have been the fastest-growing components of labor income since 1959; according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the *New York Times*, they now account for one of every five dollars of all household income.

The bourgeois criterion of productivity – from each according to his abilities, to each according to the value he creates through productive labor – has in this limited sense given way to the ancient Christian and the modern socialist criterion of need – from each according to her abilities, to each according to her needs.

VIII

Social relations more generally have changed for the better, as the meaning of both liberty and equality has been broadened and deepened in accordance with the agendas of the civil rights movement, the women's movement, and the gay rights movement. These changes, too, are evidence of an ongoing transition from capitalism to

socialism, for they transpose consent from the minor key of politics to the major key of society, from the voting booth to the workplaces and the common carriers and the schools. Thus they are moving us, hesitantly to be sure, from a strictly political to a broadly social democracy.

Note, accordingly, that the conservatives who invoke the specter of socialism when they draw the line on the "social issues" are closer to the truth of the matter than the liberals and leftists who dismiss identity politics as evasion of the "real" economic issues. Note also that the epochal changes in social relations which conservatives rightly fear also reflect the dispersal of power – the "self-organization" of society – that has enlarged the rights of persons vis-à-vis the rights of property since the 1930s (although the Roberts Court seems determined to reverse this trend).

But I will leave this matter aside for now, and conclude instead by asking whether we are living through a *new market revolution* wrought by the internet, which, by changing the way we appropriate basic goods, is changing social relations of production. Marx famously wrote about "the so-called primitive accumulation" in *Capital: Volume 1*, where he explained it as the conversion of natural resources, including land itself, into commodities that could be bought and sold in markets, which in turn allowed for the expulsion of peasants from enclosed commons and the creation of a propertyless proletariat. The social relation of capital and labor was born (not realized) in this moment.

As I've suggested, this social relation is already attenuated by the extrication of both capital and labor from the fabled "process of production." What happens to it when the internet permits what I have elsewhere called "primitive disaccumulation," the conversion of basic commodities like information and music into goods that we can appropriate or distribute without the mediation of money and markets? What do we call the results? The decommodification of communication, the demise of "reification," the socialization of the culture industry? Has the "self-organization" of society now reached a point where the reproduction of capitalism requires ever greater doses of socialism, liberalism, and democracy? Is the transition from capitalism to socialism legible here, too, in the new battles over copyright and intellectual property in cyberspace?

IX

Quite possibly, I would say, because I think Brus was right to claim that an increase in the scope and importance of commodity relations can facilitate the development of socialism, and vice versa. I'm certain that the questions need asking, because they can help us take the long view on the transition from capitalism to socialism.

I do not mean that the transition is complete, or that it could be, or that we would want it to be. In my view, the continuing collaboration and interpenetration of the two modes of production – "the mix," as Martin Sklar has called it – is better for all parties to the social bargain. I mean only that the transition has been underway for at least a century, and that even in the absence of a socialist movement or a labor party – perhaps *because* of the absence of either – there is still socialism in the United States.

But why is that simple historical fact important, or even interesting? Who cares whether or where socialism actually exists anymore? Or rather, what is the point of caring? A famous political philosopher put the question to me this way: "Why is socialism the name of our desire?"

In the American intellectual context, the answers are always framed by Sombart's question: the name of our desire is the unobtainable. To say you're a socialist is to place yourself at the margin, beyond the pale, on the run, off the reservation, or at sea: you're a mariner, a renegade, a castaway, you march to a different drummer, you're above all a dissenter from the political mainstream. You know that in these United States, socialism is a foreign import, branded as such by politicians and social scientists alike, and you want – no, you really need – to come from that world elsewhere. Europe will do but France would be better. The danger on the rocks has surely passed; still you remain tied to the mast.

You want – no, you really need – to believe that socialism can't ever happen here, because that would mean heaven and earth had somehow intersected, that the revolution of the saints had been televised but you missed it. You have to believe that your political purpose is something like a sacred vow that exempts you from the corruptions of this world. Your dissent keeps you clean. But that cleanliness, next to godliness, makes you a holy fool who must abstain from the real world.

"Do you seek far off? Surely you come back at last." That's Walt Whitman singing the antimetaphysical lullaby that made him a nineteenth-century scandal. In the spirit of that poem, I hereby invite you back to these United States, where socialism is a historical reality that saturates our time and place, regardless of ideological commitments, party labels, and political discourse. It's not the name of an unobtainable desire – it's all around us.

So conceived, socialism no longer functions as an ethical principle with no bearing on the historical circumstances of our time, which is about as useful as a crucifix when the real vampires approach. Instead of a pious wish that things should be better – an "ought" with no purchase on the "is" – it begins to feel like the fuller expression of an actually existing social reality, something we can live with, build on, and build out. It begins to look like a usable past. ■

THE AGE OF ILLUSION

Interview by Jake Blumgart

AN INTERVIEW WITH CHRISTOPHER HAYES.

Crisis is the catchword of our time. After the dawning of the new millennium, America stumbled from debacle to debacle. The election of Barack Obama gave hope to many, but the realities of a deeply dysfunctional political economy do not readily yield to a good speech or two. As I write, the slow-motion collapse of public education, aided by the policies of a Democratic administration, continues apace. The financial system seems as unwieldy, reckless, opaque, and insanely powerful as ever. I could go on, but my crippling depression prevents me from listing anymore cripplingly depressing examples.

Chris Hayes has a theory about why everything is going straight to hell. The culprits aren't the typical cast of Republicans, fundamentalists, and rednecks. It's the meritocracy that did it.

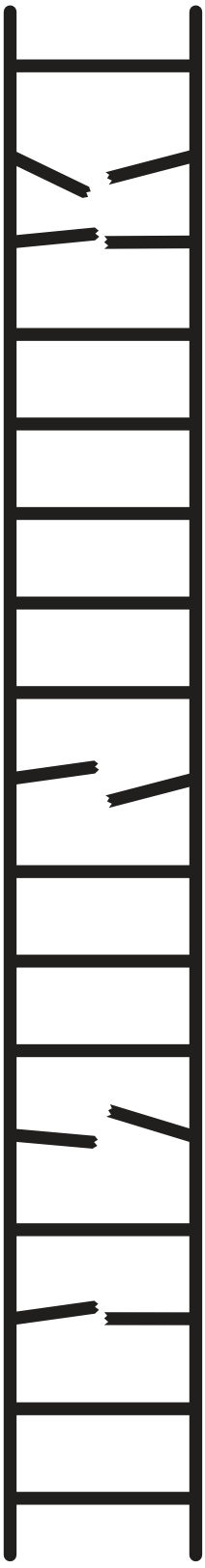
Hayes is an editor-at-large with the *Nation* and host of the only cable news program worth watching. In his new book, *Twilight of the Elites*, he explains that the "fail decade" is the result of an insular and corrupt meritocratic elite, which cannot help but be dysfunctional. Hayes argues that it is the meritocratic ideals of our elites, ossified into perverse caricatures, which engender their repeated blunders. A wide but shallow notion of equality allows for greater acceptance of, say, gay marriage, but leaves social mobility a pipe dream, the working and middle classes sidelined, and the safety net perpetually set upon.

The book is strongly influenced by the work of Christopher Lasch, whose 1994 book *Revolt of the Elites* presages many of Hayes's arguments, and Robert Michels, an early-twentieth-century socialist intellectual whose most famous book, *Political Parties*, argued that all organizations, even those of the Left, inevitably slide into oligarchy. I read all three books in an inspired blaze of near-comprehension and then waded through a tide of schoolchildren to meet Hayes at a diner near his home in Park Slope, where the elite go to breed. The following is a lightly edited version of our discussion over coffee, omelets, and free-range hash browns.

Jake Blumgart You argue that meritocracy inevitably metastasizes into oligarchy, creating "elites who cannot help but be dysfunctional and corrupt." Some I've explained the idea to seem skeptical — what's wrong with letting the smartest and most driven run society?

Chris Hayes I think people are resistant to the idea because the meritocracy is our social ideal, particularly among good liberals. Equality of opportunity, but not of outcome. Not evaluating people by their [outside] features, but by their innate talent and drive. And I do not say this mockingly. It's an incredibly appealing vision. But meritocracy contains the seeds of its own destruction. It concedes inequality. As an ethos it doesn't trouble itself with what the results are going to be. One of the key arguments of the book is that those results have real effects. And they then queer the system to produce more inequality and restrict equality of opportunity.

Meritocracy leading to oligarchy:



THESE ARE THE CONCRETE EFFECTS OF HAVING AN UNEQUAL ENOUGH SOCIETY THAT THESE GUYS DON'T GET FEEDBACK.

my high school is a concrete parable for that. Here's a place, the Hunter College High School [a prestigious public high school in Manhattan], an amazing place that in some ways sticks to a beautifully austere vision of meritocracy. They have this single test and it literally doesn't matter if you are Mayor Bloomberg's daughter; if you don't take and pass it you are not getting in. I've talked to the president of Hunter and she told me, "You would not believe the phone calls I get, and who I get them from – 'is there some way to make an arrangement?'" And there's something incredible about that, particularly in an era in which there are very few institutions that can confidently say Mayor Bloomberg's daughter wouldn't [necessarily] get in.

But what's happened to this, at some level brutally, equal system? That equality is embedded in a social system full of massive inequality, and the latter leaks into the former and colonizes it. We've had … the growth of this tremendous testing and test-prep industry in New York, along with the massive rise in inequality, and it has produced a system in which the school is now admitting only three, four, five black and Latino students. The students they are admitting are almost entirely white, affluent kids with tutors or second-generation, first-generation immigrants from Queens and other places where the parents pay for test prep. You end up with a system where who you are really letting in are the kids with access to test prep, the kids with access to resources. Hunter can be an amazing engine of mobility, but over time it can't help but break down if it isn't embedded in a society that has egalitarian commitment. That's the theoretical soul of the book.

Meritocracy has amazing things about it and terrible things about it. Part of the purpose of the long section on Major League Baseball is to show that one of the outgrowths of a system of incredibly intense emphasis on performance, with finely granulated judgments of who's better than whom, is that you produce real intense incentives for fraud, for cheating. And that's not to say it's impossible, but in the same way that everyone recognizes that in a bureaucracy or a system driven by seniority, that there are side effects to that, you need to keep people motivated and you have to make sure you don't end up with blockages and obstacles to getting things done. If we are going to keep embarking on this meritocratic project, we should be clear-eyed about what the negative effects are.

The Atlanta education testing scandals really exemplify that for me.

That's a perfect example. There is a certain social vision that bureaucracy is bad and meritocracy is good and we are going to replace the [former with the latter]. That's clearly what a lot of the education reform fight is about. One of the points of the book is, wait a second; it's a lot more complicated than *bureaucracy bad, meritocracy good.* You can create tremendously destructive meritocracies. One of the interesting things about doing reporting for the book was talking to people from Enron. People loved that company. Numerous people said to me, "It was the least bureaucratic place I ever worked; you couldn't keep deadwood around." The favored son of some manager wouldn't cut it, because everything was structured in a very fluid way. People really loved that. There are benefits.

I liked your description of meritocracy as "a new hierarchy based on the notion that people are deeply unequal in ability and drive." When put like that it does seem a deeply conservative idea, ignoring social realities of poverty, structural racism, lack of social mobility, ideas central to the vision of education reformers like Michelle Rhee.

This idea of "equality of opportunity, not of outcomes" is very bipartisan, almost meaningless pabulum. But it means something, it has a politics. One of the inevitable results is that you are going to ask the educational system to expiate the sins of the entirety of the rest of society. It's the only place where we can make interventions. And that's what you are seeing in our politics; that's the place where energy is being made.

Education policy is the one place where there seems to be bipartisan overlap.

It's not an accident that all the hedge fund guys are funding school reform. I think they really believe, really are idealistic in that sense. They hate unions too. But they see a manifestly unequal society and within the terms of the ideology they have, the way to deal with that is to make education better. My point is that their whole framework is screwed up.

They have this view from 20,000 feet of what education policy should be, but they are too far removed to get any feedback from the community when it doesn't work.

