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# Notes on the Occupy Movement

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The Occupy Wall Street movement was long coming but is certainly a sharp departure from the usual protest: instead of a one-day demonstration, a 24/7 encampment; not a list of demands, but a stark statement about wealth concentration. This movement seeks not justice, within the prevailing system, but, albeit implicit, a massive redistribution of wealth. Unlike the Madison Spring when direct action gave way to electoralism, the Occupy protesters disdain to be coopted by either political party and describe themselves as post-political. And it revives an almost forgotten practice of "participatory democracy", remembered only as the leading edge of the New Left of the 1960s. Let's stipulate these achievements and focus, instead on what comes next.

As these lines are written, several events threaten to alter the landscape fundamentally. A New York winter is upon us which makes an outdoor encampment difficult. The tent city at the park is, at best,a temporary solution, but the tents overwhelm the scene. The Mayor hints, darkly, that health conditions at Zucotti Park may force him to order the police to evacuate the site. How can Occupy avoid becoming a social service organization in the wake of the presence of homeless people and other deprived souls? And despite the movement's spread to more than 100 cities and towns around the country, and the huge Oakland march that shut down for a day the fifth largest US port, nagging questions remain: will this purportedly leaderless uprising craft an organizational plan that can help it survive ebb times? Are there other objectives beyond the sweeping call for income redistribution, a call that has been interpreted by liberal politicians as raising the taxes of the very rich? While it was a stroke of genius for the assembled protesters to refuse to reduce their resistance to a set of manageable demands, how long can utopian thought sustain them?

What "post-political" signifies, in the main, is Occupy's refusal to become entangled in mainstream electoral politics. But the movement has a class analysis when it poses 99% of the population as the have-nots against the 1% of the haves(in fact, the wealth concentration is in the hands of only 0.01% (a hundreth of one percent). But by posing the conflict in these terms a few aspects of the protest are masked: this is largely a movement of the dispossessed "new" middle class of salaried professionals. Of course, since the protest began older people, unemployed and employed workers, labor unions and progressives have joined the fray. Since the Depression of 2007-, they have discovered that the economy no longer has room for most of them. But alienation goes beyond joblessness and falling economic prospects. These grievances may be solved within a political system willing to accommodate some of the disaffected. What it cannot do is address political and cultural disaffection. Like the New Left that, for the most part, enjoyed a degree of affluence born of the favorable US position in the global economy and the permanent warfare state, the current generation of what C.Wright Mills termed "the new middle class" of brain and other salaried workers, harbors a deeper

critique of the system than the garden variety of left-liberal program of jobs, jobs, jobs.

The rise of temporary work has cast a huge shadow over the professional and technical caste. People need to work because wages are still the major source of food on the table and a roof over one's head. But very few jobs offer fulfillment. For millions life has become precarious. Increasingly, the job itself is under siege because employers—public and private—only hire on a contract basis, do not offer health care coverage, pensions or paid holidays and vacations. In short the precariate has reached the new middle class, where the term signifies the proletarianization of the once-privileged. The political system has failed to address this dimension of the crisis. It is less capable of addressing the social and cultural alienation that marks this revolt. For example, many college graduates are employed in one of the more precarious sectors, the service industry, especially food services. Although some servers earn a living wage, primarily on tips, more are stuck in third rate restaurants where tips are smaller and steady work is almost non-existent. Low wages and temporary employment have forced young people to share apartments and other living costs. If they want to live alone or with a partner, they are obliged to hold down more than one job. And, whereas the traditional labor movement once boasted that it was the movement that brought us the weekend, its decline and the rise of the non-union service economy has taken away Saturday and Sunday for many. Will the Occupy movement articulate the broader dimensions of alienation beyond income disparity? In other words, will it become the social movement of a generation? So far, there are few indications of a public discussion about these issues.

Finally, the question of organization, a perennial agony of movements of protest and resistance. The Occupiers understandably distanced themselves from a variety of predatory forces ranging from Tea Party members, left-liberal democrats to the seriously weakened socialist and communist groups. They reject the conventional forms of hierarchy, both for their own movement and for society. Internally, horizontalism has become an inviolable mantra and practice. When some of the organizers entertain the prospect of posing the problem of organization, of an office, new forms of governance, they hesitate on the belief that participants see the hated bureaucracy. Some even say that to pose the question has become risky because spontaneity is elevated to the status of religion among participants.

The Occupiers might do well to examine the history of radical organizations. They would discover previous efforts, and not only by anarchists, to implement democratic forms of organization that resist the normal patterns of elected leaders and representative government. One of the forms is governance by federation rather than central bureaucracy. In this model, the movement is united by co-equal participants who may send delegates to coordinating meetings. Another, the workers council and popular assembly movements that occasionally go beyond the workplace into neighborhoods. Of course, the danger of evolving into hierarchies is always present, an event that, together with ideological conflict destroyed the leading organization of the New Left, SDS.

Federation and popular assemblies presuppose a general agreement among participants with principles and analysis of the situation. In order to achieve these principles, a relatively long

period of discussion and education are necessary. Will the occupy movement initiate these processes in a sustained way? And if so, what are the starting points? It is hard to predict results, but we may be certain that lacking attention to forms of organization and an education and ideological process, the movement’s prospects are likely to be limited.

# Occupy Wall Street: “We Are What Democracy Looks Like!”

By | 2011: vol. 10, issue 4

Given how extraordinarily successful it has been both in its own terms and in its capacity to grab the attention of the media, *Occupy Wall Street* has been conveniently misunderstood by its supporters and detractors alike. Recently, Mayor Bloomberg patronized it haughtily, saying “It’s fun and it’s cathartic — it’s, I don’t know, it’s entertaining to go and to blame people, but it doesn’t get better by complaining about; it doesn’t get better by disrupting commerce (and) vilifying people.”(NYTimes, November 2).

Meanwhile, Bill Keller of the New York Times wrote from India (where people like capitalism just fine, he explained) in a tone of mocking disdain: “I’m willing to celebrate when the Occupiers… accomplish something more than organizing their own campsite cleanup, demonstrating their tolerance for tear gas, and distracting the conversation a little from the Tea Party.” (NYT op ed, October 31, 2011). Like Keller and Bloomberg, critics but also would-be supporters announce their comfort level with demands by demanding that OWS reveal *its* “demands.” The celebrity obsessed media, used to defining movements by leadership, search for the real “leaders.” Friends worry the movement is good-willed but amorphous and aimless, while critics dismiss it as another eruption of hippie anarchism –complaining kids who, standing for nothing, want to tear down everything; or perhaps are just offering an expedient feeding trough for the homeless.

To be sure, the occupiers themselves with their multi-hued cornucopia of perspectives are a diverse lot. As one travels from New York to Oakland to Chicago and Atlanta, and then on to Rome and London, the encampments embrace a panoply of causes, and contain tensions and fissure the protesters themselves acknowledge and even welcome. OWS has become a vessel into which people pour their own fears and aspirations, but that is a strength not a weakness. You can’t build a movement on a single narrow demand, however compelling it may be. Which may be why the movement has been slow to produce a defining document that will define it in, but at the cost of shoving lots of things out.

That is not to say there is not a unifying theme. It’s “occupy WALL STREET” not the Times Square military recruiting station or BP Oil Headquarters or Gracie Mansion. It’s about the MONEY stupid! The money that has put profits before people and left human values to be measured by price alone. The money that (with the complicity of the Supreme Court ) has replaced votes (one for each of us) with dollars (one for the 99 and 99 for the one!) and thereby replaced democracy with plutocracy.

Anyone who spends a little time at Zucotti Square, however, quickly learns that those

occupying Wall Street share more than the unifying conviction that money has undone the social compact; they share something even more precious: a belief that what democracy really is cannot be defined by how it is being practiced today. If the occupiers do not have demands, they have an agenda;  if they lack a palpable politics, they exemplify a powerful process that speaks to their principles.

To understand what's going on, look at what OWS *is*, not what it *does*. Start by taking seriously the ubiquitous signs asking "What does democracy look like?" and answering "WE are what democracy looks like!"  Look at the process, which is a bold attempt to embody an alternative paradigm of participatory engagement , one that offers an alternative to big league moneyball democracy.

What the process offers is a compelling rejection of that ***instrumentalism*** so beloved of American politicians — you know, ' the end justifies the means' so President Obama just has to raise funds from big-time bundlers and lobbyists despite his pledge not to do so, because how else can he get reelected? Or the hypocrites who temporize: "Yes, off-shore drilling does risk cataclysmic environmental disaster," but go on to explain how "we need the jobs and besides it means independence from foreign oil!"  It is crass instrumentalism of this kind that turns the protesters  against not only Wall Street and capitalism, but against politics as usual and the righteousness of politicians on both sides of the aisle who piously insist they are different, when they aren't.

The protesters' principles are then in their processes, and the processes are quite remarkable, not only for the contrast they offer to how we normally conduct business, but for how well they actually work.  The key process requires that all decisions, whether about tactics or money expended or principles or changes in structure be submitted to the General Assembly that convenes almost every day and is the source of the movements'  "general will" and hence its legitimacy. The G.A s process is maddingly open and transparent, and must deal with the inconvenience of a changing constituency, since all are welcome at assemblies and the crowd can change from night to night.

Moreover, and here is the both the glory and the peril of the process, decisions are taken by consensus. Not majority, not two thirds or three quarters, but consensus. Consensus that must be realized In an evolving constituency in successive meetings where full legitimacy comes only after every amendment is considered, every point of process and every concern is put "on stack" and aired; and where — most tellingly — every voice has to be heard, including those of participants so offended by a proposal that they respond with a "block" — signified by arms crossed in an X. Blocks must be registered, responded to and overcome (or not), if consensus is to prevail.

There is a mechanism that allows a 90% supermajority to overrule a block (or blocks), but it is rarely used. When the GA wanted to send $20,000 to Oakland to help bail out abused and arrested protesters there, what could have been a 20 minute meeting lasted for over two hours so that blocks could be removed by persuasion and amendments incorporated into  the motion.