Exactly. These are the concrete effects of having an unequal enough society that these guys … don't get feedback.

Despite its seeming novelty, this isn't a new idea. Back in 1994, Christopher Lasch (whom you cite) wrote: "the chief threat seems to come from those at the top of the social hierarchy, [the "new aristocracy of brains"], not the masses.… Meritocracy is a parody of democracy." How influenced were you by Lasch's work, where do you diverge from his analysis, and how have things changed since his writing?

I'm heavily influenced by his work. And the trends have only gotten much, much, much worse. In fact, I think that's a very prophetic book. He deals with the way it sort of destroys the moral fabric of society, and is unjust. But my book – I don't think it's a very moralistic book. Lasch is making a very moralistic argument; he's a polemicist, a Jeremiah figure, a prophet railing against the fallen society in which he lives. I'm trying to make, in some ways, a practical argument. About the practical effects, the negative consequences. No one wants an Enron; no one wants a financial crisis.

I want to circle back to something you said about reporting for the book. In contrast to Lasch and Michels, you come from a journalistic background. You've engaged with actual people while writing this book. How did that affect your perspective and work?

It's a methodological toolkit I've been trained in. It's a huge part of how I learn about the world. There's a certain form of content synergy insofar as if the problem is social distance.… Look, I'm a member of the elite I'm writing about. That's a weird and uncomfortable thing for me to say, but there is no definition of the elite, no plausible, coherent one, that I don't belong to. I'm just as subject to the same forces, so it's really important for me to actually talk to people. And I think reporting makes it more compelling storytelling. The book's form is weird in a way; it's both a reported work and a work of theory.

Michels had a strong influence on your work, but the conclusion he reaches – "Democracy leads to oligarchy, and necessarily contains an oligarchical nucleus," implies intrinsic limits to the radicalism of any project. Is a better elite the best we can hope for?

I was having an exchange with someone who was really active in Occupy Wall Street and I asked him about this horizontalism and, yeah, I'm with Michels on the limits of horizontalism. At a certain point you run up against these basic mundane, logistical problems. Again, I don't want to overgeneralize, there are some cooperatives that are really functional and some that are complete nightmares. But Michels' core insight, it seems to me, is undeniable. The question is what you do with it. Michels took it and became a fascist.

He pitches it as an objective truth he's found.

That's another place where his influence shows in my book. He actually isn't making a moral argument; he's making an almost entirely practical one about organization. I'm trying to do an analogous work on meritocracy.

But the question was about better elites.… There is no final fix, no static condition. The nature of having egalitarian commitments is recognizing that the work is never done.… The inevitability of that; it's a little like the Camus essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*. The inevitability of that doesn't mean it's invalid, it means the struggle continues. You keep fighting for equality because equality isn't the natural state of human beings; I think that's in some ways the really profound insight. Inequality is baked into the cake. Inequality and hierarchy are natural, but that doesn't mean they are right, that doesn't mean there isn't a productive tension between those forces and the forces of equality. You need the horizontalism always present as a challenge, different egalitarian movements or forces pushing and forcing events, if you are going to create this vibrant tension, rather than some end-of-history equilibrium.

Michels felt he had proved the impossibility of socialism and democracy. He sought a magical cure of sorts and ended his life a fascist. Do you fear such an analysis stemming from the "near-total failure of each pillar institution of our society"?

Yes, I'm very worried about that. I think the data are interesting; you see the two institutions that have gained in public trust are the military and the police. The most trusted institution in the country is the military; the least trusted is Congress. Authoritarianism becomes very seductive during times of discredited elites, but it's important to keep all this in relative terms. We are not in a crisis like Greece is in a crisis. In Greece the [neo-Nazi] Golden Dawn party got 7 percent in the May elections [allowing the possibility of parliamentary seats], and who knows what they are going to get in June? Probably higher.

Or consider the Hungarian example.

Hungary's even worse. But I don't want to be too alarmist. We are not Hungary, we are not Greece.… But because we are so powerful our failures resonate more. In some ways, the worst victims of our institutional and elite failures, through the ripple effect of financial crisis and war, aren't Americans.

With the massive power differentials you describe, how can we hope to enact real reform? In the case of, say, abolition or civil rights, there were other powerful groups for the oppressed to ally with. Or a strong labor movement, or mass-based political party that wasn't dependent on the wealthy. That seems harder to imagine here. I don't really see a power base that can push back.

The argument I make in the book, and it's a tentative argument, is that there is a potential for a radicalized upper-middle class. We already see that; it's just a question of how that gets channeled. Everything about the Netroots, the antiwar, anti-Bush sentiment [the Tea Party is also cited in the book]. One of the interesting things about the way our certain kind of fractal inequality has manifested, the people who see it the most, have the closest proximity to it, say, are the top 2 to the top 20 percent: "I went to law school with Joe and I have some job at a firm and I'm doing alright, but he went into a hedge fund and is making $10 million."

That is a lot of power, resources, cultural capital, network, class, monetary power. The working class has already been ground into dust in terms of political power, as I cite in the book the Martin Gilens and Larry Bartels studies showing [the preferences of voters in the top one-third of income distribution are represented in the votes of senators to the exclusion of everyone else]. It's not uncommon for revolutions to stem from a radicalized group just outside the circle of power. That's what the French Revolution was all about; that's what the American Revolution was. The question is: Are all those groups, because of the nature of partisan polarization and ideological polarization, just going to fight each other? Or is there capacity to organize?

I don't want to be overly optimistic because I don't think polarization is some kind of grand distraction. It's real. People have different commitments, believe in different things and principles, different visions of the good life … but there is also a degree to which all the really big, successful reform movements in the country had extremely bizarre ideological coalitions. Abolition did, Prohibition did. So I wonder if that's the way out for us.

You cite Latin America's leftward turn as an example of nations taking inequality seriously and political parties utilizing progressive policies to reduce it. What lessons can progressives learn from Latin America? What of their experience is replicable?

The important lesson is that it's doable. It wasn't rocket science. The Lula government [in Brazil] started giving a lot of money to poor people. This isn't something beyond our control; there are things we can do.

I DON'T THINK POLARIZATION IS SOME KIND OF GRAND DISTRACTION. IT'S REAL. PEOPLE HAVE DIFFERENT COMMITMENTS, BELIEVE IN DIFFERENT THINGS AND PRINCIPLES, DIFFERENT VISIONS OF THE GOOD LIFE.

Some have been more successful than others in that part of the world. The other important lesson is that it doesn't have to come at the expense of growth. Which is always the tradeoff [that is posited]. Brazil is a complicated case because there has been a huge boom in energy exports due to sugar-based ethanol. And obviously it's easier to grow faster when you are a less-developed country than when you are where the US is.

The basic story of Latin America: ten to twenty years of IMF-imposed austerity and structural adjustment that created terrible crisis, terrible poverty, and terrible inequality, which provoked a backlash across the continent. Left and center-left leaders were voted in who had mandates and political coalitions in which inequality was explicitly part of their agenda, and then implemented policies that were egalitarian. Again, there are tremendous differences between Brazil and Bolivia and definitely Venezuela, which is a special case because of Chávez and the resource-curse of Venezuelan politics. But that three-act drama is the basic story – financial crisis and huge inequality; backlash against that; government elected to shrink inequality.

In *Twilight of the Elites*, you advocate "disrupting the normalcy and comfort of the elite." What actions and organizations are you most excited by?

I see a lot of hope in the Occupy mobilizations.… I think that's really incredibly important because one of the strange things about the bizarre post-crisis interregnum we're in is that the elites, once they produced the crisis, did a good job of essentially keeping the ship afloat. Bernanke, Paulson, Geithner, the president. It really could have been much worse. Look at Europe. We could have 20 percent unemployment. They could have screwed it up enough to do that. And if they did there probably would be more mass movements in the streets.

[The] potential for crisis is clear to everyone, but the actual depth and acuteness of the current crisis [is felt by] people who are poor or unemployed. It's horrible and miserable and acute. But 8 percent unemployment is not 20 percent unemployment. There is this weird, frustrated sense of unhappiness with the status quo, and yet, a sort of return to normalcy. I want us to make the changes we need to make, and redistribute power in the way we need to, but I don't wish for crisis. Crisis is horrible and hurts people at the bottom the most. So what you really need to do is create disruption, because there is either going to be exogenous disruption, which will mean another shock, another crisis, or you create the disruption through movements, through street protests, through all sorts of creative ways to say, no, this is not tenable.

I really worry, because if the analysis is right, the current constitution of the American elite and American power will inevitably lead toward another crisis. So this is our chance to, in a sense, save the elites from themselves. And we see it in the news from J. P. Morgan Chase in the last few weeks. The smartest guys in the world, back at the casino table. ■

DESIGNING CULTURE

by Colin McSwiggen

DESIGN PLAYS A CENTRAL ROLE IN CULTURAL REPRODUCTION. THIS ISN'T NECESSARILY A GOOD THING, FOR ANYONE.

Want to hear a really pretentious definition of design? Probably not, but I have to listen to this stuff almost constantly and misery loves company, so here it is: "Giving form to culture."

I hear people actually say those words from time to time, and it never puts me in a particularly good mood. My main beef with that definition is that after a year in a postgraduate design program and too many hours spent between stacks of anthropology textbooks, I still can't figure out what "form" and "culture" even mean.

My other beef is that the above definition is delusional. It seems to be gesturing toward the all-too-common notion that designers have some kind of sociocultural superpower: by shaping the physical objects that mediate and regulate people's behaviors and interactions, they are shaping society itself! It's a classic credit-hogging move on the part of the design world's plentiful narcissists, who would like you to believe that material culture emerges fully formed from the depths of their magical sketchbooks.

The reality is that most designers work under some pretty heavy constraints: There's a client or employer who gives them a mandate and makes the final call on what will actually be manufactured, printed or constructed. There are precedents set by existing designs that simultaneously inspire and circumscribe the designer's work and limit the range of possibilities that clients and users will find acceptable. Finally, designed objects, spaces and images are frequently reinterpreted and repurposed by people who have no idea what the designer had in mind. In short, design is subject to the same limitations as any other so-called creative practice, and designers are no more authors than, well, authors are.

But despite the limited influence that designers themselves are able to exert over culture at large, design as a practice plays a central role in cultural reproduction.

Industrial design in particular has been especially important in the creation and maintenance of class divisions. Here's a second, much different definition of industrial design specifically: it's the profession of creating instructions for factory workers. Design is one of the linchpins of capitalism, because it makes alienated labor possible.

Starting in the mid eighteenth century, some factory owners realized that they could increase the efficiency of their operations by allowing customers to order their wares from catalogs and samples rather than selling them directly off the shelf in stores. But first they had to solve an unprecedented problem: customers buying from a catalog would expect their goods to look just like the picture, or else they'd return the goods and probably start buying from a competitor. This meant that factory output would have to be made almost perfectly uniform, which had never been done before.

Originally, factory craftsmen had a fair amount of creative license over what they produced, which meant that individual products in the same style could vary quite a bit. Now that freedom had to be taken away. Complex, varied jobs originally performed by a single craftsman were chunked into simpler, more easily standardized units. Each of these subtasks was then assigned to a different artisan, with the goal of eliminating any creative decision making on the part of the people actually making the wares.

The most famous documented example of this process occurred in the factory of the pottery tycoon Josiah Wedgwood, described in Adrian Forty's design history classic *Objects of Desire*. Forty quotes Wedgwood boasting that he would "make such Machines of the Men as cannot Err." But having stripped his men's work down to the most inane,

repetitive tasks possible, Wedgwood needed to pay someone else to do the creative work of preparing the original models that the rest of the artisans would then bore themselves stiff trying to replicate.

Who would be good for such a job? The ideal candidate would be good with their hands and broke enough to need employment, but still conversant in the tastes of the upper classes, whose purchases supplied most of the factory's revenue. What Wedgwood needed, obviously, was an artist. So he hired one, and the field of industrial design was born.

As manufacturing shifted away from handicrafts and became increasingly mechanized, design as a distinct form of labor, and designs themselves as a form of intellectual property, became more and more important to sustaining relations of production.

The historical lesson here is that the idea that designing something should be done independently from making it – in other words, the idea that design should even exist as a profession in its own right – has been foundational both to the formation of the modern working class and to capitalist production period. This is not to hate on designers, who don't get much say in the matter either.

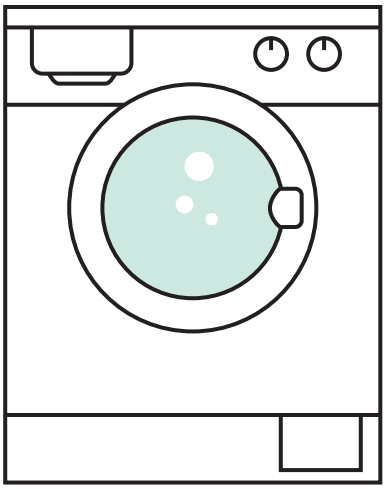
All of that, though, is only what goes on in the factory and the studio. Designed objects don't exert their full influence over cultural reproduction until they get out into the world of our homes, offices, and schools.

Most criticism of industrial design's impact on everyday life amounts to a lamentation of consumerism. I think that sort of misses the point, but let's run with it for a moment. Design is often decried as a tool for creating false needs through unnecessary product differentiation, promoting a pandemic obsession with individuality and newness. As the popular argument goes, design enforces and reproduces existing social hierarchies by making the lower class waste their money on goods they otherwise wouldn't want. This traps them in poverty by preventing them from accumulating capital, and also creates a feeling of inferiority to the higher classes, who are able to afford the material signifiers of status that poorer people are tricked into craving.

My attitude toward that line of reasoning could be characterized as seasick agreement. There's a lot of truth in there somewhere, but such a facile explanation leaves me feeling queasy. Yes, everyone buys too much shit and poor people get exploited in the process, but forty-two years after Baudrillard's *Consumer Society* we know it's not that simple. The ideas of *waste* and *need* are monumentally more complicated than a lot of leftists are willing to admit. Who can I trust to tell me which of my needs are real? How can I know whether I'm wasting money or investing in symbolic capital?

In any case, when it comes to design's influence on social structures, the focus on consumerism distracts from something more significant and interesting. Design's real power is that it makes relationships and divisions between people *concrete*. Without physical stuff to remind us of how we supposedly differ from one another, our hierarchies would be awfully ramshackle; stripped of our possessions, categories like "class" start to look like just a bunch of learned behaviors and confused ideas. Whether prohibitively priced cars, gendered garments, or separate schools for blacks and whites, social hierarchies are always maintained with the help of physical objects and spaces designed to reflect those hierarchies. Otherwise everyone's claims of superiority and difference would be quite literally immaterial.

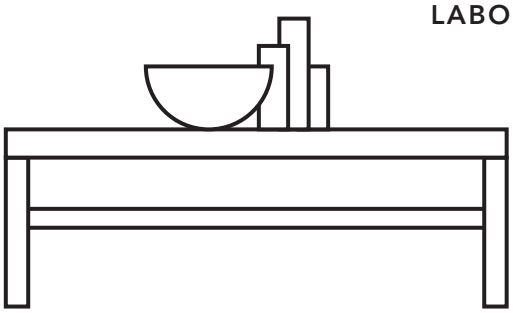
This is why women's rights groups were so pissed off when LEGO released its dumbed-down "LadyFigs" line targeted at young girls. By simplifying a common toy for girls to use, LEGO was not only insulting girls by implying that



they are technically inept, uninterested in challenges and generally stupider than boys; more importantly, the company was also proliferating objects that obviously embodied some blatantly discriminatory ideas about differences between the sexes. The point would not be lost on a five-year-old, who would realize immediately that compared to her brother's LEGOs, hers look like they were made for an idiot.

This is a big deal because one of the main ways that people are socialized is through using, observing and contemplating material objects. The idea that people learn their places in society by engaging with the physical stuff around them has a long history in anthropology, but it was finally cemented into the theoretical mainstream in 1972 when Pierre Bourdieu published his *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Bourdieu makes the case that we come to internalize the expectations of our particular social group by analogy with categories, orders and relations of *things*. Spatial arrangements of objects in the home, for example, or the use of different farming tools at different times of year, come to stand for intangible relationships between genders, social strata and

DESIGN IS ONE OF THE LINCHPINS OF CAPITALISM, BECAUSE IT MAKES ALIENATED LABOR POSSIBLE.



the like, thereby anchoring abstract ideas about social organization to the physical world.

Regardless of whether you buy what Bourdieu has to say about it, it's interesting to note that people often really do act like objects and spaces are actual concrete instantiations of their relationships with other groups of people. A particularly good example of this sort of behavior comes again from Forty, who details the measures taken by Victorian elites to maintain a sense of superiority to their servants.

In nineteenth-century England, domestic servitude was one of the few lines of work in which employees still lived with their employers, a practice that had been common on farms and in workshops a century earlier. Servants, whose social peers in other professions had more of a life outside of work, were growing frustrated with what they saw as an anachronistic form of labor that offered little in the way of personal independence. Upper-class households read their servants' disgruntlement as a crisis of disobedience, and they reacted by systematically degrading servants' living standards, just to make sure everyone knew who was who.

In addition to creating a bunch of new rules for servants' conduct (stuff like, don't hand the master anything unless it's on a silver tray), wealthy families began to build homes with separate living quarters and work areas for servants, which were decidedly shabbier than the rest of the house. Homewares companies started designing extra-low-quality furniture and crockery and marketing them to the rich as items for their servants to use, the idea being that anyone who ate and slept on stuff *that* bad couldn't help but know their place.

Of course the servants knew what was going on. Forty cites the autobiography of one housemaid who complains about her "lumpy mattress, specifically manufactured for the use of maids, I suspect." But it wasn't particularly important whether the servants were savvy to the situation or not, because their employers had fulfilled their real goal: they'd successfully created material environments that reassured them that they were better than the people who worked for them, which enabled them to keep acting like they actually were better.

Once you realize that all designed objects carry this sort of encrypted information about the organization of society, something amazing happens: you suddenly stop feeling bored in home furnishings stores. Washing machines and cooking implements have a lot to say about norms surrounding domestic labor; office trash cans embody the values of a middle class that can't deal with its own waste; alarm systems and porch lights offer a crash course in the popular phenomenology of crime. But these objects are not just passive representations of ideas about how society should run. They actively promote those ideas, validating certain prejudices and chastising us when our behavior deviates from certain norms.

Maybe the problem with designers who boast that they are "giving form to culture" is that they don't realize how big a responsibility they're claiming. The chicken-and-egg relationship between systems of stuff and systems of people is very real, and with the world as it is, anyone who could legitimately claim control over either would have to be a pretty unthinkable asshole. Rather than glorifying themselves as cultural architects, perhaps designers should be relieved that they are such a *small* part of the apparatus that actually gives rise to the stuff all around us.

That's not to say that designers are powerless. Far from it. They occupy a nodal position in the capitalist mode of production, and they'll be important for getting out of it. Stuff – objects, spaces, images, technologies – play just as critical a role in restructuring relations between people as they do in maintaining them, and a solar cooker or a free software application requires way more design work than a Philippe Starck lemon squeezer. But any kind of progressive work is difficult if we're deluded about what we actually do. As designers, we'd do well to abandon preoccupations with our own ability to generate solutions, and start being more aware of the ways that we participate in the problems. ■

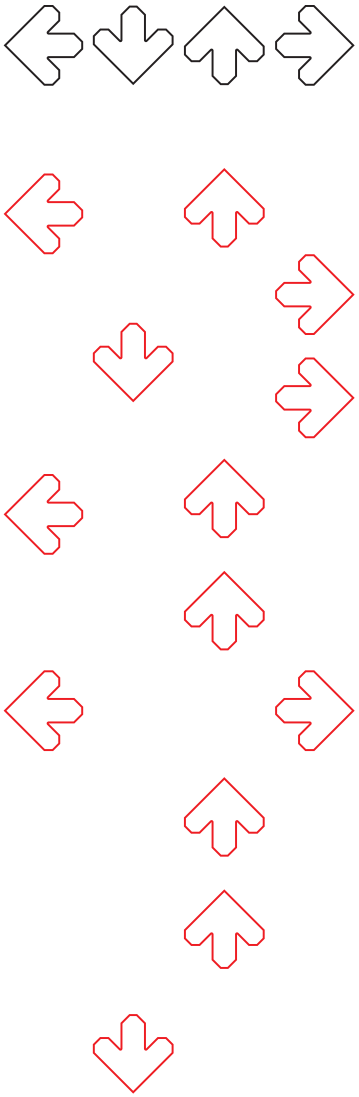
DANCE DANCE REVOLUTION

by Audrea Lim

COMMUNAL CELEBRATION HAS DEEP ROOTS IN HUMAN CULTURE. WHY SHOULDN'T THE LEFT EMBRACE IT?

Plant a stake crowned with flowers in the middle of a square, gather the people together there, and you'll have a festival. Do better: let the spectators become an entertainment to themselves; make them actors.... This way each one sees and loves himself in the others; and all will be better united.

—Jean-Jacques Rousseau



Some great things look suspect from the outside; many mediocre things look great at first glance. When images of chanting crowds are invoked, it's easy to think of the Nazi spectacle – unthinking, ecstatic people manipulated by crude, irrational forces. But that probably says more about the poverty of our experience with large crowds than about the nature of crowds themselves.

The masses in Tahrir Square during the Arab Spring were hardly fanatical. And for the first time in years, the mainstream media didn't represent a mass uprising as such. They were not so nice to the Occupy movement. Activists at Liberty Square often looked like fringe nutjobs on TV, ecstatic with joy and rage. This shouldn't have been surprising. The media seek out the crazy, weird, and sensational, while the liberal establishment looks down on anything resembling religious conviction. But while TV treats sports fanatics and protesters as species of the same family, the uprisings of 2011, anchored in public squares, included moments of collective joy of two different types, including one quite different from sports-induced euphoria.

I have experienced the type of joy that is similar – though not identical – to sports-mania mostly in protests,

including the #N17 march that began with tens of thousands gathered in Foley Square, then proceeded across the Brooklyn Bridge. Along the way, people sang, danced, and randomly hugged like it was a New Year's party.

I saw this on rare occasions at protests, as well as in the streets of Toronto after Canada won the Olympic gold in men's hockey in 2002. Immediately following the medal ceremony that night, a raucous party broke out along Yonge Street, stretching through nearly all of downtown. Cars inched along, unable to break through a dense slurry of bodies and Canadian flags. At one point, a man climbed on the roof of an empty van and posed for a photo with a cop, who stood beneath with arms folded in a play of authority, and afterward they hugged. The experience felt singular, incommunicable – I tried to explain it to my brother over the phone, with what I think were mixed results – the thrill of being united in joy with so many others, most of whom I would never know.

The other type of collective joy that was manifest in Occupy was present in Liberty Square almost all the time, and could be described as the joy of being united in a project unlike anything many people in the United States have ever experienced. I did not camp in the Square, but I still felt this joy on a number of occasions. The feeling of being part of something greater than yourself that still represents you – the feeling itself is not so different from the protests-and-sports-mania type of collective joy. But the fact that it derives from participation in a radical political project – not a momentary burst of excitement – makes it very different.

Providing a venue for this type of collective joy is one thing that separates recent movements broadly anchored by the occupation of public squares – not just Occupy, but also Tahrir Square, Syntagma Square, Puerta del Sol – from the protest movements of the past many years. It gives these movements a strategic advantage that radical movements of the past few decades have lacked. Where the consumer capitalist society offers little more than hedonism – momentary pleasure, instant gratification – movements anchored in public squares offer participants something richer. They connect the swelling feeling of ecstasy to participation in a new way of living and ordering our lives.

I can't count the number of political protests I've attended, but I can say that most of them have been unmemorable, consisting of a few hundred people standing around, occasionally yelling things like, "What do we want? [Insert what we want]. When do we want it? Now!" and wondering if something is going to "happen," whatever that means. Usually, nothing does, and after a while, groups of people begin to leave in search of food or because they have other plans. Life continues, uninterrupted.