And when a 95% supermajority was finally invoked last week to install a "spokes council" system that allows the GA to decentralize some of its less important and more technical questions to caucuses and committees ("spokes" in a wheel), it was only after several meetings over a full week that allowed extensive time and voice to a handful of objectors (in the end, over 300 said yes, 17 said no).

Whether taking decisions by consensus or by a 90%- plus supermajority, the process requires patience and tolerance. And a great deal of talk. Talk and debate and deliberation. And an extraordinary focus on understanding and addressing objections. It makes it much harder to pass (and thus to decide or do) anything, but every decision that is passed can claim a legitimacy that finds no counterpart in how we otherwise do business in the public or private spheres, often under the anything but transparent influence of covert "free market" monopolies, special interest lobbies and rivers of cash.

Gesture also plays a role in the OWS process: the block can seem rather vehement, but assent and dissent are more gentle, hands up with fingers twitching for yea, arms forward, hands down with the same twitch for nay. As if the GA were consulting aspen leaves fluttering in the wind. Drunks, crazies and disrupters with no interest in the process (a constant threat given OWS's diverse constituency) are dealt with gently as well: escorted off by — call them 'crazy-whisperers' — who exert control by suasion and kindness; or where that doesn't work, shielded from the assembly by a shirt held up in front of their faces, and perhaps drown out if they are screaming by repeated calls for a "MIC CHECK" from the patient crowd, which outlasts the disruptor.

Cynics on the right dismiss OWS as a bunch of socialists and collectivists, but I know of no democratic process so attuned to the autonomy and rights of individuals. Indeed, one of the serendipitous features of Gene the process in Zucotti park is the "peoples' microphone" (megaphone ) invoked by a facilitator who calls out "mic check "– an innovation necessitated by the refusal of the city to allow electronic voice amplification. With crowds of several hundred or more at the GA, individual voices cannot be heard, so speakers voice their concerns in snippets that are repeated (echoed) by the crowd at least once and sometimes twice in an expanding circule, so that the words can be heard on the periphery.

The Peoples' Mic is a clumsy process and makes complex and nuanced speech difficult. But it has two considerable democratic virtues: it forces relatively simple, straightforward speech that enhances clarity and communication; and it requires that in dealing with naysayers and "blocks" the majority must mouth and voice the actual words of those who disagree. How better to kindle a sympathy for minority voices than for their majority opponents to have to rehearse their protests, word for word, and even mimic their affect (for the peoples' microphone does that too)? And how fitting that a movement wedded to moral protest should be attuned to protests against its own actions that come from within.

Where does such a cumbersome yet truly democratic process come from? Rousseau? Jefferson? I call it "strong democracy" in my book on participatory governance. But the correct answer is

anarchism.  Anarchism!? But isn't that radical libertarianism? The triumph of the will of the heroic egoist — Ayn Rand's protagonists  John  Galt or Howard Roark —  over all the others? Surely anarchism means Rand and Nietzsche and Stirner  who reject not just government and the state, but all forms of authority and insist on the absolute sovereignty of the solitary self? of what Stirner calls '"the ego and its own"?

Not  at Occupy Wall Street. Because what media simplifiers watching OWS miss is that although anarchism is best known as a radical *individualist* rejection of every form of authority,  in favor of the absolute sovereignty of the solitary self,  it  has actually more often been represented by what we might call *communitarian* anarchism.  The kind associated with 19th century philosophers like Pierre Proudhon and Prince Kropotkin. Proudhon raged against property as "theft" (in his *What is Property*), but like Kropotkin in *Mutual Aid*, he assailed not common concern and cooperation but hierarchy and statist authoritarianism, even when they masquerade as  "democratic."

For communitarian anarchists like those at OWS (not that they call themselves that or necessarily know the background for what comes to them naturally), human beings are social animals that do not require a hierarchical state to practice democracy or to live under decisions and rules made by consensus. There are local processes that make "the state" unnecessary and allow neighborhood democracy to secure a common authority comprised by the full participation by all in the process.  Communitarian anarchism is what democracy looks like, and it is from communitarian anarchism that OWS's rules and processes seem for the most part to be drawn.

OWS may be naive and exasperating in its refusal to engage in ordinary politics and its disdain for voting when so much seems to turn on who is in the White house (think Supreme Court appointments,  for example). Surely they  would do better to acknowledge that capitalism is here to stay and that there are no systemic alternatives; to recognize that the challenge is to regulate and govern the system democratically rather than to abolish it.

Yet the occupiers know and show that American resentment, right and left, runs deeper; that there is something wrong intrinsically with how America does business that has impaired its leadership globally and undermined its democracy from within. That even when it is running smoothly, the system is deeply corrupted and its democratic ways badly compromised.  Greed, narcissism, avarice, self-interest and  egoism –radical individualism run amok and market ideology turned vicious — have  so corrupted the system, that it appears to be beyond saving.

So, take note Mayor Bloomberg and BIll Keller, protesters  are not complaining or playing the blame game. They are engaging with one another to develop an alternative, a paradigm shift: self-government in place of corrupt central government,  active participation in place of the culture of complaint, responsibility in place of cynicism. It may not be possible to govern a nation of 300 million this way, but it offers a powerful  riposte to the tyranny of money over everything under which we now live.

For too long we have taken our democracy for granted, assuming that it will ramble along, with or without us, in the name of somebody's interests and somebody else's money. Less government will fix it. Or more government. Voting will fix it. Obama will fix it. Or Michele Bachmann will fix it.

Occupy Wall Street is having none of it. Democracy itself is in deep trouble and so America is in trouble.  But there is another way, and we are that way. Occupy Wall Street speaks as our civic conscience and asks for deep reflection about who we are; and who, with engagement and a will to act, we might become. We will ignore OWS at the peril of the liberties about which we constantly chatter even as we sell, surrender and forfeit them.

# Walking Wall Street

By | 2011: vol. 10, issue 4

Certain times require a spark: not merely to ignite action but to foster some sense of historical understanding. This is one of those moments and Occupy Wall Street struck the match. Frustrated over the seemingly intractable character of the financial crisis that began in 2007, and the inability of established political organizations to do anything about it, American activists and anarchists of a new stripe took up a suggestion from the Canadian magazine Ad-Busters to occupy the center of New York's financial district and the heart of global capitalism. These activists were not part of some half-crazed mob of fanatics as suggested by Newt Gingrich, Eric Cantor, Bill O'Reilly and other luminaries of the Tea Party and Fox News. Occupy Wall Street was inspired by the Arab Spring but even more by the street protests in Greece, Italy, and other nations teetering on the brink of financial insolvency. Everywhere the insatiable greed and arrogant irresponsibility of banks "too large to fail" and their lavishly paid CEO's were generating the kind of economic inequality that was virtually unimaginable a generation ago. So it was that the bold actions of those who flocked to tiny Zuccotti Parkin Manhattan on September 17, 2011 produced a chain reaction of other occupations in major cities throughout the United States and nearly one thousand cities worldwide — undoubtedly with more to follow.

The ruling classes may not yet be trembling but now, at least, they have something to think about. If nothing else, and this is a great deal, Occupy Wall Street has changed the political discourse. For nearly two years, Americans have been caught between a rock and a hard place. Political debate has been stifled. Intent upon obliterating the welfare state, and turning the United States into an unrestricted playground for corporate capital, Republicans have waged war against President Barack Obama. Disclaiming responsibility for the legacy of President George W. Bush, whose reign was marked by the gutting of all corporate oversight, and the largest upward shift in wealth and income in American history, these reactionary free marketers wouldn't give an inch and they spit on the olive branches that were offered them. One deal followed another on health care, the bailouts, energy, and the deficits. Saddled with a significant minority of conservative "blue dog" Democrats, vilified by the Tea Party, Obama's policies appeared as one long attempt to appease the far right and mitigate its agenda. Even the most stalwart of his former supporters were becoming disillusioned and demoralized. The old talk of "hope" and a "new day" rang increasingly hollow with each report of rising unemployment coupled with rising corporate profits. Traditional demonstrations inWashingtonand a few other big cities sponsored by unions and various left-wing coalitions were sparsely attended. They lacked energy and a purposeful sense of solidarity.

Occupy Wall Street stepped into the breech. Its slogan "We are the 99%!" sought to highlight the blatant unfairness of a situation in which, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (September 9, 2009), two-thirds of the nation's total income gains from 2002 to 2007

flowed to the top-1 percent of U.S. households. Taxation is outrageously skewed to the rich. Federal bank bailouts show that the most powerful institutions are not willing to play by the rules that they impose on everyone else. Dealing with an unemployment rate of above 9% is far less important than shrinking federal budgetary deficits for the 1% of America that controls nearly half its wealth. Outsourcing becomes just another way for the kings of capital to find cheaper labor –and deregulation allows them to work every loophole to increase their profits. Recession and reaction spurred Occupy Wall Street and, even more than that, its supporters among unions, community groups, and everyday people who undertook the peaceful marches to City Hall, Times Square, and elsewhere.

Occupy Wall Street had an anarchist flavor from the beginning. Banners magically appeared and slogans were coined. Tents were pitched, sleeping bags tossed one next to the other, food was donated, first aid stations were manned, and sanitation facilities were imported. Street performers provided entertainment and music. The style was that of the 1960s. A flurry of practical innovation took place in Zuccotti Park. Political forums spontaneously arose with a host of committees, unwritten rules of procedure to allow even the most shy and reserved to participate, and a general assembly. Dozens of plans are making the rounds on the web. Some are naïve and others disturbing. A few people envision shutting down the Federal Reserve and ending bailouts. There is also talk about a National Convention on July 4$^{th}$ resting on the election of one man and one woman from each of the 435 existing congressional districts to a general assembly that will then present a list of grievances and demands to all branches of government: refusal to act on these various petitions will supposedly result in recalls of all governmental officials including those sitting on the Supreme Court. (Linette Lopez, “Occupy Wall Street’s Plans for a National Convention” in Reader Supported News: 15 October 2011). But, then,Occupy Wall Street has only been in existence for a short time. Its activists have shown no lack of visionary ferment while coordinating various days of action.