Joy has been a contentious issue in radical movements of the past. The original Jacobins – the ones who were instrumental in the overthrow of the Bourbon monarchy and counted Max Robespierre among their ranks – included many members of an emerging educated middle class, who considered public carnivals and festivals to be barbarous wastes of time. That time, they thought, would be better spent laboring, a view that separated them from the workers and peasants who made up the bulk of the Third Estate. In fact, the Jacobins frowned on the use of maypoles, whether for revolutionary purposes or otherwise, and once in power, even banned cross-dressing (a common feature of Carnival).

Maypoles are no longer a divisive issue for the Left. Neither are happiness and collective joy, but they are undervalued. Traditional organizing tactics – leafleting, petitioning, strikes, picketing, and media campaigns – are hardly unimportant, but neither is holding public space merely symbolic. The public square offers many things – a site that the attention-deficit media can focus on, a space where people can circulate and casually get to know one another. But with the desire for joy long rationalized by capitalist society and confined to acceptable venues and times (read: drinking alcohol, in restaurants and bars, after work hours), the offer of a different kind of happiness constitutes a powerful mobilizing force – and a radical one.

Barbara Ehrenreich's *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy* tells of deliberate expressions of collective ecstasy – and their subsequent repression – across the continents and through the ages. Beginning with carefully planned dance rituals in "primitive" and prehistoric societies, Ehrenreich describes how anthropologists of the 1930s began to see them as functional, even rational, for creating social cohesion in small-scale societies. British anthropologist Robin Dunbar discovered that speech was inadequate to hold together Paleolithic groups at the emotional level. "Just as we were acquiring the ability to argue and rationalize, we needed a more primitive emotional mechanism to bond our

large groups," he wrote. "Something deeper and more emotional was needed to overpower the cold logic of verbal arguments."

Western observers of ecstatic rituals in these non-Western "primitive" societies initially viewed them as savage and contemptible, but the history of the West is not without its own examples, from Dionysian ritual in ancient Greece to ecstatic dancing in the European churches of the Middle Ages (involving priests, women, and entire congregations). However, these rituals have always precipitated social tensions as well: where social hierarchy is understood to have arisen in step with militarism and war, group ecstatic rites threatened military preparedness and social hierarchy itself. The rise of capitalism in particular required changes to the values and behaviors of the citizenry. The industrialism that corresponded with the Protestant reform of the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries required the middle classes to save and to defer gratification, while discipline was required of the lower classes in order to ensure a continuous year-round labor force (unlike the seasonal labor force of the peasant society). This discipline was ensured partly by the widespread suppression of traditional festivities and the rollback of holidays.

But the suppression of collective ecstatic rituals required a compromise between obedience and joy; completely miserable people don't make good workers or subjects. Anthropologist Victor Turner, whose study of the "ritual process" is credited with giving ecstatic group behavior a legitimate place in anthropology, saw the main function of collective ecstasy as keeping the structures of society from becoming too rigid and repressive by providing occasional relief. The twelfth- and thirteenth-century Catholic Church, determined to "maintain its monopoly over human access to the divine," purged the church of unruly behavior, including the ecstatic dancing rituals common in early Christianity, but this suppression was also accompanied by the emergence of Carnival. Within the boundaries of the Carnival, the transgression of social categories was sanctioned (participants commonly cross-dressed and mocked authority figures), and dancing, drinking, and feasting could occur unabated – but only within that delimited space and period of time. The spirit and thrill of festival was permitted, but it could only be marginal, never prolonged into routine condition.

In contemporary American capitalism, happiness and joy are largely private or individual experiences, whether they involve the hedonistic pleasure of consumption or fulfillment through personal achievement. Workers and consumers are ideally satisfied enough not to opt out, but not so satisfied that participation in the consumer economy becomes unnecessary, and ecstatic ritual in the US is largely confined to the realm of entertainment, such as sports events and nightlife. "It is a measure of our general deprivation," writes Ehrenreich, "that the most common referent for *ecstasy* in usage today is not an experience but a drug, MDMA, which offers fleeting feelings of euphoria and connectedness."

The consequence? Ehrenreich argues that urbanization and the rise of the competitive, market-based economy "favored a more anxious and isolated sort of person," one with a heightened sense of individuality and personal autonomy – traits that encourage great intellectual and physical daring, but can also lead to isolation, loneliness and disengagement from the world. Today, depression is the fifth leading cause of death and disability in the world, according to the WHO; 10 percent of Americans over the age of six are on antidepressants; and antipsychotics are now the highest-selling class of drugs in the US. Leaving aside the interests of the lucrative and powerful pharmaceutical industry, whose growth has corresponded with a rise in diagnoses of mental illness, Ehrenreich argues that Western psychology, with its focus on bolstering the individual self against the force of irrational emotion, is woefully inadequate in understanding the benefits of experiencing collective joy and ecstasy. In fact, the standard psychiatric guide to mental illness, the *DSM-IV*, pathologizes collective ecstasy as "depersonalization disorder."

Ehrenreich's conclusion? While there may not be any innate human need to experience communal pleasure, the decline in opportunities for collective pleasure has taken away a potentially effective cure for depression – a cure that has been used against physical, psychological, social, and spiritual illnesses in both Western and non-Western societies.

There is an odd duplicity to the place of ecstatic ritual in society, which *Dancing in the Streets* touches on but does not flesh out. Ecstatic ritual doesn't leave the sociopolitical structures that cause anomie untouched – it actually strengthens them by acting as a pressure valve.

But as expressions of the collective spirit – where individuals are united by something greater than themselves – ecstatic rituals can also have a more radical edge. After the Middle Ages, writes Ehrenreich, it became more common for people to launch armed rebellion under cover of the masks and noises of traditional festivities, and many people began to see in these events "the possibility of inverting hierarchy on a permanent basis, and not just for a few festive hours." Has this panned out in the case of the Yippies or the street-party atmosphere of the Seattle WTO protests?

My most notable experience of collective ecstasy was not a radical protest, but Obama's inauguration in 2008. Two million people were reported to have gathered on the National Mall, and it was the most diverse group of people I have ever been part of – racially,

GROUP ECSTATIC RITES THREATENED MILITARY PREPAREDNESS AND SOCIAL HIERARCHY ITSELF.

economically, geographically, culturally, and in age. It was the first time I thought I understood the power of religious experience – of palpably feeling something greater than oneself. If I hadn't felt this, I would have said that the sight of strangers from radically different demographics passing around coffee and snacks, and enthusiastically exchanging conversation and hugs, was unnatural. Usually, this only occurs with the aid of some very powerful social lubricants. But in person, it made perfect sense even to my cynical self and gave me some hope (naively, it turns out) for a rebirth of people power.

We all know how Obama's first term has gone – and perhaps that is what makes this a good example. The galvanizing force of collective joy may be more powerful than the force of words, but like experiencing the divine, it also has severe limitations: what makes it powerful – its deeply personal, experiential nature – can also make it apolitical. There is no reason that, even when experienced in a political setting, it will precipitate any concrete action. However, that doesn't make it unimportant; the Yippie Revolution was not worthless because it didn't invert the hierarchies of its surrounding world. Particularly in an age of anomie, the experience of collective joy – and its offer of happiness – is a powerful force.

There has not been a popular radical movement for decades now (Seattle 1999 was largely a movement of organizers, not a popular movement, and is barely within the memory of most of Occupy's participants, including myself). The past decade has only seen localized and largely issue-centered movements, anchored by dedicated activists and professional radicals in the nonprofit world – meaning that grassroots power requires some building. With radicalism heavily marginalized, ghettoized and relegated to lifestyle politics until very recently, this is an urgent priority for the Left.

Like Dunbar, I don't believe that the power of education, rhetoric, and debate will be enough, and that is where the promise and experience of joy and happiness come in. The process of learning to believe and trust that we're part of something that is greater than ourselves yet also reflects who we are, does not occur through discussion or online campaigns. It can only be achieved in person, by gathering people together in a physical space. But once in play, it is first-hand evidence that an alternative to our hyper-individualistic and highly regimented world is actually possible – and this experience binds you to the ideas of the movement, and to the other people in the square. Not to undercut the importance of reading Kropotkin, but experiencing mutual aid, and deriving joy from it, is a far better education than reading a treatise about mutual aid.

There are limitations to everything; this is no exception. Public squares inevitably get cleared out, and afterwards, everyone may simply call it a day; life continues, uninterrupted. But without belief in the movement – a belief that goes beyond the truth or falsity of a debate – and without the offer of joy and happiness in a world obsessed with comfort and pleasure, there is no chance for a popular movement.

The other obvious limitation is that the power of the public square is also limited to those who participate – which is why it is no substitute for a good media strategy or organizing campaign. But the *promise* of joy is also powerful. It was hard not to be moved by the images from Tahrir Square, even via laptop in New York. While the media makes lots of great things look suspect, joy can be infectious at a distance. One of the more bizarre phenomena that Ehrenreich describes is the dance manias that broke out spontaneously in Europe during the late Middle Ages. In each case – one in Utrecht in 1278, along with others in Germany and Belgium in the wake of the Black Death – hundreds of people suddenly started dancing in public and didn't stop until, in Utrecht, the bridge under their feet collapsed, and in the other cases, until the dancers fell in exhaustion. Meanwhile, bystanders, at first watching in amazement, found themselves swept into the frenzy as well. While most scholars have tried to explain these phenomena as contagious diseases ("plagues"), or as caused by tarantula bites or fungal poisoning, Ehrenreich points out that the manias were contagious and could be "spread" by visual contact alone.

There is something incredibly compelling about seeing people ride a wave of ecstasy firsthand, especially a wave built on spontaneous bursts of collective empowerment. There will always be bystanders, but some will also be drawn in, whether by excitement or mere curiosity. Dionysus, according to Nietzsche, demanded "nothing less than the human soul, released by ecstatic ritual from the 'horror of individual existence.'" A radical movement can offer this release without also demanding the soul as payment, but the effect is the same: "Now the slave emerges as a freeman; all the rigid hostile walls which either necessity or despotism has erected between men are shattered." ■

BREUCKELEN GENTRY

by Arlene Stein

'GOOD GENTRIFIERS' AND THE NEW BROOKLYN AESTHETIC.

BROOKLYN *Magazine* is a glossy quarterly published in, well, Brooklyn. It aspires to be a *New York* magazine for the Brooklyn hipster set, and is filled with ads for Brooklyn beer, Brooklyn real estate, Brooklyn clothiers, and Brooklyn literature.

In its pages one can discern the makings of a distinctive borough aesthetic: off-center, handmade, pastiche, vintage, cluttered – West Coast grunge meets East Coast sophistication. Homes are filled with repurposed school desks and chairs, retro turntables, flea market finds that are kitschy but cool, and *objets de nature* made from tree trunks and taxidermy. While mid-century modern furnishings are occasionally seen, handmade and found objects trump the manufactured and the mass-marketed; old and worn, put together with a seemingly unstudied elegance, is preferable to new and shiny. Breuckelen, the old Dutch name for the borough, is now the moniker of a local distilling company, as well as a café and an apparel company.

There is a lot to admire about the values that animate this emerging lifestyle: concern for the environment, reverence for the past, a desire to make an urban life that is rich and inviting. Like other middle-class urban pioneers, the agents of the new Brooklynism reject the dream of suburban living with its focus on the family and its desire to flee crime, crowds, and the space of difference. They revel, instead, in the unruliness of cities and the possibility of creating neighborhoods that urbanist Jane Jacobs would be proud of, where people of different ethnicities, races, and especially classes live cheek-to-jowl, where bohemianism and literary experimentation flourish.