Occupy Wall Street has its pretentions. And, for the time being, they have been inflated by less a critical than a pandering media. The young people in the tents and the sleeping bags, who were prepared for an indefinite stay, are deeply disillusioned with representative democracy. All of them consider their movement new – a break from the past. But it is actually a contemporary expression of a tradition that reaches back to the ParisCommune, the Mass Strike of 1905, the workers councils of 1918-1923, the Spanish Anarchists of 1936, and the global uprisings of 1968. In the United States, more specifically, Occupy Wall Streetstands in a direct line with the radical tradition of participatory democracy, the town meeting, and the horizontal organization of power. Its anarchist advocates call for a new language, a new consensus, and even a new spirituality that rejects ideology and “political” conflict. What might be termed the *core* of the movement is obsessed with the thought of being co-opted by those liberals and socialists on the *periphery* still willing to play ball with capital and the political establishment.

There is nothing wrong with thinking about new ideas on political participation and mobilization. But self-styled radicals should begin thinking more cogently about the structural imperatives of the capitalist accumulation process, its contradictions, and the dynamics that

produced the financial crisis in the first place. Idealists need to consider how democracy might enter the workplace. Democrats cannot afford to ignore how the lack of vertical structures of procedure and accountability made it easy for tight-knit sectarian groups to manipulate participatory movements in the past. Imagination is required to develop new forms of solidarity that link class and identity, centralization and decentralization, as well as institutional accountability and democratic participation. These are long-range undertakings and, arguably, utopian. But they contribute to fostering a class ideal and an ethical framework for the pursuit of more concrete tasks. Occupy Wall Street is (for right or wrong) already identified in the public mind with bringing the troops home, free education, regulating capital, equitable tax codes, and placing "people before profits."

Liberal "pragmatists" should not feel too smug. They have not exactly faced up to the parochial and energized minions of the Tea Party. Their criticisms are also often hypocritically used to justify a return to business as usual. Asking what has been "accomplished" or the inevitable follow-up questions about "tactics" and "goals," more often than not serves as an indication of bad faith. Occupy Wall Street has sparked world-wide demonstrations with millions of participants – all while the cynics were making their wisecracks.  It alone has responded to the economic and political class war initiated by the Bush Administration. Not liberal pragmatists or political professionals but the idealists and the radicals have driven the Tea Party and its Republican sycophants off the front pages. Occupy Wall Street has energized the unions and community groups. Occupations in different cities with different needs and different constituencies have created publicity for a plethora of progressive and radical issues ranging from free higher education and jobs for teachers to aid for the elderly and animal rights. Occupy Wall Street  has also provided the impetus – and a kind of practical legitimacy — for what has become a more aggressive jobs-oriented left-turn by the Obama Administration. Those are all good things.

Tempering the whip of the market, controlling capital and preventing its poisoning of the electoral process all call for strengthening the bureaucratic welfare state – not abolishing it. Dealing with these concerns in practice assumes making this explicit in theory. But that admission does not compromise Occupy Wall Street. Quite the contrary: changes of this sort will not come without public outrage, without radical attempts to mobilize the base, and without radical dreams of a new and better society. Formulating specific policies and legislation is what the movement is about: it is the province of the pragmatists and the technocrats. Occupy Wall Street can best protect itself from them  — and mitigate the inevitable dangers of bureaucracy and co-optation – simply by continuing to do what it is already doing: target ever new sites of injustices, highlight grievances, build class solidarity, and inspire mass action. To the extent that Occupy Wall Street is successful it will increase its ability to criticize and badger the progressive establishment to address the needs of working people and the poor. The fact of the matter is that the core and the periphery, the idealists and the pragmatists, the mass movement and the political establishment are fare ultimately interdependent. Each set of forces is different in what it can and cannot do. Tensions will inevitably exist between them. Especially in the United States, however, spontaneous radicalism and organized progressivism are now feeding off one another. And they are doing so

in a remarkably constructive way. Such is the fascinating dialectic has turned Occupy Wall Street into “the tipping point” of contemporary politics.

# Labor's Rank-and-File Owes OWS a Thank-You Card for its PR Help

By | 2011: vol. 10, issue 4

The Occupation movement has been unfairly but predictably criticized in the mainstream media for having an ill-defined political agenda and no clear path to institutionalizing its struggle against long-standing abuses of corporate power in America.

While all that gets sorted out in its free-wheeling "general assemblies around the country, Occupy Wall Street (OWS) has already given our timorous, unimaginative, and often politically confused unions a much-needed ideological dope slap.

Some might describe this, more diplomatically, as a second injection of "outside-the-box" thinking and new organizational blood. The first infusion of those scarce commodities in labor came earlier this year during the completely unexpected labor-community uprising against GOP Governor Scott Walker in Cairo-by-the-Lake (aka Madison, Wisconsin).

I can confidently predict that OWS, as a worthy and widespread successor to the Wisconsin uprising, will be long remembered even if it leaves no other historical footprints than its brilliant popular "framing" of the deepening class divide in this country.

In his 1974 memoir and union history, Jim Matles, a founder of the left-led United Electrical Workers (UE), reminded readers that labor struggles are about "them and us"—or, as OWS puts it, "the 1 percent" vs. the "99 percent."

Unfortunately, most other unions have long relied on high-priced Democratic Party consultants, their focus groups and opinion polling, to shape labor's public "messaging" in much less effective fashion.  The results of this collaboration have been unhelpful, to say the least. Organizations that are supposed to the voice of the working class majority have instead positioned themselves–narrowly and confusedly–as defenders of America's "middle class," an always fuzzy construct now being rendered even less meaningful by the recession-driven downward mobility of millions of people.

As SUNY professor Michael Zweig has argued in his book, *The Working Class Majority: America's Best-Kept Secret* (Cornell ILR Press, 2000), labor's never ending mantra about the "middle class" leaves class relations—and the actual class position of most of the population–shrouded in rhetorical fog.  Zweig acknowledges that the working class in America today looks quite different than the blue-collar proletariat of the last century, which leads many to believe that differences in "status, income, or life-styles" define where they stand on the economic and social ladder. But  "the real basis of social class lies in the varying amounts of power people have at work and in the larger society.…The sooner we realize that classes exist

and understand the power relations that are driving the economic and political changes swirling around us, the sooner we will be able to build an openly working class politics."

As Zweig would agree I'm sure, labor's "framing" not only lacks the clear resonance of that employed by the new anti-capitalist campaigners of OWS; "one of the great weaknesses" of the standard union view of class "is that it confuses the target of political conflict." When the working class disappears into an amorphous "middle class," not only do the "working poor" (a mere 46 million strong) drop out of the picture, but "the capitalist class disappears into 'the rich.' And when the capitalist class disappears from view, it cannot be a target."

Well, thanks to OWS —but not most unions—that target is back in view, big time. So now, even some union officials are racing to catch up with a grassroots movement that has provided a far more favorable public opinion context for waging key contract fights like the on going CWA-IBEW battle with Verizon.

During the two-week strike by 45,000 Verizon workers in August, union PR people issued leaflets urging support for their "fight to defend middle-class jobs." This characterization of strike goals enabled Verizon to run newspaper ads claiming that the $75,000 a year or more earned by telephone technicians made them part of the "upper middle class"—and thus, apparently not worthy of sympathy from customers or members of the public whose jobs provide family incomes closer to the national or regional average. By late October, CWA activists were brandishing new anti-Verizon signs at a "corporate pig roast" held right around the corner from "Cuomoville," the OWS encampment located in downtown Albany (where vegan and vegetarian fare prevails over pork). This time, the union message was more universalist: "We are the 99 percent!"

While it's heartening to see union leaders making little pilgrimages to the new Lourdes—aka Zuccotti Park and similar high-profile camping sites around the country–I remain skeptical about what miraculous transformations are likely to occur among the organizationally old, blind, and lame of American labor. The interactions between protestors and union members at the rank-and-file level have, of course, been inspiring and maybe even transformative. But a labor officialdom so long in the clutches of inside the Beltway PR consultants is not likely to cast off the crutch of bad "middle class" messaging. Only union members, more in touch with what side they're on and what class they're part of, can make that course correction in labor's communications strategy.

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# Occupy Together and ‘Mass Left Radicalism’: Great to see!

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Occupy Together and ‘mass left radicalism’: Great to see! By Bill Fletcher, Jr. Occupy Together did not come out of nowhere precisely because it was the result of a convergence of forces and factors without any of which it is highly unlikely that we would have seen the movement gain steam. Credit, however, must go to the Arab democratic uprisings that began in early 2010 and spread, not only throughout the Arab World but also to Africa and eventually Europe…and Madison, Wisconsin! The courage and creativity of the Arab people in response to years of repression and desperation was truly inspirational, and many people in the USA, through the wonders of modern technology, watched and noticed.

The Occupy Together movement, however, is not a carbon copy of other movements, though clearly it has been both inspired by and learned from others. It is an example of a spontaneous eruption against economic injustice and the results of years of organizing which holds the character of what I would identify as “mass left radicalism.” Mass left radicalism refers to a broad-based, systemic critique of the capitalist system that is rooted not in any one Left organization, collection of organizations or even any one ideology. Its base is to be found in that 30% of the population that opinion polls over the last three years have identified as being “open to socialism” and critical of capitalism. To be clear this does not in any way suggest that there is a consensus as to the nature of socialism or what a progressive post-capitalist society would look like. Quite the contrary, what it does suggest is that there are literally millions of people who are fed up with the system for any host of reasons and are looking for alternatives.

The Occupy Together movement, as broad as it is, offers a home for anti-capitalism. Its critique of Wall Street has not strayed into anti-Semitism and conspiracy theories, despite the efforts of right-wing populists such as Ron Paul supporters and LaRouche supporters. The movement represents an open display of distain for the political and economic elites that have ruined the lives of millions and show no awareness of the need for progressive and radical answers to the current crises (economic and environmental). It carries with it the passion of Martin Luther and his posting of the “Ninety-five Theses” which helped to catalyze the Reformation.

The breath of the Occupy Together movement is unlikely to be united in one organizational form. It may parallel the Tea Party movement, in certain respects, with different tendencies emerging. There is nothing wrong with that. Mass left radicalism is the soil in which an on-going movement with a proliferation of organizations can emerge.