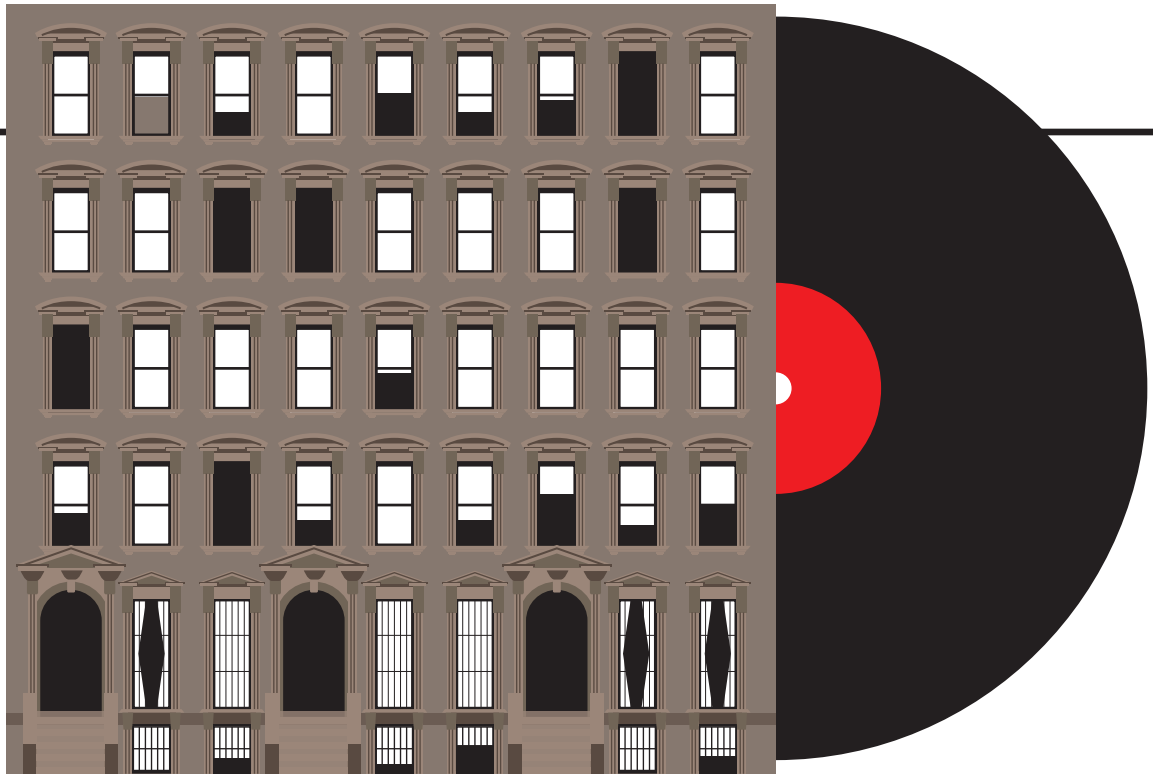
Today, those Manhattan neighborhoods those neighborhoods are available only to those few who can afford them. While Hudson Street, Jane Jacobs' beloved Greenwich Village haunt, still looks as quaint as it did in her day, with prices averaging $1,000 per square foot or more, it's now populated by investment bankers and celebrities. No wonder, then, that Brooklyn pioneers have disavowed Manhattan. "For all the money in the world, we wouldn't move back to Manhattan," says Pilar Guzman, a Park Slope homeowner quoted in the 2008 coffee table book *Brooklyn Modern* by Diana Lind, which showcases the transformation of Brooklyn brownstones.

In *Brooklyn Modern*, we are welcomed into the beautifully appointed Park Slope triplex Guzman and her husband Chris Mitchell share with Mitchell's brother and sister-in-law. It is grand and high-ceilinged, filled with simple wooden furnishings, parquet floors, and lots of light. In this version of Breuckelen style, there is little in the way of hipster clutter, though there is reverence for the traditional and the handmade. Pilar and Chris prefer Brooklyn to Manhattan: grand Brooklyn brownstones offer upper-middle-class families the kind of space and privacy that would be the envy of even the superrich in Manhattan.

But there's more to the appeal of brand Brooklyn than just the possibility of more space. In the most recent issue of *Brooklyn Magazine*, humorist David Cross is asked why he gave up his home in Manhattan for Brooklyn's Dumbo. "I had lived in the East Village for ten years," he says, and "it got to feel like a different place." There were two factors: "The first was the mall-ification of the area, the arrival of 7-Elevens, Subway sandwich shops," he says. And then, there was the arrival of the weekend crowd: "drunk girls" and "guys who went with a group of friends and tried to get laid."

The city has always hosted its share of bridge-andtunnel types, of course. The population expanded in the post-Giuliani, *Sex in the City* era, when clean streets and an active police presence meant that Manhattan ceased to be a scary place for all but a few city-phobes. With its Subways, 7-Elevens, and other chain stores, Manhattan today looks like a much more densely populated version of the rest of America – which, for some, is part of the appeal. But a lot of the young people who crowd the Village's streets on the weekend actually live there – they're students at NYU, or other schools, and often their parents are paying the bills for them to live out their urban adventure.

There goes the neighborhood. What's missing from Manhattan's increasingly sanitized streets for Cross and others is, in short, "authenticity," a sense of rootedness that, in the case of urban romantics, "humanizes the inner



city poor and celebrates rather than disparages the messiness of city life," as historian Suleiman Osman describes it.

In *The Invention of Brownstone Brooklyn*, Osman shows that the quest for urban authenticity really began in the postwar era, as progressive lawyers, teachers, writers, and white-collar workers began to reclaim neighborhoods like Brooklyn Heights, seeking a sense of permanence and rootedness as a refuge from Manhattan's more impersonal verticality. They were drawn to the brownstones that are the trademark architectural style of the borough, influenced by the Dutch who first colonized the area, and housed the growing middle class that settled in the borough in the nineteenth century.

Today's urban pioneers are not altogether different from their 1940s predecessors. The difference is that there are more of them: the quest for authenticity is no longer confined to a relatively elite segment of the educated middle classes. There are more people with college degrees, more people who have grown up in the suburbs who want a different experience for their children, and New York City, shinier and less crime-ridden than ever, is seen as a good place to find these things. No wonder townhouses built for nineteenth-century laborers in neighborhoods like Carroll Gardens or Park Slope now go for $3 million or more.

But authenticity is a loaded term. Sociologist Sharon Zukin, in her 2009 book *Naked City*, describes how restaurants and bars and the resurgence of farmers' markets offer urban consumers a safe and comfortable place to "perform" a sense of difference from mainstream norms. These spaces fabricate an aura of authenticity based on the history of the area or the backstory of their products, and capitalize on the tastes of their youngish, alternative clientele. These middle- and upper-class folks consume, at least in part, to mark distinctions, as sociologist Pierre Bourdieu put it.

For those on the cutting edge, this authenticity is highly self-conscious and stylized, and extends into the home. Critic Kurt Andersen, in a recent issue of *Vanity Fair*, notes that the styled home is no longer merely the preserve of rich people. Millions of Americans, he writes, are now "amateur stylists – scrupulously attending, as never before, to the details and meanings of the design and décor of their homes, their clothes, their appliances, their meals, their hobbies, and more." It's décor that bears little relationship to the way its inhabitants live: think vintage typewriters and deer antlers.

Brooklyn Magazine rebels against this, and yet also participates in the commodification of anti-style. In an article entitled "Department of Records," written by Amanda Park Taylor, we are treated to sumptuous photos of quirky Brooklyn interiors. While most interesting homes, she suggests, are created by design professionals or those who follow them, the "other kind of remarkable home," she says, "is much rarer." It is "the product of personality." This

home shuns design icons like Eames and antler lamps. "Rather than prove a point about its owners' curatorial prowess, it serves its residents' higher-order needs."

In other words, Brooklyn's cultural omnivores pride themselves as having eclectic tastes, and even at times as being "rebel consumers." (How else can we make sense of the ongoing struggles at the Park Slope Food Coop over whether to boycott Israeli-made goods?) Still, says Zukin, these consumers with a difference are "not-so-innocent agents of change." While they might see their struggles for their own pleasures as somehow daring and confrontational, their desire for alternative foods, both gourmet and organic, and for middle-class shopping areas encourages a dynamic of urban redevelopment that displaces working-class and ethnic minority consumers. That should give pause to the Brooklyn style mavens whose sense of superiority rests on drawing distinctions between "good gentrifiers" and "bad gentrifiers."

Bad gentrifiers buy new high-rise condos, shop at the Gap, and feel relieved the more their neighbors come to look like them. Good gentrifiers buy up old brownstones and keep their original details intact, gently restoring them to their original patina and lament the fact that the neighborhood is whitening up. Bad gentrifiers welcome the fact that a restaurant touted as having "the best burgers in the borough" has replaced the bodega on the corner. Good gentrifiers collect vintage vinyl, drive Priuses, drink craft beers and frequent the neighborhood Burmese restaurant. While bad gentrifiers see themselves as having little impact on their environment – they are simply maximizing their own self-interest by getting a good deal in an up-and-coming neighborhood – good gentrifiers are supremely aware of their privileged place in the urban food chain, and sometimes even feel guilty about it.

Brooklyn Magazine is a symptom of the process by which working-class neighborhoods are upscaled, and it is also a harbinger of this change. As a mythmaker, the magazine helps define what is cool, but stops short of announcing to its readers: this is how you should dress, think, and furnish your abode in order to be one of us. Still, it provides a blueprint for how to know and live Brooklyn, or at least how to know and live a certain gentrified hipster aesthetic embodying ideals of authenticity, individuality, cosmopolitanism, and reverence for the past. Its editors, like all editors of lifestyle magazines, are tastemakers who are one step ahead of the game, who know where to place their money, or at least proclaim that they know. In one article, we learn about a number of neighborhoods in the borough that have yet to be fully "discovered." These "lost neighborhoods of Brooklyn" include places like Georgetown, King Bay, Remsen Village, and Mapleton. Are these neighborhoods, the reader wonders, the next Red Hook or Crown Heights?

Gentrification is about change and renewal, remaking urban spaces, opening them up to new groups of city inhabitants, and closing them off to others. It signals the triumph of the market, and in the absence of strong tenant protections, public housing programs, or subsidies for lower-income home ownership, we have no choice but to play by its rules, maximizing our own self-interest however we see fit.

In places like New York, where real estate is at a premium, the process will continue to transform urban landscapes until there are no longer any new frontiers to be had. Virtual sociality, it turns out, is no substitute for the real thing: people, particularly young people, want to be in public spaces, surrounded by other living, breathing humans they can smell and see and touch. No wonder Brooklyn, with its impressive housing stock, huge landmass, and proximity to Manhattan's urban core, has over the past few decades been on the leading edge of this reclamation of city life. Though gentrification seems unremarkable, inevitable, and the product of individual choices rather than collective actions, to name it, and become aware of it, is a necessary first step.

Brooklyn gives a knowing wink to its liberal readers' unease. In a self-mocking column called "The Self-Loathing Gentrifier," an inquirer who identifies himself as a Bay Ridge native writes: "I recently moved to Williamsburg and I'm getting all sorts of grief from old neighborhood friends about being a yuppie-scum gentrifier. What should I tell them? Are they right?" He is told, in effect, yes. Another asks: "I've been hearing about this new entrepreneurial Brooklyn economy? How can I get in on that shit?" He is advised to place fifty dollars in an envelope and send it to the columnist, and the columnist will send him a tip sheet that will tell him everything he needs to know. There's seriousness behind the gag: an admission that cash is king, even among those who are looking for alternatives – like many of *Brooklyn*'s readers. The magazine is filled with ads for high-end real estate, infertility doctors, and Mercedes Benz. Good gentrifiers are, in other words, as implicated in the system as anyone else. They're just more self-aware – and have better taste.

"Brooklyn-ness," as art critic Holland Cotter wrote, has become "a cultural ethnicity." If it is an ethnicity, it is organized mainly around practices of consumption. Flows of money and real estate converge with movements of cultural innovation, and with processes of emulation, appropriation, and mixing, which bring together and also separate races, classes, and ethnicities. The music, food, and sensibilities of others insinuate themselves in us, and we become attuned to worlds that once seemed very far away. We learn from unfamiliar others, but tend not to notice when they mysteriously disappear from view. ■

HAPPY HOOKERS

by Melissa Gira Grant

SEX WORKERS AND THEIR WOULD-BE SAVIORS.

Original image of Nicholas Kristof by Monika Flueckiger. This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Generic license.

THE FOLLOWING books were not published in 1972: *The Happy Secretary, The Happy Nurse, The Happy Napalm Manufacturer, The Happy President, The Happy Yippie, The Happy Feminist*. The memoir of a Manhattan madam was. *The Happy Hooker* climbed best-seller lists that year, selling over sixteen million copies.

When it reached their top five, the *New York Times* described the book as "liberally dosed with sex fantasies for the retarded." The woman who wrote them and lived them, Xaviera Hollander, became a folk hero. She remains the accidental figurehead of a class of women who may or may not have existed before she lived and wrote. Of course, they must have existed, but if they hadn't, say the critics of hooker happiness, we would have had to invent them.

Is prostitution so wicked a profession that it requires such myths?

We may remember the legend, but the particulars of the happy hooker story have faded. Hollander and the characters that grew up around her are correctly recalled as sexually omnivorous,

SEX WORK NOW ISN'T A LIFESTYLE; IT'S A GIG, ONE OF MANY YOU CAN SELECT FROM A VENUE LIKE BACKPAGE OR CRAIGSLIST.

but desire alone didn't make her successful as a prostitute. She realized that the sex trade is no underworld, that it is intimately entangled in city life, in all the ways in which we are economically interdependent. Hollander was famous for being able to sweep through the lobby of the Palace Hotel, unnoticed and undisturbed, on her way to an assignation, not because she didn't "look like" a working girl, but because she knew that too few people understood what a working girl really looked like.

In *The Happy Hooker Goes to Washington*, a 1977 film adapted from Hollander's memoir, a scene opens with teletype bashing the screen with Woodward-and-Bernstein urgency. Flashlights sweep a darkened hall. Inside an unlocked office, a criminal scene is revealed: a senator embracing a prostitute. Hollander is called before Congress to testify. When the assembled panel interrogates her career, attacking her morals, she is first shameless, then spare but sharp in pointing out the unsurprising fact that these men are patrons of the very business they wish to blame for America's downfall.

What's on trial in the film is ridiculous, but the questions are real. What value does a prostitute bring to society? Or is hooking really not so grandiose as all that? Could it be just another mostly tedious way to take ownership over something all too few of us are called before Congress to testify on (the conditions of our work)?

"Did you know that 89 percent of the women in prostitution want to escape?" a young man told me on the first day of summer this year, as he protested in front of the offices of the *Village Voice*. He wanted me to understand that it is complicit in what he calls "modern-day slavery." The *Village Voice* has moved the bulk of the sex-related ads it publishes onto the website Backpage.com. This young man, the leader of an Evangelical Christian youth group, wanted to hasten the end of "sex slavery" by shutting Backpage.com down. What happens to the majority of people who advertise willingly on the site, who rely on it to draw an income? "The reality is," the man said to me, not knowing I had ever been a prostitute, "almost all of these women don't really want to be doing it."

Let's ask the people around here, I wanted to say to him: the construction workers who dug up the road behind us, the cabbies weaving around the construction site, the cops over there who have to babysit us, the Mister Softee guy pulling a double shift in the heat, the security guard outside a nearby bar, the woman working inside, the receptionist upstairs. The freelancers at the *Village Voice*. The guys at the copy shop who printed your flyers. The workers at the factory that made the water bottles you're handing out. Is it unfair to estimate that 89 percent of New Yorkers would rather not be doing what they have to do to make a living?

"True, many of the prostitution ads on Backpage are placed by adult women acting on their own without coercion," writes *New York Times* columnist and professional prostitute savior Nicholas Kristof. But, he continues, invoking the happy hooker trope, "they're not my concern." He would like us to join

him in separating women into those who chose prostitution and those who were forced into it; those who view it as business and those who view it as exploitation; those who are workers and those who are victims; those who are irremediable and those who can be saved. These categories are too narrow. They fail to explain the reality of one woman's work, let alone a class of women's labor. In this scheme, a happy hooker is apparently unwavering in her love of fucking and will fuck anyone for the right price. She has no grievances, no politics.

But happy hookers, says Kristof, don't despair, this isn't about women like you – we don't really mean to put you out of work. Never mind that shutting down the businesses people in the sex trade depend on for safety and survival only exposes all of them to danger and poverty, no matter how much choice they have. Kristof and the Evangelicals outside the *Village Voice* succeed only in taking choices away from people who are unlikely to turn up outside the *New York Times*, demanding that Kristof's column be taken away from him.

Even if they did, with the platform he's built for himself as the true expert on sex workers' lives, men like Kristof can't be run out of town so easily. There's always another TED conference, another women's rights organization eager to hire his expertise. Kristof and those like him, who have made saving women from themselves their pet issue and vocation, are so fixated on the notion that almost no one would ever choose to sell sex that they miss the dull and daily choices that all working people face in the course of making a living. Kristof himself makes good money at this, but to consider sex workers' equally important economic survival is inconvenient for him.

THIS BUSINESS of debating sex workers' choices and whether or not they have them has only become more profitable under what sociologist Elizabeth Bernstein terms "post-industrial prostitution."

After the vigilant anti-prostitution campaigns of the last century, which targeted red-light districts and street-based prostitution, sex work has moved mostly indoors, into private apartments and gentlemen's clubs, facilitated by the internet and mobile phones. The sex economy exists in symbiosis with the leisure economy: personal services, luxury hotels, all increasingly anonymous and invisible. At the same time, more young people find themselves without a safety net, dependent on informal economies. Sex work now isn't a lifestyle; it's a gig, one of many you can select from a venue like Backpage or Craigslist.

Recall the favored slogan of prostitution prohibitionists that on the internet, they could buy a sofa and "a girl." It's not the potential purchase of a person that's so outrageous; it's the proximity of that person to the legitimate market.

Bernstein calls these "slippery borders," and asks us to observe the feelings provoked by them, and how they are transferred. Anxieties about slippery market borders become "anxieties about slippery moral borders," which are played out on the bodies of sex workers.

The anxiety is that sex work may be legitimate after all. In a sense, the prohibitionists are correct: people who might have never gotten into the sex trade before can and are. Fighting what they call "the normalizing of prostitution" is the focus of anti-sex work feminists. In this view, one happy hooker is a threat to all women everywhere.

"It's sad," said the speaker from the women's-rights NGO Equality Now in protest outside the *Village Voice*. She directed her remarks at the cluster of sex workers who had turned out in counterprotest. "Backpage is able to be a pimp. They're so normalizing this behavior that a group of Backpage advertisers have come out today to oppose us." So a prostitute's dissent is only possible if, as they understand prostitution itself, she was forced into it.

"Why did it take so long for the women's movement to genuinely consider the needs of whores, of women in the sex trades?" asks working-class queer organizer and ex-hooker Amber L. Hollibaugh, in her book *My Dangerous Desires*. "Maybe because it's hard to listen to – I mean really pay attention to – a woman who, without other options, could easily be cleaning your toilet? Maybe because it's intolerable to listen to the point of view of a woman who makes her living sucking off your husband?"

Hollibaugh points to this most difficult place, this politics of feelings performed by some feminists, in absence of solidarity. They imagine how prostitution must feel, and how that in turn makes them feel, despite all the real-life prostitutes standing in front of them to dispute them.

IT DIDN'T used to be that people opposed to prostitution could only get away with it by insisting that "happy" prostitutes didn't really exist. From Gilgamesh to the Gold Rush days, right up until Ms Hollander's time, being a whore was reason enough for someone to demand you be driven out of town. Contemporary prostitution prohibitionists consider the new reality, in which they deny the existence of anyone with agency in prostitution, a form of victory for women. We aren't ruined now. We're victims.

Perhaps what they fear most of all is that prostitutes could be happy: that what we've been told is the worst thing we can do to ourselves is not the worst, or even among the worst. What marks us as fallen – whether from feminism or Christ or capital – is any suggestion that prostitution did *not* ruin us and that we can deliver that news ourselves. ■

EATING FOR CHANGE

by Claire E. Peters

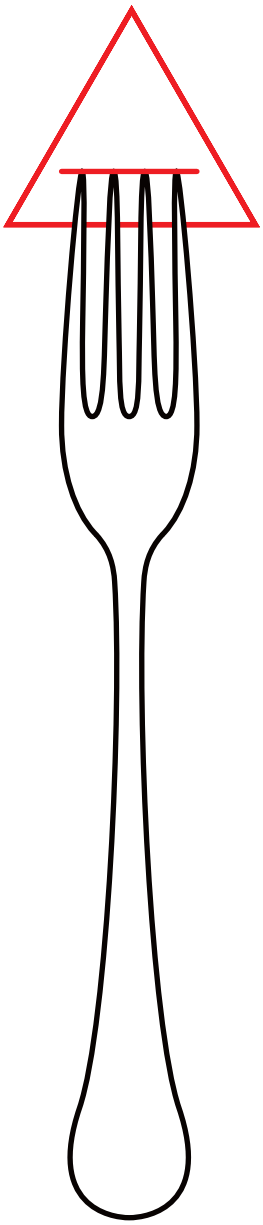
WHEN IT COMES TO REFORMING OUR FOOD SYSTEM, CONSUMER CHOICE ISN'T ENOUGH.

In May, Michael Bloomberg proposed a ban on the sale of sugary beverages over 16 ounces. If it passes, New Yorkers with an urge for a deluge of high-fructose corn syrup and caramel coloring will be forced to purchase multiple puny 12-ounce beverages. Bloomberg's war against dental and arterial destruction was praised and derided with equal fervor, with most of the commentary revolving around the tension between health outcomes and consumer freedom.

The mayor's proposed legislation may have provoked libertarians, but it struck many in the sustainable food movement as little more than a gesture, with soda a random mark among many other possible targets – his announcement, incidentally, took place just before "National Donut Day."

Whether it passes or not, the proposal has stirred debate around how much say government should have in shaping individual consumer choices that inevitably have broader social impacts.

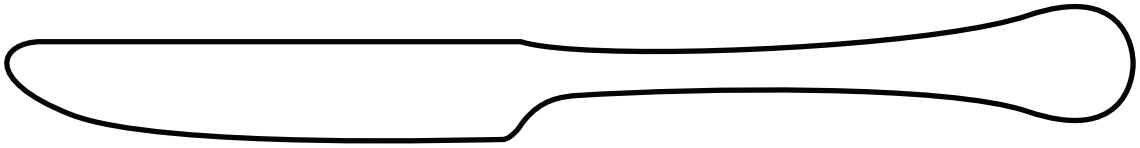
Cries of protest by the food and beverage industries are to be expected, but it's worth noting that the majority of food advocates, and other opponents of industrial food, structure their arguments around the ideology of consumer choice as well. Faith in the free market flows steadily through the clotted arteries and glucose-flooded bloodstreams of America's famously large citizens, as well as the hearts of whole-food evangelists.



Over the past decade, a vibrant food movement has grown out of an increase in popular knowledge regarding the ecological, social, economic, and health-related threats posed by the conventional agricultural system. Supporters of sustainable food are armed with a wealth of information regarding unsustainable farming methods, the exploitation of farmers and migrant workers, the commodity crop system, and the twin epidemics of diabetes and obesity that our supply of heavily processed foods has abetted. Rather than focus on creating collective action to change the system that produces these effects, however, the food movement has taken on a distinctly supply-side, neoliberal flavor.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 7 percent of Americans are overweight and 33 percent are obese. The World Health Organization reports that Americans exhibit higher rates of high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease than those in other developed countries. Our national statistics make it clear that we are unhealthy, but why we are so remains the object of contentious debate.