Yet, the question that hovers above the movement is a simple though complex one: where do we go from here? There is no one answer in large part because the mass left radicalism of the

Occupy Together movement has competing tendencies and the participation of various social movements ranging from student activists to environmentalists to the unemployed to an increasing number of activists of color (themselves representing different movements and forms of activism). That said, there are some intriguing possibilities that can not only push the flowering of mass left radicalism but also help it join with the broader progressive movement toward the building of a progressive majoritarian bloc. With that in mind, the following are some suggestions for consideration.

For one, the movement needs to script its narrative. There is a great popular narrative that has been developing in the Occupy Together movement which describes the deterioration of conditions in capitalist USA. The narrative focuses on Wall Street and other capitalists for their greed and avarice. Yet the movement cannot rely on the mainstream media—the media that attempted to ignore it and later ridicule it—to memorialize the narrative. Rather the movement needs its own scribes, for lack of a better term, that turn the narrative into picture books, pamphlets and the myriad of on-line media in such a way as to connect with the average person. The narrative is more than a story-line. It serves as a framework through which regular people can interpret their experiences and reality. To put it another way, we need 21st century Thomas Paines producing our own versions of Common Sense.

Two, we not only need further actions—more about this later—but we need alternative power centers that bring together the dispossessed and despised, to borrow from the words of African American labor and civil rights leader A. Philip Randolph. In our book Solidarity Divided, Fernando Gapasin and I propose what we term “working people’s assemblies.” We were thinking about gatherings of representatives of various social movements and organizations rooted among working people from specific geographic areas to construct an agenda that speaks to the needs of what the Occupy Together movement calls the “99%ers” (which is actually more like the bottom 80-90%, but who’s counting). We need an agenda around which the broad array of forces that support the Occupy Together movement plus more, can not only gather but within which they see themselves. Such an agenda and assembly could become an on-going juncture and power center challenging unjust and disreputable authority.

Three, there needs to be a range of tactical options. This can include land occupations, i.e., moving into abandoned land and buildings and seizing them in the name of the people in order to create urban farms (with abandoned land), housing for the homeless, and stalls for those involved in the informal economy.

There are myriad of other tactics, but one that should not be ignored is the electoral realm. There has arisen a tendency among some to counterpose the activism of the Occupy Together movement with electoral activism. This is a major mistake. We should see in the Occupy Together movement the sort of energy that can help to propel forward genuine left-of-center leaders into the electoral realm, or support those who are already there. Such forces can translate the energy and direction of the Occupy Together movement into a concrete platform that helps to build and unify the progressive majoritarian bloc we need to both defeat the political Right as well as lay the foundation for the sort of social transformation that ultimately

needs to come to the USA.

There is no perfection in the Occupy Together movement but there certainly is beauty. This is a moment to support this effort but also think through next steps before the energy dissipates. This is too important a time and too important a rising.

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# Wall Street Walkers

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Resistance always “comes out of nowhere” and smug establishments always are bewildered by it. Such was the case with the irresistible rise of the American civil rights movement, the May 1968 upheaval in France, and the breakup of the Soviet bloc. Just over a month ago it looked like mighty financial players would have it all their own way, awarding trillions to banking malefactors and dispensing costs to everyone else: the old pattern of socialism for the wealthy and social Darwinism for the hoi polloi. This malevolent process has not been reversed but the institutionalized deceits enabling it to go unchallenged no longer work as well as they used to. The ‘Occupy Wall Street’ movement, long overdue, will not subside. This is the real thing, the eruption of a countermovement against shameless pro-wealthy policies promoted by both major Parties. The Republicans are incorrigibly hypocritical about, and the Democrats are hopelessly hypnotized by, free market rhetoric (and campaign contributors). Corporate mass media will mock, maul and misrepresent this many-stranded movement until the sustained growth of the new organizing forces make moguls reckon honestly with it.

Vulgar marxists have scored a point. The remorseless squeeze that the economic system, rigged (more than usual) by the super-rich over decades, has inflicted on working people reached the strangling point. Even the slickest propaganda has  real world limits. You cannot get away with telling people who can’t afford to pay needlessly soaring bills that they are doing fine. A swelling but inchoate opposition finally hit on a key crystallizing slogan, compelling sound bites (reflecting deeper thinking), and conjured up an organizational vehicle through which to fuse discontent. The much-mocked leaderlessness, and lack of central manifesto, of the movement is a strength in the early going when authorities unleash every dirty trick in their bulging repertoire to derail this oncoming locomotive. This formidable anarchic movement is the threat that Rightwing billionaires contrived the Tea Party to divert popular energy from becoming. The Tea Partiers blindly blamed the State and refused to notice the privileged private powers who stealthily captured that State.

Since the much-maligned 1960s, which was the high point of real wages, social benefits and civil rights, the Right has connived in every well-funded way to cut salaries and strip rights of “average” Americans, whatever their skin color. Right-wingers detest the 60s because it was a rare era when improving conditions fueled mass demands for social justice at home and abroad. The idolizing of the ‘market’ since Ronald Reagan’s reign camouflaged corporate ploys to escape regulation and to behave lawlessly. Pollute as you like, mistreat workers as you like, corrupt the political system as much as you like – and do it all legally. There comes a point, beyond despair, where ordinary families cannot take it anymore and scramble to find ways to fight back to restore some semblance of decency, where a society again strives to redirect the wealth generated through collective labor for the common good. The Democratic Party, and Obama, are no friends to the people clamoring in the streets but quite soon they will try ever so

insincerely to be.

The odious outcome of this four decade squeeze, relieved only by shiny bubbles and easy credit, is destitution for tens of millions and gnawing insecurity for all but the top tier. The Great Recession, as Paul Krugman calls it, is not a 'double-dip phenomenon. It never ended for the 99%. The US would be sinking in an endless 1930s-style Depression except for the few remaining props of welfare state measures that the Right's sorry train of presidential candidates all fight so fiercely and deviously to discard. Donate your social security money to Wall Street. It's safe there, for as long as they can wring commissions and fees from it. The Right's ideas are confetti. The Tea Party is likely to lose swarms of adherents as a genuine debate arises in the country over the actual causes of national woes. At a Chicago "Occupy" rally I spotted several signs that were Tea Party holdovers carried by folks who don't understand how the economy really works but may be in for a bracing education. On the other hand, for another possibly telling anecdote, I met a disgruntled Chicago commodities broker, whose clearing bank headed by Jon Corzine just crashed, who utterly identified with the 99%. A movement with that range of allegiance is not going to vanish.

The recitation of motivating calamities ought to be familiar. All productivity gains since 1971 were siphoned by the top bracket. Had those gains been split according to the previous pattern, families would have at least 10 thousand dollars more to spend each year and there would be no excuse for cutting social programs. The US government, hitherto guided by frothing free marketers, devised a technique of practicing Keynesianism exclusively for rich people via bailouts and quantitative easing, which hurts everyone else by driving up prices during a severe economic downturn – which otherwise ought to be impossible. A Wall Street acquaintance told us that his cronies knew the instant the Government announced the first "quantitative easing" cash avalanche that it would flow to Wall Street, which was the only mechanism that could handle influxes of that magnitude, which they then would nudge into commodities speculation to uphold the fortunes of the very people who crashed the economy. Oh yes, and how many troops are being left behind to run Iraq and keep defense industries humming along after Obama "withdraws"?

Obama's 2008 election demobilized and gulled the very constituencies who otherwise would have applied pressure on government to undertake true remedial, if not radical, policies.  In the 1930s 'Make me do it," is what Franklin D Roosevelt encouragingly dared popular organizations to do as he was assembling the New Deal that saved capitalism from itself. Unlike FDR, Obama clearly does not care about people who lack connections and resources, and never really did.  The next question is what is to be done, and I'm not sure that I or any other analyst will come up with answers more creative and potent than will emerge naturally from the growing movement. For now, I'm just glad it's there.

# Go to Wall Street

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I have often remarked that Occupy Wall Street filled a hole in the American democracy. Even I, a skeptic of the intentions of many business institutions and a constant critic of current policies, didn't quite realize there was so big a hole. I thought America's true concerns were being diverted, even thwarted, by special interests, new procedural obstacles in Congress, and an ideologically backward Supreme Court. What I didn't fully grasp was that the anger, frustration and confusion of the America people were not getting conveyed to government, the media or even many progressive think tanks.

To the contrary, there was a lot of talk about why the unemployed were not speaking up, why so many economically hurting Americans were voting for Republicans who wanted to rip up the social safety net, and why so few voted at all. Americans could have voted differently, if they cared to, we were told. Americans often didn't vote at all.

Suddenly, this has changed. The growth of OWS and its proliferation around the world is something of a miracle. Contrary to all the pros, who demand that political groups have clear objectives and policy changes in mind, those who launched OWS struck a deep vein in America and elsewhere. Many Americans were angry, but they apparently did not know how to channel it or felt it futile to try. Apparently, many found the nation's current democratic institutions and alleged free press not worth bothering about lost faith in them. Now someone at last was giving them voice.

The instinct was right at the start. Go to Wall Street. That's not only where the crisis was begat, but it's also where all the power is. Washington is not on the American power map, in truth. Power is in money because elections are so expensive now. Power is where the money is, not where the legislation is passed. And even much of the legislation is now written by lobbyists.

And much of the top 1 percent is on Wall Street. Those who manage businesses and are in the top 1 percent are also really beholden to the Street as well. They make their money now through stock options, which in turns requires them to get the share price up. Once Wall Street worked for business, now business works for Wall Street.

To poke around at a few policy points, however important, would not have worked. The reason is simple. Too much has gone wrong in America. When the easy=chair pundits say that OWS has to work on solutions, I can understand the OWS participants skepticism. They have been told this for years. They have been told that most cynical of things as well: that bipartisanship is how you get things done.

Really? Are small compromises going to put the nation on the right track? This nation needs

a radically reformed healthcare system, trillions of dollars over ten years of investment, a generous social net as the job machine fails and people fall into outright poverty, and serious taxes on the well-off. It needs public financing of elections and a press that is not essentially part of the entertainment conglomerate monopoly. Is there a bipartisan middle that will get to that?

The OWS people I speak to want to learn about the options, about what happened to America. Democrats and Republics, for the most part, won't tell them. The mainstream press for the most part won't, either. But I'd like to impress upon them that there are exceptions. There are Congress people whose constructive, deeply held and accurate views have been checked by financial power and political stalemate. They should be sought out. There are members of even the major media who understand and will carry the message.

For now, I think OWS and their affiliates around the world should ask questions, not give answers. Funny how their educated, established, experienced elders (OWS are mostly young) are telling them to establish policy demands. In other words, work up your own answers. On balance, most of them are still seeking answers because they know they don't know it all, unlike their elders. Such humility could serve the rest of us pretty well.

But there may come a time when the movement needs a goal. For me, they must for now go where they see injustice. Their cause is not narrow economic reform, but social justice. We have been told that a free market would lead to social justice. It hasn't. It hasn't even led to true prosperity. We need a new mix.

So when people scoff at this movement for not having a clear agenda, I answer that they do. Go to shine a light on injustice. And, furthermore, they have seen that your answers have failed. Something's missing in America, in their minds, and they are still searching for it. They are mostly right. I'd like to see them connect with some members of Congress. I'd like to see some splinter groups fight for some change, like public financing of elections and against the absurd historical twist that has given us austerity economics in so many places around the world.

If that takes a while, that's ok. Even if the weather gets the better of them this winter, they have shown remarkable grace under pressure. Maybe that will work. That, and giving voice to an angry and confused America that is likely well down the road of decline.

# Catalytic Conversion

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"Occupy Wall Street" has had tremendous effects even if they were all to pack up their tents and leave right now. It has refocussed the political agenda after years of contrived misdirection by the legislators and "official" commentators who depend on Wall Street for patronage. It has put looting and its consequent inequality firmly at the center of discourse, and despite the organizers' insouciance about mere electoral politics, the Occupation surely played a role in the reversals of the Republican right agenda on November 8th.

OWS has provoked mixed reactions from across the traditional spectrum. Some on the orthodox left were bemused about how a bunch of counter-culturals with no recognizable (and thus attackable) ideology had managed so much more publicity and, dare we say, effect, than several generations of traditional marches, petitions and rallies by unions, parties and NGOs.

In many a sectarian committee room there is probably much gnashing of teeth with frustration at their inability to seize the leadership of a leaderless movement and set it on the correct path of party building. Of course, OWS is less leaderless than it pretends, but the non-leadership has made a pragmatic principle out of the old religious maxim that anonymous good deeds are worth ten times more than those with names attached.

They had worked for long weeks before hand, preparing for the logistics of food and comfort as well as developing ground rules – above all of non-violence and non-provocation. They bemused traditional leftists by refusing to draw up a shopping list of demands, which, one suspects designedly defused the sectarian objections that would have certainly have followed any such declaration. There have been some attempts to draw up a program, but some of the published results almost sound like parodies, like the discussions of the radical groups in "The Life of Brian." Their vacuity is as good as nothing!

That and the flat structure allows OWS to distance itself from would-be hijackers such as, in early November, the 9-11 Truthers who piggy-backed on the original protest with "Occupy Building 7," or, presumably any other infiltrators.

Not to detract from OWS's considerable achievements, they did not have to to reinvent the wheel. The occupation drew from the union-inspired occupation of the Wisconsin state capitol and in some of its showier aspects draws on the more flamboyant end of the progressive spectrum such as "Billionaires for Bush." Echoes of occupations and situationist tactics from the sixties ring round Zuccotti Square.

Like the Wisconsin protestors, OWS also learnt from the Arab Spring: occupy a prominent public place, get attacked by thugs in the name of order – and use social media to publicize those excesses. The NYPD obliged when a senior police officer was videoed unprovoked,

walking over to women protestors and pepper-spraying galvanizing active participation and support from many people who would otherwise have been passive supporters.

OWS has two roles – on the one hand, its internal dynamics, which cement group solidarity and maintain enthusiasm for long occupation. Even if the rituals of the daily assembly, how to agree or disagree with varying finger wiggles, the human microphone and so on are not exactly calculated to bring in the broad masses, they do keep a sense of solidarity and involvement.

Self consciously taking the collective role of Mohamed Bouazizi as "the single spark that lit a prairie fire," – without actually spontaneously combusting themselves, OWS is a catalyst. Catalysts can promote reactions even if they are not affected by the various components, which might stay inert if not for the presence of the catalyst. In some ways, the question is why the various ingredients of the American (and indeed the global) situation had not exploded earlier. The combination of OWS's astuteness, timing, location and the fortune of gratuitous police violence have produced success far beyond their wildest dreams.

The causes for an explosion of anger are manifest. Unemployment, immiseration and insecurity spreading: bankers and financiers expecting taxpayers to pay for their mistakes while rewarding themselves with ever-increasing bonuses and fighting off all attempts at regulation, while the legislative process has rarely been so visibly dysfunctional and disconnected from the electoral base. The ruling on the "personhood" corporations was just one part of a process that saw corporation-bought legislators blocking almost all measures to ameliorate the crisis or its effects on ordinary people let alone take remedial measures to prevent a repetition.

However, while ordinary Americans were seething with anger, with few exceptions, none of their elected representatives articulated that anger and one reason was the amount of money that Wall Street firms made available to candidates on both sides.

At a BBC seminar years ago, I asked Tom Brokaw why television had missed the Savings and Loans scandal and he explained that "no one had raised it on the hill." That was not completely true, Rep. Henry Gonzales of Texas was constantly raising it, and being ignored as the major media went with the Washington consensus of those with their hands in the till, rather than the reality expressed by alleged "fringe" figures.

But now, when Bernie Sanders and others raise the issue of the crisis, it goes viral on alternative media. The 99% were not a silent majority: they were a muffled majority in the major media. Even so, respected economists were articulating reality and people were listening. Even Paul Volcker former Chair of the Federal Reserve shocked his former colleagues by sympathizing, "It obviously reflects a feeling of restiveness and concern, which I guess is understandable." The discontent was in the air, like firedamp in a coal-mine waiting for a spark

The showmanship of OWS, the location itself, and the ill-considered officer whose pepper spraying was "worse than a crime: it was a blunder," ignited all those compounds of discontent. Imaginative and astute New York union leaderships realized that the protest

brought their issues to the foreground and helped without trying to take to the helm.  New York's radical tradition, conveniently existing in the same city as Wall Street, came back to life in solidarity.

To the poll-evaluated satisfaction of the public, the movement put in the pillory the financial engineers who had  brought about the immolation of their world economy had hidden in the smoke and directed the spotlight at Obama, at government spending, at social security and made "entitlement" a pejorative.

The movement made some Democrats choose between their campaign donations and the voters and gave space for others to articulate what they thought anyway. It created space, even on the traditional political playing fields, for the left field to come out fighting. We all owe OWS a huge debt, but unless we indulge in dreams of tumbrils and barricades, the battlefield to be won is electoral – a long March through the government institutions of a kind that many of those shivering Winter Soldiers in Zuccotti Park probably disdain.

# The Originality of OWS

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The political movements of the left that I have participated in over many decades were almost always focused on or prioritized particular issues (wars, civil liberties, civil rights, poverty, collective bargaining, etc.) and/or particular subsections of the population (African-Americans, women, gay people, immigrants, etc.). The authorities almost always took advantage of that focus to separate and isolate the movement from society generally. They were often successful. Even when the authorities failed to provoke general hostility to the movement, they were able to prevent the development of more than a general sympathy for it.

In the short history of OWS and its spread to date, I am struck by its impressive insistence on remaining a movement around a very general and inclusive critique of an unjust economy (99% against 1%) that has corrupted much of US politics and culture. The net result is a built-in *systemic* critique, sometimes explicit (remarkably often named as capitalism) and almost always implicit. The hesitation to choose among and focus on specific demands reflects the wisdom of maintaining the broad, systemic critique. The taboo against systemic critique – a legacy of post-war anti-communism – seems to be broken. Nonetheless, the struggle to select and prioritize specific demands needs to take time and great care, especially if that struggle is to be accomplished without losing the invaluable systemic critique and demand for change. Most other movements of the left could not accomplish that to their detriment and often destruction.

In its short history, OWS seems already well along in discovering and instituting a new kind of leadership system and organization. The task is daunting and its accomplishment has likewise eluded most left movements in the past. The polarities to avoid are (1) purely horizontal collectives lacking the coordination and shared focus without which massive duplications and wastes of energy and effort breed disorientation and demoralization, and (2) conflict-ridden power concentrations that dissipate and de-energize general initiative and enthusiasm. Here too, interesting explorations of how to navigate between these polarities are underway in OWS. The US left is littered with the debris of movements that crashed on these polarities and/or atrophied from settling into one or the other.

OWS is rooted in the mass disaffection felt about the basic political economy of the US. Those dominating economics, politics and culture seem determined to keep the society moving in just those directions that will deepen that disaffection and thereby strengthen OWS. Income and wealth inequality, alienation from politics, deteriorating job, educational and retirement opportunities all conspire to recruit for OWS. The increased stresses and strains of personal life and relationships do likewise. OWS has already managed to exert combined political and personal attractions on a broad public.

Since 2007, the US has been engaged in this sequence of social events: a capitalist crisis, a trickle-down economic recovery program (that helped the top but never trickled down to anyone else), and an austerity program to pay for that trickle down program. Europe experienced a parallel engagement. However, Europe had much more viable and in-tact labor unions and anti-capitalist political parties and party factions. They enabled the mobilization of Europeans against austerity programs and in some cases also against the trickle-down policies and crisis-ridden capitalism that produced austerity programs. They also reaffirmed and reinforced existing organizational patterns that did not attract much of the new energy emerging on the left.

In contrast, the US has taken longer to react and respond. Yet therein lies an important dialectic of opposites. Precisely because the US has long-declining and therefore weak labor unions and no significantly influential anti-capitalist parties, opposition to the crisis-trickle-down-austerity sequence takes much longer to form and mobilize. People in the US have to rebuild old shells of organization from the bottom up or build altogether new organizations. Yet with this difficulty comes a certain distance from and relative freedom to consider, evaluate and pick carefully among the many old habits, presumptions, organizational forms and styles that have demonstrated their strengths and weaknesses in and for left movements.