For every study alleging that any single factor is the main contributor to increasing rates of obesity and type 2 diabetes, there are ten more suggesting



alternative culprits. We have pointed the finger at cake, cars, stress, chairs, TV, genes, and PVC shower curtains. We have blamed a lack of access to the right food, an excess of the wrong food, or that we eat our food too quickly or in inappropriate locations. Where our diet is concerned, the federal government has tried to make things simple for us. The USDA and FDA have built us pyramid after pyramid, and in 2008, they served their guidelines to us on a platter with the introduction of MyPlate. Yet despite all of these efforts, our unhealthy eating behaviors persist.

The current food movement argues that structural changes to the agricultural system, infrastructural improvements, urban renewal, and increased wages for farmworkers are necessary, but only insofar as they will ultimately result in changes to individual consumer behavior. The movement remains infinitely hopeful that increased access to more affordable produce is enough to turn Americans away from processed food, and, with guidance, toward a future filled with victory gardens and home-cooked meals.

These are admirable goals, but their focus on facilitating more healthful consumer choices overlooks broader structural issues – persistent economic inequality, unemployment or underemployment, inadequate healthcare – that affect health and quality of life. They also ignore the myriad factors besides access and education that influence food choice.

THE 'DEATH BY A THOUSAND CUTS' TACTIC WILL NOT BE EFFECTIVE, BECAUSE THE FOOD MOVEMENT'S RANKS WILL ALWAYS BE RELATIVELY SMALL.

Anyone who has tried to reduce his or her caloric intake or make substantial dietary changes of any kind knows that it takes a high level of mental jujitsu to convince oneself that these changes amount to anything more than an increase in personal discomfort. The prospect of long-term health or ecological sustainability is vague and intangible compared to the immediate loss of enjoyment and the increased sensations of anxiety, discomfort, and work (in the form of cooking for oneself or engaging in a way of eating that may be different from one's peers).

Food advocates may extol the virtues of sustainable farming methods, or regale one another with tales of home-cooked meals eaten slowly and enjoyed thoroughly. But for people without social networks in which healthy eating is a priority, or for whom the potential for lifelong health takes a backseat to

more immediate concerns, the suggestion that they ought to endure added discomfort "for their own good" may seem insulting and cruel, not to mention patronizing and unrealistic.

In an attempt to elevate the act of eating from the clutches of vulgar hunger or hedonistic indulgence, and to liberate cooking from its current place within the domain of "work," proponents of sustainable food often end up fetishizing these acts: preparing a meal is a holy rite, and eating is a communion with the gods. Many food advocates support the cultivation of a relationship, however fleeting, with the people who produce their food. This places growers and purveyors in the position of having to sell themselves along with what they produce.

A recent article by Benjamin Wallace in *New York* magazine demonstrates how this phenomenon is unfolding in Brooklyn's artisanal food scene. Judging by the commentary provided by the food makers Wallace consulted for the article, staying in business is a matter not simply of selling whole, unadulterated, sustainably produced food, but of having a good origin story to go along with it. Not to say that increased interest in the lives of the people who grow or prepare our food isn't to society's benefit, but a sustainable food system should not require the custodians of a safe and nutritious food supply to double as performers or storytellers.

Another expression of this type of anti-industrial food fetishism can be seen in the behavior of the so-called "foodies." The term "foodie" is flexible; it might be used in reference to a twenty-something food blogger snapping photos of himself at a new Korean taco joint in Greenpoint. It might just as well refer to a food celebrity like Anthony Bourdain, the aggressive, hypermasculine culinary conqueror who will hold us captive with his expletive-punctuated narrative of the incomparable pleasure of glutting on fattened songbirds.

Recent cultural commentary suggests that interest in food and eating is fast becoming a stand-in for other hobbies and forms of cultural exploration. In a *New York Times* article from March of this year, one source compares New York's current food scene to its fine-arts scene in the eighties, as people seek out eating experiences that offer an "underground cachet." Another discusses how food has replaced his record collecting habit: "I used to spend five hours in a record store looking for albums," he says. "Now everything's online. But I can't find artisanal sausage online and eat it right away. Maybe food markets are the vintage record shops of 2012."

Because their actions are in keeping with the "vote with your dollars" ethos, these foodies can feel morally upright and politically correct for spending money on nonconventional food, while competing with one another to stay at the forefront of the culinary zeitgeist.

In the March 2011 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*, B.R. Myers wrote a scathing takedown of foodie behavior, calling attention to foodies' "affectation of piety," which is contradicted by their "penchant for obscenely priced meals, for gorging themselves." Myers reminded readers that the word "glutton" not only pertains to those who overeat to the point of being ill or obese, but to anyone who is preoccupied with consumption. The food movement, in both its foodie and food advocate iterations, represents a form of gluttony not so different from that of the binge-eating McDonald's lovers they deride. Their image of the "conventional" American eater is of a person obsessed with quantity (huge portions in restaurants, value-sized packages at Walmart and Sam's Club). The food movement, however, is obsessed to a similar degree with the quality and origin of its food. This is not to say that foodies are in the habit of eschewing indulgence when it comes to their carefully curated food choices. A subject in "Eat, Talk, Tweet" said that during the food festival at which he was interviewed he planned to "eat until I'm physically full and can't eat anymore." Myers's piece in the *Atlantic* is full of similar statements from foodies for whom overeating is inherent to a satisfying culinary experience.

Everyone has to eat, however, and those who can afford to make decisions based on factors other than cost must eventually decide how to feed themselves. At the moment, the food movement seems to offer only two choices. The first is to be vigilant about eating sustainably, and run the risk of ending up in the "good consumer" trap. The second is to opt out of the conventional food system as much as possible by growing tomatoes in a rooftop garden or raising chickens in our backyards. Both of these choices are probably better than throwing up one's hands and reaching for a bag of Funyuns, but neither addresses the structural factors that make the food movement's idea of "good choice" difficult or unappealing to those outside the movement.

More importantly, they do not acknowledge the near-impossibility of changing the food system through individual consumer choice. The "death by a thousand cuts" tactic will not be effective because, due to the limitations explored earlier, the current food movement's ranks will always be relatively small. As de facto representatives of the anticonventional food movement, food advocates and foodies need to ask themselves whether their current approach to food and eating is truly sustainable, or if they are instead engaging in self-satisfied gustatory acquisitiveness among themselves. Beyond the ideology of liberation and sustainability, through consumer choice, and avoiding what cultural geographer Julie Guthman has referred to as "food messianism" – outreach and education measures that tend to strike a discordant tone with their supposedly benighted subjects – lies the possibility of a food movement driven by the Left. ■

BEYOND NOVEMBER

by Michael Hirsch & Jason Schulman

THOUGHTS ON POLITICS, SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, AND THE 2012 ELECTIONS.

Marx wrote in *The Civil War in France* that every few years workers got to decide which members of the ruling class were to misrepresent them. How right he was. And is. That is uncontestable. What's at issue are the implications. What politics is necessary in a formal democracy where elites have a stranglehold on national election outcomes and even candidate selection? What is to be done when the working class acts less like a class for itself and more like a crush of sharp-elbowed shoppers at a Walmart Presidents' Day sale?

While movements for social and economic justice are in the final instance the agents of historical change, election efforts should reflect those movement interests. Yet the form electoral action takes rarely jibes with movement needs.

In no advanced industrial nation, and especially not the United States, have the needs of social movements and electoral gains been conjoined. Worldwide, the Occupiers deny a connection is even warranted – the Spanish Indignados are the most vocal – saying that political parties of the Left and Right inevitably work to maintain social order. Descriptively, it's true; that is how governments of the Left and Right have acted, at least since the Second World War. But it's not inevitable, and abandoning politics is no solution.

In Western Europe, the social-democratic parties act as the kinder, gentler face of neoliberalism. In the United States, the labor movement can't point to a signal federal legislative victory since the 1970 passage of the Occupational Safety and Health Act – and that under a Republican president. In most developing countries, politics is a reflection of the competing demands of comprador and local bourgeois factions; working-class struggles are subterranean. The magnificent Arab Spring was remarkable for what it was and not for what it portended. The contenders in Egypt's first elections were the army and the Muslim Brotherhood, both with infrastructures in place and both former collaborators with the hated Mubarak regime.

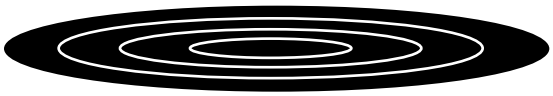
In 2012, the US presidential election will once again be decided not on wants or needs but on fear. With neither candidate likely to gin up much energy for themselves based on program, personality, or merit, the election will go to the campaign that scares key voting blocs the most about the opposition.

The prospects of selling Obama as the preferred candidate are daunting, if worth doing at all. With his proliferation of the national security state, his refusal to put juice behind the Conyers jobs bill, his water-carrying for the insurance companies and destruction of any near-term possibility for single-payer health care, his failures on card check and other labor law reforms, his refusal to treat Wall Street as a criminal enterprise, his embrace of reactionary education philosophies, his incursive black-ops foreign policy, and his ten o'clock scholar's embrace of gay marriage, his is an administration not to praise but to damn.

So what to do? Or how do we even think about what to do? That's not like asking, "Why is there no labor party in the United States?" Political sociologist Robin Archer offers a compelling argument that points out specific conditions – the weakness of the early industrial union organizing efforts, the level of state repression, the structural divides determined by religious affiliations, the bonkers politics of Daniel DeLeon's Socialist Labor Party and the equally malignant and self-interested craft union response – conditions that in combination were true nowhere else. These inhibited any class-based politics, even of the most tepid kind. Archer explains why the US was late to the game, if not AWOL, but not why corporate ideology is still the common coin of both parties, let alone what can be done today.

Radicals, since at least the 1936 re-election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, have battled over two key electoral strategies: relate in whatever way possible to progressive forces around the Democratic Party or denounce the two-party system as a sham and build

THINK OF SHAKESPEARE'S GLENDOWER BOASTING THAT "I CAN CALL SPIRITS FROM THE VASTY DEEP." TO WHICH HOTSPUR APTLY REPLIES, "WHY, SO CAN I, OR SO CAN ANY MAN; BUT WILL THEY COME WHEN YOU DO CALL FOR THEM?"



a progressive third party. The two don't exhaust the list of left possibilities, but they take to the field at election time as dueling perspectives. We find the first simplistic and the second at least a telescoping of events.

ELECTORAL POLITICS AND THE BURDEN OF HISTORY

Veteran labor activist Bill Fletcher, Jr, writing in his Organizing Upgrade blog, argues that election perspectives need to be strategic, and that dismissing electoral politics as hopeless or building third parties out of whole cloth "are actually unpolitical and lack any sort of concrete analysis." He's right. Absent strategy, anything else is just expressing a shopping preference.

Strategic planning includes sizing up your own side's strengths. Frankly, we're too weak to have any effect on the Democratic Party network at the national level.

At the same time, we can't build much of a third party with impossible state ballot access requirements, winner-take-all elections and a lack of institutional support. Anything a third party can do – anything a third party *should* do – can also be done in local and state Democratic primaries.

Parties are not creatures of desire alone. They are political expressions of movements arising at historical conjunctures, or comprise decades of work culminating in effective interventions in crisis situations. The last third-party effort institutionalized nationwide was the Republican Party. Not only was it the outcome of the struggle over slavery – something the Whigs could not get right – but the Lincoln election was the proximate cause of the South Carolina secession and the Civil War that followed. The GOP's creation was not epiphenomenal; it was structurally driven, and the war emerged as the central and as yet unrivaled organizing event of the modern American party system.

Yes, radical parties had influence, too. The Socialist Party that thankfully succeeded the SLP in prominence excelled before and during the First World War, electing thousands of local officeholders. But it sent just two members to Congress – one from New York and one from Milwaukee, cities with substantial foreign-born populations with radical views and roots in European working-class organizations. The party had its faults, including an electoral orientation that could not abide the direct-action tactics of its own supporters, but it acted as the party of a class – something no third party can do today.

Absent mass upheavals that make electoral reform a concession, US third-party efforts are also handicapped by a political system that is not analogous to that of any other liberal-democratic state. Here, it's the state, not the parties, that controls who can join (anyone who registers). The parties have no sway over who registers, runs in their primaries, or holds office under their name. Yes, election lawyer-wizards do challenge dissident Democrats' election petitions

at the behest of county-based, paid political functionaries. The outcome: candidate suppression, especially of the novice hopeful. But it's state law, not party manipulation, that is responsible for voter suppression, the more toxic threat to free elections.