In Europe, those oppositional forces that seek to start afresh and independent of the older movements – for example, the various “indignant” groupings – slip quickly into disunity and tension with the existing left organizations. This weakens and divides the left just when the opposite is needed most. In the US, OWS may well be able to avoid that problem precisely because of the old left’s long period of decline and demoralization.

The stunning growth and social influence of OWS in its few weeks of existence augur well for its survival and maturation.

# The Way We Protest Now

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It is increasingly evident that, in pivotal realms such as global economics and international affairs, the United States has lost its superiority – its capacity to lead. In fact, since the September 11 attacks, American democracy has been on a course of precipitous decline – a fact confirmed by two economically and morally draining foreign wars, excessive restrictions on civil liberties at home, and a corporate aversion to economic innovation and risk-taking, resulting in a painful and disheartening "jobless recovery" in whose grip we will remain, if the economic forecasters are to be believed, for the foreseeable future. Here, the tragedy is that the decline is the result of a self-inflicted wound – a consequence of conscious policy choices that have negatively impacted our national well-being. Thus if one surveys the state of American politics in the aftermath of last summer's debilitating debt ceiling stalemate – an irresponsible game of political brinkmanship that could easily have precipitated another major economic tailspin – it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the political system has broken down, and that there is no imminent remedy in sight capable of repairing it. When one side of the congressional aisle (the Republicans) openly proclaims that its primary goal is to prevent the party-in-power (the Democrats) from implementing programs that might redress the nation's socio-economic ills, the civic ideals upon which the nation was founded have been disqualified.

A keen awareness of this situation, and of the dearth of realistic prospects for remedying it, has fueled the fires of the Occupy Together movements that have by now mushroomed in over 150 cities across United States: among them, Atlanta, Austin, Denver, Oakland, Orlando, Nashville, and, of course, New York.

Typically, extra-parliamentary protest movements reflect a deep-seated frustration with the political status quo. They intentionally avoid existing institutional mechanisms of conflict resolution, since they regard those mechanisms as essentially dysfunctional – or, at the very least, as inadequate to address the pressing problems at hand.  The Occupy Wall Street movement has performed a great service in giving voice to this sense of well-nigh total frustration with politics qua business-as-usual. The standard criticisms of it that have been aired – that OWS is disorganized, unfocused, self-marginalizing, and self-indulgent – miss the point. Only those who are politically tone deaf would deny that there is something admirably utopian about the activists' purism: their idealistic belief in the values of political transparency and consensus, their strict adherence to the laborious practices of direct democracy. (For a measure to pass the OWS General Assembly, a 90% majority is required. If decisions are unanimous – or nearly unanimous – there can be no "tyranny of the majority.")

It is common knowledge that parliamentary government congeals into a lifeless mechanism unless it is periodically revivified by civil society as a repository of negative-constructive-

vigilance. This characterization captures much of what the Occupy Wall Street movement is about. In an October 17 *New Yorker* article, Hendrik Hertzberg aptly described the OWS *mentalité* as "a cri de coeur, an exercise in constructive group dynamics, a release from isolation, resignation, and futility." By remaining non-goal-oriented, by renouncing explicit platforms and demands, the OWS movement has better served its own purposes, diffuse though the latter may be. In seeking to understand OWS and its sister movements across the nation, we must take leave of the domain of *instrumental politics* and enter the terrain of *symbolic politics*.

Ultimately, of course, these two realms are interrelated. Symbolic politics possess the capacity to frame and reorient establishment politics. Like civil disobedience, symbolic politics call attention to grievous wrongs that remain imperceptible from the standpoint of the existing political system. The obscene level of socio-economic inequality that has become more acute over the course of the last decade – recent estimates suggest that the top 1% of the American population now controls nearly 40% of the nation's wealth; hence, the OWS battle cry: "we are the 99%" – is only one manifestation of this dilemma. The fact that the Obama administration made resuscitating Wall Street its top priority, whereas Middle America was allowed to founder – at present, an estimated 25 million Americans remain unemployed – is another.

Symbolic politics – an approach that has proliferated in the post-1968 years – are a form of counter-politics. Counter-politics are explicitly non-revolutionary. Their aim is not to overhaul the existing political system – despite its manifest dysfunctionality – but to incite and promote radical reforms. As such, counter-politics may be defined as a modality of "contestation": one of the central leitmotifs of post-1960s politics, in which a variety of promising new social movements – ecology, women's rights, gay rights, rights of the disabled, and so forth – flourished. As a mode of contestation, counter-politics self-consciously reject the Western revolutionary tradition, the discredited Jacobin-Bolshevik model. They do not aspire to seize political power. Instead, the aims of counter-politics are avowedly *evolutionary* rather than *revolutionary*. They seek to probe and challenge the existing political system at its most vulnerable points, its weakest links.

Suffice it to say that there is nothing distinctly left-wing about counter-politics. In an American context, in recent years the Right has often learned the lessons of political self-organization and grassroots struggle as well as, if not better than, the political Left. Here, one need only think of the Tea Party, OWS's main rival, a movement that, as the 2010 congressional elections showed, has succeeded in shifting the spectrum of Republican (and national) politics distinctly to the Right.

When all is said and done, the Occupy Wall Street movement is symptomatic of a new politics of refusal. Increasingly, popular sovereignty manifests itself as a power to contest government decisions and parliamentary outcomes that are perceived as having violated the social contract or the public weal. Thereby, a new democracy of oversight or refusal superimposes itself on traditional legislative democracy. In this way, the people strive to reclaim the prerogatives of sovereignty which they feel their representatives – who, in their eyes, have failed to represent

them adequately – have usurped. In their new role as political overseers or watchdogs, the people seek to reassert their lost political-constitutional centrality. As a result, the conventional opposition between direct and representative democracy would seem to merit serious reevaluation.

As the French political theorist Pierre Rosanvallon has observed, insofar as the lexicon and grammar of democratic citizenship has broadened, “these narrow [traditional] categories must give way to a more diverse understanding of democratic activity.” Citizens no longer exert their political will solely via the sporadic and occasional mechanism of voting, but by vociferously voicing their opinions, admonishing their representatives, engaging in public debate, and undertaking demonstrative symbolic acts.

In all of these respects, the political significance of the Occupy Together Movements is much greater than it may appear upon first view. These movements seek both to reinvigorate the notion of democratic participation as well as to redefine the grammar and lexicon of popular sovereignty.

# Occupy Wall Street and the Challenge of the "New"

By | 2011: vol. 10, issue 4

The occupation of Zuccotti Park (now, renamed Liberty Square) in New York City is an inspiring political action. As a symbolic act, it has focused attention on the geographic center of the financial industry that bears responsibility for the current financial crisis. It has drawn in thousands of Americans who have suffered as a result of being out of work, in debt, or who have had their homes foreclosed. Zuccotti Park has become a meeting ground for individuals of varying political ideologies who share a common frustration with the political response to the economic crisis. It has also served as a model for similar actions across the country. Walking through the Park, one participates in and overhears heated political discussion. There is a strong sense that active democratic participation has been reinvigorated in this space. A singular feature of these discussions is a fixation on "newness." An occupation like this has never occurred before. It is something new in that regard. But the "new" permeates this action at every level. The organizational structure is attempting to be entirely new. Many of the activists think that we need to talk about politics in an entirely new way. They say that the old ways of thinking about politics and the old political structures have failed us and we have to start from scratch. Everything has to be rethought and the Park is increasingly being seen as a site for experimenting with the reinvention of society. This particular action may be new, but the uniqueness of this form of activism should not lead to the mistaken view that this is an action without historical precedent.  The issues of wealth inequality and the distorting effect of wealth on democracy, which are the only discernable common concerns that have brought people to the Park, are very old. The theoretical and practical responses to these issues are as old as the issues themselves.

There are many aspects of this action that have received regular criticism in the press. The lack of a coherently stated message and the lack of a strong organization have been the features most commonly singled out for critique. These problems can be addressed in time. They will not, however, be successfully confronted if the activists do not begin to orient themselves within a tradition. The point is not to blindly embrace a model that would hegemonically dictate the aims and organization of a movement to come. Rather, there must be a critical engagement with tradition. Traditions provide an arsenal of principles, ideas, and models for movements that activists can draw upon and put to new use. Rousseau and Hegel dealt with the problems of political representation in radical ways. Smith, Marx, and Keynes offered critiques of the negative impacts capitalism in ways that would seem prophetic if we lose sight of the fact that their concerns about capitalism are very much like ours. The activists in the Park do not have to comb through all three volumes of *Capital* or agonize over Keynes' *General Theory* in between their confrontations with the police and their efforts to defend themselves against the rain and the oncoming winter. They do have to recognize that their

action is situated within a tradition of theory and practice that has combated oligarchy and economic inequality.

Traditions are not absolute. They change and develop in light of new ideas. The old problems and solutions can be reevaluated to make them relevant. A commitment to a tradition is never necessarily a commitment to a doctrine. It is an acknowledgement of the fact that we have a ground to build on. Frederick Douglass was keenly aware of this when he pitted the claims of the Declaration of Independence against the reality of slavery. He was simultaneously challenging the old order while using its principles against itself. He appropriated a conception of political equality with an old pedigree and used it to fight a new battle. The Occupy Wall Street activists can do the same. They can ground themselves within a tradition that has opposed economic inequality. They can bring the old ideas – the ones that remain vibrant – to bear on the present. They can challenge them, revise them, and produce ideas that are relevant, but that are still grounded within a coherent schema.

Activists concerned with confronting real problems and correcting them have never been well-served by attempting to rethink everything from the ground up. Such exercises are of little use when there is pressure to develop a position, attract support, and build an organization that can guide and militate on behalf of ends. These practical issues aside, current left-wing activism has been put into a more dire position because of the prevalence of post-modern and, now, post-Marxist strands of thought. Lyotard tells us that we live in an age without grounds. Foucault argues that all knowledge is permeated by power and is oppressive. Žižek fixates on a mythic "real," while Badiou waits for the "event." All of these thinkers convey a message that we have no bearings, we must distrust everything external as potentially oppressive, and that we must retreat inward to our own authenticity as the only origin of political action. The occupiers of Zuccotti Park may not be consciously invoking these thinkers, but we see the effects of such thinking on their form of activism. Calls for a position are met with replies that a position is not needed. The position is expressed through the mere spectacle of the occupation. Attempts to construct a position are met with suspicion. Every suggestion at a meeting is met with concerns of ideological cooptation. Increasingly, the activists have become less concerned with focusing their message than with attempting the wholesale reinvention of society. Positive arguments for why certain actions should be taken are grounded more in subjectivity than in objective conditions. The activists speak for a plurality without finding commonalities between the pluralities. No common interest can unite the disparate voices because a common interest is perceived as always exclusionary.

While the Occupy Wall Street action is the first anti-corporate and anti-capitalist response to wealth inequality of the neoliberal era that has the real potential to provoke a serious international dialogue and galvanize change, it is not yet a broad-based movement. Unfortunately, the kind of political discussions that are occurring on the ground are anathema to the imperatives of a movement. They threaten unity and the formation of a coherent stance. More importantly, these discussions are unable to address the material problems that affect the global victims of the financial crisis and the neoliberal economic policies that preceded it. Philosophical groundlessness has little to say about the real homelessness of people who have

had their homes foreclosed. But these discussions can be shifted. The rich tradition of theory and action that opposes economic inequality and oligarchy remains ripe for reinvigoration. The activists are not lost in a groundless modernity where political legitimacy can only be couched in authenticity. Rather, they are the heirs of an ongoing confrontation with economic injustice. Their predecessors were able to mobilize mass movements that successfully appealed to capitalism's victims and brought about concrete change. The Enlightenment's opposition to authority, European Social Democracy's opposition to capital, and the struggles of American radicals on behalf of workers and people of color, serve as venerable models. In embracing these traditions, the participants in the occupations throughout the world can pick up where these movements left off. They can reinvent these traditions for today and, potentially, launch the first major challenge to the neoliberal manifestation of economic injustice.

# Generation Threat: Why the Youth of America Are Occupying the Nation

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*"In the late sixties, we were so fed up we wanted to destroy it all. That's when we changed the name of America and stuck in the "k". The mood is different today and the language that will respond to that mood will be different. Things are so deteriorated in this society, that it's not up to you to destroy America, it's up to you to go out and save America."*

*Abbie Hoffman— National Student Convention '88, Rutgers University*

**OCCUPY FLASHBACK**

In 1988, fresh out of college, I had the good fortune to get a job entering data in the New York City office of a civil liberties organization headed by a prominent liberal fundraiser devoted to Democratic Party politics and the arts. She took an interest in my student movement experience and direct-action preoccupations. One afternoon, she invited me into her office to share the story of her experiences in the streets of Chicago in August of 1968. Eager for the vantage point, I listened intently, tracking her experience against the radical accounts I had both read and heard. She was in Chicago as part of Gene McCarthy's team. McCarthy's beleaguered bid for the Democratic Party nomination, she was convinced, offered the last slim bit of leverage for the inclusion of an anti-Vietnam War plank in the Party platform of that blood-soaked year. Barely forty-years old, she had cultivated friendships and heated debates all year with some of the most influential leaders in the radical youth movements of the day. It was, therefore, no surprise to any of them when the third week in August rolled around and the profound divisions between the radicals and the liberals on the question of Vietnam and the Democratic Party were entirely in-tact, and in full-view.

The Conrad Hilton was the headquarters for both the McCarthy camp and for the nominee-apparent, Hubert Humphrey. Meanwhile, the Yippie-inspired "Festival of Life" was getting underway in Grant Park. The trickle of young anti-war protestors that began over the weekend, swelled and by the start of the convention on Monday evening, their numbers lurched toward 10,000. But Chicago '68 is less remembered today for the specific reasons young people were drawn there, and more for the brutal police violence unleashed on them. Trammeled by 23,000 local police and National Guard troops summoned by local Democratic Party-boss and Chicago mayor, Richard Daly, the legacy of Chicago was forever memorialized on film and audio. By Wednesday night, the worst police violence of that week (the "Battle of Michigan Avenue") erupted as police bulldozed protestors using military jeeps with fence-high, barbed-wired buttresses fitted to the vehicles' front-ends. Behind the trucks followed rows and rows of police, a couple thousand of them, swinging clubs mindlessly and firing tear-gas.

The chanting of the protestors, now with their backs up-against the Hilton, faltered — and then faded. The mighty unison of "Peace Now. Peace Now" began breaking-up, punctuated by screams and insults. There in the midst of spreading panic, a new chant sputtered up, gaining strength in the hot August air: "The whole world is watching. The whole world is watching." The protestors' desperate collective hope, that somehow the electronics of mass media might provide protection where a twisted and broken rule of law could not, echoed through the streets. The scene was captured by the heavy cameras and cumbersome audio equipment of 20th century TV and transported over narrow bandwidth into living rooms across the country and around the world.

My story-teller, now drawn down from her hotel room by the noise, recalled staring out over the violence in shock. She began organizing teams of sympathetic staffers and non-delegates, directing them to strip linens from hotel beds, tear them into bandages and form teams to carry the wounded off the streets and into the hotel lobby for treatment. Dodging clubs and cops, she and a band of McCarthy-liberals went to work, collecting young casualties, wrapping their heads and limbs the best they knew how. Amid the tear gas and chaotic brutality, she remembered looking-up, spotting the face of one of her young friends—the magnificent political balladeer and artist Phil Ochs, who performed that night in Grant Park. Beckoning to him, she begged him to get into the hotel, off the street and to safety — but he refused. She paused and leaned in, closing her eyes for a second. Transported back, I sensed a shift of emotion. Was it anger? Or fear as she watched her beloved liberal order implode? Perhaps it was both, along with grief, knowing that its shadow-side was responsible for the brutalization of so many young people that night. Bringing her story to a close, she recounted her final plea to Ochs as he began to leave: "Please, Phil don't give up on the democratic process." Ochs' crisp reply imprinted on her, permanently I think: "I won't. But understand, I'll go into the ballot box with you, when you come into the streets with me". He then turned, disappearing into the crowd. She went back to treating casualties.

**OCCUPY NOW**

Forty-three years after Chicago, with a Democrat in the White House, with two-wars and five additional "troop commitments" in-tow, with a volatile election-cycle underway and, notably, with the 0-25 year old age cohort nearly rivaling the baby-boom's share of the population, it may indeed be seductive to hang a lot of sixties analogies on the Tree of Occupy. But to do so, is both dangerous and a mistake. The context which underpins the largely youth-driven "Occupy" phenomena evidences *dramatic and defining* differences which can be discovered in the measurable and widespread deterioration in American society, captured in the life-prospects of the young. Certainly, the 1960's had its share of looming threats: the country was wracked by racism, "hidden" poverty, a catastrophic and expanding war in Southeast Asia and marked educational inequality. But, it was also an era characterized by low-unemployment, low-inflation, low-college tuition, low-housing costs, low-energy costs, low-incarceration rates among the young, new federal commitments to civil rights enforcement, new federal welfare provisions for mothers, infants and children, new federal commitments to equity funding for K-12 and higher education; new commitments to occupational and environmental regulations

and,  perhaps most poignantly, a substantially more  progressive federal tax-policy.  While the threats have worsened, the positive elements are starkly absent from the landscape today – destroyed, lost or simply conceded.

How then do we begin to unpack the current context? What factors have propelled this Occupy movement into being?  How might on-lookers better understand the movement's defining issues and core participants? How can sympathizers best support and connect to Occupy?  And how might older Americans resist the blinders of age and life-stage so as to avoid finding themselves on the sidelines, immobilized by fear or grief, or maybe feeling just a little ashamed for having waited so long to wade in?

**THE FOUR HORSEMEN:**

***Joblessness, Jails, Debt and Blight***

In a number of ways, this generation shares very little in common with the sixties.  There are the big cultural differences: this is a generation of young Americans who owe their main cultural orientations to the 80's hip-hop/rap revolution, to the 90's digital communication/entertainment technology revolution, and to the ongoing demographic revolution in which young "whites" no longer hold majority status among their peers.  In 2008, the Pew Foundation solidified the descriptor " The Millenials" in a fairly shiny report about the then 13-29 year old cohort documented as incomparably diverse, more politically progressive than their predecessors,  more digitally transfixed, far less religious, more tolerant and, oddly, more trusting of institutions than Gen X'ers.[1]  While all of these characteristics were found to be statistically significant among those surveyed, it may be more helpful to abandon the term now for its lack of insight into the crises which seem to stalk this generation at every turn. After all, as a descriptor the term "Millenials" offers little help in understanding the dilemmas facing youth today. It provides even less help in unpacking the robust relationship between young Americans and the Occupy phenomena.

I prefer the phrase *Generation Threat.*  Among the many crises at their backs, I see four primary threats facing young Americans which, when examined, highlight a thirty-year history of generational abandonment.  The fact that this is a generation defined by threat does not in-and-of-itself confer political significance upon them.  While defined by large-scale risks, *Generation Threat*, I argue below, is in the process of transforming "precarity" into political power through  a politics of disruption in a context of electoral instability. Their willingness to jump into the waters of protest seems inspired by the stark realization that national government reveals no true allies and no effective advocates.  The very threats which appear to have diminished their life-prospects , now inspire them to re-imagine their political position and discover their latent power.

Stalked by the Four Horseman of mass joblessness, mass incarceration, debt-for-life and environmental blight, an entire generation of  young adults now face unprecedented challenges, all of which will continue to affect the 70 million 0-18 years olds unless dramatic

reforms are undertaken. While we can leave talk of divine retribution to the Michelle Bachmans of the world, we might all agree that when combined, these four threats are indeed biblical in proportion. To be clear, the Occupy phenomena in the U.S. is not a "youth movement" in any strict or exclusive sense of the term. But it is a movement whose participants are broadly younger people, a preponderance of whom seem to be born after 1980, with many born after 1990. The wellspring encampments of Occupy Wall Street certainly evidence a core of highly committed 20 and 30 year olds drawn from a cross-section of unemployed and underemployed college-graduates, current college-goers-some of whom are "stopped out" due to finances, young unemployed and underemployed non-college goers, Iraq and Afghanistan War veterans, along with a sprinkling of more experienced organizers, many over 30, drawn from the alter-global, peace and justice, union, LGBT, anti-foreclosure, environmental and immigrant rights movements of the last 5-10 years. Of course, there are plenty of others present who fit none of these descriptions or age-categories. Nonetheless, from New York to Boston, from Austin to Hartford and from Trenton to LA, the core demographic motoring the Occupy phenomena is a generation buffeted by the crass and wreckless logic of profits over people that has dominated American politics for the last 30 years.