UNDERSTANDING THE DEMOCRATS

What complicates things is that Democrats themselves talk about one big party, under one big tent, dancing to one tune. It's rubbish. The US effectively has 435 separate Democratic Party organizations corresponding to incumbents or challengers in each congressional district, with the loosest of national affiliations. Politics USA-style is candidate-, not party-driven.

It's not the party that does the lion's share of fundraising, either. It's the candidates, and – thanks to the Supreme Court – the virtually flying-under-the-radar corporate-run Super PACs. One effect of the McCain-Feingold campaign finance law is that even fewer dollars will be coordinated by the national parties. The AFL-CIO, its numerous constituent unions, and others expect to ride that money-churning tiger, but the advantage goes to business.

The Democrats are not even a rule-from-the-top party that disciplines its elected officials, though under Rahm Emanuel, progressive candidates were pushed aside by the party's congressional fundraising arms in favor of more mainstream and ostensibly electable moderates. Party discipline at times is enforced by promising or denying "pork" or committee chair posts, yet for all those cozy arrangements, party politics is decentralized. This means grassroots efforts to elect allies or punish enemies are viable.

Want to punish incumbents? Primary 'em up. Even if you lose, you've killed their summer and made your point. The Left is in no position to affect national party policy, but it can still hold a local candidate's feet to the fire.

STRUCTURAL BARRIERS AND COALITION "PARTIES"

Short of storming the Winter Palace, politics *requires* coalitions. But what kind of coalitions? Both main parties are coalitions of disparate elements. Ostensibly, class-based parties in a parliamentary system function the same way, with the deals cut after the election, but they have the advantage of raising sharp differences during campaigns and allowing radicals a role, at least before entering government.

The US party coalitions are not particularly unified. Both have a hard core of ideological or interest-group supporters, and a periphery of idiosyncratic centrist allies. The cores are always dissatisfied that their interests aren't served, while the moderates entertain fantasies of a great party of the center-right, which would ostensibly sweep any election. Today, the chief exponent of that view is the drearily predictable *New York Times* scribe Thomas Friedman.

It should be no surprise, then, that every Democratic president since the Civil War has come from the middle of the coalition. That's the nature of the Democratic Party, and it is that way because of the reality of the US political system. Changes in state laws permitting multiple-party endorsements, the alternate vote, proportional representation, same-day registration, and the like would vastly improve prospects for third parties, but winning these means fighting state-by-state. Even a constitutional amendment requires some thirty states to agree. It's a fight worth having, but short of that, or short of a cataclysm delegitimizing the main parties, coalition politics and the sort of incrementalism revolutionaries despise – in part because there are so few increments – is the only contemporary politics possible.

That's why the links institutions like the NAACP and the AFL-CIO have with the Democratic Party won't be overcome by an act of will or even the election of a new generation of Marxists to a handful of top union leadership posts, as desirable as that would be.

Those on the Left who call for a third party are basing their choice on a prayer, not a plan. Think of Shakespeare's Glendower boasting that "I can call spirits from the vasty deep." To which Hotspur aptly replies, "Why, so can I, or so can any man; But will they come when you do call for them?"

Even Hotspur's advice, "Tell truth and shame the devil," has its limits. The Left has ample truths deserving of a hearing, but given its weakness and disconnect from the lives of working people, who's listening? And given that we can't deliver, and that our self-appointed vanguard tribunes know they can't deliver, it's like hawking shoddy goods to demand that working people must, as at least one sect said in all seriousness, "Break with the elephant; break with the ass. Build a party of the working class."

Support for a nationwide third party today isn't a political response, but a propagandistic one. It's also bad propaganda because it assumes that the Democrats are hegemonic due to voter ignorance. It's not illusions that drive voters. Asking working people to forgo their only practical form of politics is like urging the religious to abandon their gods. That's something even the twenty-four-year-old Marx knew was nonsense, when he wrote that the world of atheists "reminds one of children, assuring everyone who is ready to listen to them that they are not afraid of the bogy man."

The Democrats as a coalition are hegemonic because they provide a service, finite as it is, that is indispensable for institutions, whether they be unions, social service providers, or community-based organizations.

THE REAL SUBTEXT IS "VOTE OBAMA: HE'LL SCREW US LESS."

ASSESSING LEFT PARTY CAMPAIGNS

If parties grow from movements and from cultures of resistance, where is the utility or veracity in claiming that today's Green Party represents a core wing of environmentalism, let alone civil rights, peace, labor, immigrant rights, or others? In many ways, the Green campaign for governor of New York in 2010 had a model program and an attractive, knowledgeable candidate in Howie Hawkins. And that was all it had, though that was enough to secure state ballot status through 2014. It's been somnolent since.

Dan La Botz, an articulate campaigner on the Socialist Party line for Senate in Ohio, ran on a platform lightyears ahead of anything the two major parties offered. He declared:

> We need to organize a movement. To fight for jobs and full employment. To win health care for all. To really confront the environmental crisis by turning from coal and oil to wind, solar, and hydrothermal. To end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. I want to be the Senator who speaks for that movement.

We wish he could, too. La Botz's traction – despite his garnering "more than 25,000 votes for socialism in Ohio," as his campaign put it – was the result less of his ability to front for mass movements and more that the Democratic candidate had no chance of winning. La Botz was a protest candidate at a propitious moment. That's no knock. Often the Left can't manage even that.

Here we make no claim that La Botz or Hawkins could have made a difference running in statewide Democratic Party primaries. We do suggest that insurgents backed by reform groups with local standing could run in area primary races and win.

UNMASKING OBAMA

Still, the issue for November is how we impact political discourse among those living perilous lives.

Someone's got to tell the truth about the scabrous Obama presidency, and it won't come from the three-wise-monkey approach of the liberal left or the venality and rampant racism of the Right.

Yes, the Republicans are almost always worse, and that algorithm gives Democrats a free ride. The GOP's not always worse, though. PATCO's strike was broken by Ronald Reagan, but the rage that consumed air traffic controllers in 1981 was the accumulation of two decades of pressing grievances against mostly Democratic-appointed heads of the Federal Aviation Administration. No wonder the PATCO leadership made a Faustian bargain to endorse Reagan in 1980 in return for a deal that unraveled over, among other things, acceptance of collective bargaining over wages.

Anyone who says the future of working-class America depends on beating Romney downplays the harm successive Democratic administrations did in shilling for corporate America.

Let's face reality: Obama is the worst Democratic president since Grover Cleveland. He's a Wall Street enabler, and like his sorry predecessors, he's let his agenda be determined by corporate pressure and far-right hysteria.

Just because the worst scum in America want Obama gone, unions neutralized, and the shreds of the welfare state effaced is not reason in itself for the Left to mute criticisms and act the good soldier. The only sound justification given for backing Obama in 2008 was that he'd give the movements enough room and time to grow. We got neither.

The reason that we don't write off Democratic Party campaigns is that at the local level, anyone involved in any sort of community organizing or public-sector bargaining has to have a relationship with some elected officials. And that means visibly supporting them, even if critically. Either that or preparing primary competition. And when a mass left party emerges, it won't be the expression of a rootless counterculture.

But we're not doing our allies any good by echoing the line taken by the AFL-CIO today, which is that the November election poses a choice between two economic worldviews. Would that it were. The real subtext is "Vote Obama: He'll screw us less."

Independent left participation in the 2012 election should be based minimally on preparing people now for the fight we'll be in after the election, no matter which party wins. That means no lionizing Obama and no relying on ghoulish tales about what a GOP monopoly of government and a knuckle-dragging Supreme Court could unleash. Allowing Obama to be reelected without any critique from the Left – even one that is purely propagandistic, as the Green and Socialist parties will offer – only ratifies his centrist approach of cottoning to and co-opting the Right while neutering the Left and any possibility for substantial social gains. We can do better. ■

FAIRER SEX

by Sarah Leonard

There's been a lot of bullshit written lately about what is or is not feminist. Notable bones of contention include: ladyblogs, working in finance, doulas, "having it all," housewifing, rioting, protesting, protesting in lingerie, getting married, watching *Girls*. Essays in publications ranging from mass-circulation glossies like the *Atlantic* ("Why Women Still Can't Have It All" by Anne-Marie Slaughter) to small literary magazines like *n+1* ("So Many Feelings" by Molly Fischer) appeal to a widespread fascination with the confused meaning of the term. The narcissism underlying the debate is parodied by the blog "Is This Feminist?" featuring stock photos of people shaking hands, walking the dog, and doing laundry. The pictures are rated as either "representing feminism" or "problematic."

With no sense of what feminism is, these writers turn to personal experience. With each step and gesture, they wonder what they're contributing to feminism. Is navel-gazing feminist?

Let us borrow a definition from bell hooks: feminism is the struggle to end sexist oppression.

It cannot be about this or that group of women's ability to have careers or about individual moments of empowerment while doing laundry. Feminist movements have long suffered from the disconnect between white middle-class feminism, often focused myopically on certain careers and lifestyle choices, and the goals of working-class women. The "Wages for Housework" demands of 1970s Marxist feminists sought to make women's uncompensated labor under capitalism visible whether the woman was a bourgeois housewife, a factory worker, or a poor mother. Since capital requires the housewife to reproduce the worker, they argued, this need dictates the role of women up and down the class system.

Those who demanded state wages for housework sought two things. First, to make wifely love visible as productive work. Second, to uncover for women the leverage that workers have in their potential to strike. "To say that we want money for housework is the first step towards refusing to do it," wrote Italian feminist Silvia Federici, "because the demand for a wage makes our work visible … both in its immediate aspect as housework and its more insidious character as femininity." This was feminism designed not to increase individual compensation, but to reveal and create power while undoing sex roles in all realms of life.

Looking for expressions of these objectives helps sort out what, today, is usefully "feminist." If feminism is in fact the struggle against sexist oppression, and not merely a thousand little paths toward women's personal fulfillment, we can orient ourselves toward struggles that not only benefit large numbers of women, but highlight the ways in which uncompensated labor shapes the meaning of what it is to be female.

Consider a movement rarely discussed in terms of feminism, certainly not in the *Atlantic*. Domestic Workers United (DWU) is "an organization of Caribbean, Latina, and African nannies, housekeepers, and elderly caregivers in New York, organizing for power, respect, fair labor standards and to help build a movement to end exploitation and oppression for all." They recently pushed a Domestic Workers Bill of Rights through the New York State Legislature against all expectations.

DWU allies with unions, but it isn't a union. Its members know that their labor is brutally exploited because of the sexist assumption that care work done in the home is an act of love and shouldn't be subject to such crass impositions as labor standards. Employers of domestic workers frequently refer to these workers as "part of the family" – meaning, as

always, that women in the kitchen don't need to be compensated. The DWU is fighting to gain recognition for labor that has been historically pushed from public view again and again.

The plight of the 1970s housewife and that of the domestic worker are not the same, but they are linked. It is an ideological sleight of hand that renders care workers "part of the family" instead of properly paid employees, in much the way that Marxist feminists described housewives as arbitrarily uncompensated for their contributions to the economy. The domestic workers' movement, located in the most rapidly growing sector of the US labor market, has the power to address the way un(der)compensated work underwrites the global economy by caring for the sick, young, and old.

The DWU's struggle serves a similar revelatory function to the Wages for Housework campaign. Once care work across social strata is considered real work, radical compensatory mechanisms become imaginable, most notably an unconditional basic income. That demand is intrinsically feminist because it recognizes the domestic work vital to the reproduction of labor power.

Wages for Housework insisted that labor did not mystically become love by virtue of occurring within the household. And members of the DWU are converting what has been a tactical weakness – the invisibility of female labor – into a demand for power and recognition. If the feminism of the future is about more than bloggers watching *Girls*, it will have to directly address how sexism enables the exploitation of women today, and draw on the rich tradition of fighting for the recognition of women's work. ■

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