The poignant and descriptive "We are the 99%" campaign alludes to a complex of policies that have characterized 30 years of disinvestment from America's young. The gross increases in income inequality sit at the center of the critique. Expressed as population to share-of-earnings ratios, these "percentages" have become the symbolic and analytic language of the movement. For example, in 1979, the top 1% of income earners possessed 10% of all earnings (including capital gains) ; in 2010, the top 1% of income earners possessed an astounding 24% of all earnings. The dramatic increases in income inequality over 30 years is startling enough, but Occupiers are quick to point out that the 2010 income inequality outpaced the class cleavages that defined American society in the days when Rockefeller and Carnegie ruled the roost . In 1915, remarkably, the top 1% possessed 18% of all earnings Like a virtual inequality time machine, thirty-years of Republican inspired public-policy has transported the United States back 100 years to the inglorious days of the Robber Barons so vividly captured in the literary journalism of Upton Sinclair in his celebrated novel the *The Jungle.*

How then, has this acute inequality in the current era played out in the lives of young people? And what specifically, helped popped the cork for this burdened generation? The poignant hand-written stories on the "We are the 99%" campaign placards reveal plenty. In the personal stories, we discover what the great mystic-poet William Blake referred to as the "minute particulars":

*"I am an American Veteran. I am a senior in college. My American Dream is to become a history teacher. I am not asking for the world. I worked hard to get where I am. I may not be able to find a job when I graduate. We are the 99%"*

*"I'm eighteen, unemployed, and I can't afford to go to college at the moment. I've been searching for a job since I graduated from high school in June, and no luck there. I live at my*

*grandparents' house along with my parents and four year old sister. My grandma has a job still, and my grandpa is on disability. In March 2010 my dad got laid off from his job in Hawaii. We had been there only five months. We spent most of his severance pay on getting our stuff back to California. We couldn't afford to send back any furniture. The only furniture I own is a $20 bookshelf I bought a few months ago. We've been on welfare since August 2010, and live off of around $450 a month. My dad just barely found a job, but it's only temporary. My mom can't work because if she does we'd have to put my little sister in daycare, which we can't afford.I thought America was the "Land of Opportunity." Opportunity seems to have vanished. We are not living the American Dream. We are living the American Nightmare. We are the 99%"*

Indeed, thirty years of disinvestment has brought a generation of young Americans to a tipping point where their despair is being transformed through action.

***How Government Abandoned the Young***

Younger Americans ages 18- 30, and the 70 million children under 18, have been abandoned by government. On the books, the U.S. has pursued a thirty-year program of disinvestment from the social programs that help create strong, healthy and secure young people. In place of social investment in the young, politicians have underwritten investments in war-making and authored tax-policy absolving *the* most profitable banks and corporations from contributing much, if anything at all, to the national Treasury. When 2008 hit and the series of tax-funded bailouts began for those very players who caused the meltdown, well a lot those 99%'ers scratched their heads. The layers of pressure on this generation began to add up: on top of 30 year of disinvestment, on top of the tax-payer funded bank bailouts, on top of tax breaks for the super rich, there has also been war-making and war-spending.

Eight years of protracted military engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan have resulted in the deployment of more than 2 million US troops, whose average age is 25. Troop casualty is just the most obvious consequence for the young; budget cuts and inadequate funding underpin widespread failures in treating returning soldiers' injuries, which now include uncommonly high rates of brain injury and PTSD. Moreover, failures around their economic reintegration abound.

But there's more. U.S. youth policy it seems has gone to jail. A thirty-year trend in which the incarceration rates of disproportionately poor, young, non-white Americans has sky-rocketed under compulsory sentencing for non-violent, drug-related offenses beginning in the late-1980's. The US now boasts the highest incarceration rates *in the world* and remains the far and away leader in juvenile incarceration. The U.S. also holds the world record for the number of juvenile offenders living-out life sentences—a practice largely unheard of around the world. The incarceration rates of young Black and Latino men are one alarming sign-post marking the intersection of racism and youth disinvestment. Law professor Michelle Alexander labels the criminalization of race and poverty in our era "*The New Jim Crow*" in her widely acclaimed book, subtitled *Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color Blindness.* The Children's Defense Fund reports: "[n]ationally, 1 in 3 Black and 1 in 6 Latino boys born in 2001 are at risk

of imprisonment during their lifetime." (see CDF's "Cradle to Prison Pipeline Campaign). With incarceration three-times more costly than the average public school education and three-times more costly than the average tuition at a public college or university, juvenile and young adult incarceration rates underscore the punishing political choices of the last 30 years. Incarceration and convictions have crippled a significant segment of this generation, damning their chances of employment once out, and prohibiting many of them from ever exercising their voting rights.

For those young Americans not in prison or the military, declining-wages and wide-spread unemployment for all Americans has translated into record-breaking joblessness for the young. The DOL reported that only 48% of 16- 24 year olds were employed in July of 2010 (the peak month for youth employment) as compared to 77% in 1979.[2] For those lucky enough to get to college (roughly 1 in 3 young Americans), thirty years of declining federal and state support for higher education coupled with bank-driven education policy has resulted in massive, unprecedented student debt. The average student now graduates with a debt load of over $24,00 now climbing at an alarming rate. In October of this year, The New York Times reported that for the first time in U.S. history, student debt outpaced credit card debt with total student-loan debt likely to "top a trillion this year".[3]

While students and their families sink deeper and deeper into debt in an effort to keep pace with the 400% rise in tuition costs at *public* higher education institutions since 1980, the federal response has centered on lifting the borrowing caps under the federal student loan program and authorizing a dizzying array of private student loans products—including predatory, private consolidation instruments. The devastating combination of joblessness and student debt have produced a spike in student loan default rates beginning last year, especially among those attending private colleges and university. *Project Student Debt* reported in September that "New data released by the U.S. Department of Education show a sharp- rise in the rate at which students are borrowing and defaulting. The official 'two-year cohort default rates' show that 8.8 percent of student loan borrowers who entered repayment in 2009 had defaulted by the end of 2010, up from 7 percent for those entering repayment in 2008".[4]

And if that is not enough risk for one generation to bear, the planet on which we all reside, is the constant subject of harrowing reports and scientific studies documenting widespread environmental deterioration, some of which is already irreversible. The steady hum of news reports covering deadly weather patterns, food scarcity and resource depletion create an eerie soundtrack to an increasingly noir drama.

Welcome to Generation Threat.

**GENERATION THREAT:**

***Precarity Pops the Cork***

So what, in particular, is it in this mix that may have " popped" the cork on the Occupy phenomena now sweeping the nation? And if possible to identify, what insights and paths to

action might this moment offer the nation ? The Occupy phenomena presents a transformative moment in which cross-generational forces may, perhaps for the first time since the great Civil Rights movement, join together to confront the consequences of the last 30 years of generational abandonment. While still in its early stages of formation, the Occupy movement's young core , we should remind ourselves, grew-up listening to national leaders who largely had abandoned the idea (and rhetoric) that government is an instrument by and for the many, whose primary function is to secure the general welfare. Instead, these mislabeled "Millenials" have grown up in age of unapologetic rhetoric and policies rooted in the Reagan-ethos: government is an instrument of the market, the market is the well spring of freedom, and when the rich do well, the country does well. The compound effects on the young of 30 years of "free-market" policies and ideology are revealed through the four threats outlined above and in the stories found on the "We are the 99%" placards.

The toll on our young has been debilitating and is demonstrated across a broad spectrum of measures, though some not straightforwardly economic. The increasingly used term "precarity" seems to best capture the generational impact. A term promoted by social justice activists and analysts, precarity describes a condition of existence lacking security or predicatability and said to affect a subject's material and psychological welfare. As such, precarity helps us describe that dynamic relationship between mind and matter (or consciousness and material reality) sought by theorists of social movements in their quest to explain the rise (or absence) of protest. Certainly, the destabilizing effects of the disinvestment policies of the last thirty years appear more acute in the midst of a recession when safety-net provisions are most in demand. As a result, the current generation of young people now play out their "carefree" years amid significant social dislocation and disruptions in the main patterning institution of daily life (school, work and family). As such, it is inevitable that their psychic stress will increase. Well documented increases over the last ten years in adolescent violence, addiction and suicide rates were troubling enough. Likewise, increases in the same 10 year period in the number of college students presenting moderate to severe mental illness was a troubling trend already worrying mental health professionals on campuses across the country (American Psychological Association, August 2101. ) [5]

While precarity might certainly exacerbate existing anxiety and depression among the young, it is also possible that precarity might alternatively induces what social psychologists like to call cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance can emerge when messages and reality don't match:

- This is the land of opportunity vs. I've been looking for a job since I graduated high school in June, and no luck there;
- Work hard and you will succeed vs. I can't find a job and my student loan is past due;
- Be all that you can be vs. my VA benefits don't cover the kind of treatment most effective in treating PTSD

The disjuncture between message and lived experience can be fertile grounds for creative

action and new approaches to problem-solving and resolution. Forty years ago, in the groundbreaking work *Poor People's Movements,* Piven and Cloward told us that when ordinary people begin to see otherwise acceptable conditions as unjust, wrong, *and open to change*, they may become willing to engage in the kind of rule-breaking—the kind of disruption– that characterizes effective protest movement. All the great moments of transformation in the U.S., Piven has reminded us, have occurred this way: the American Revolution, Abolition, the workers' movements of the Great Depression, and the Civil Rights and Women's movements. In our current case, conditions suggest a near perfect storm is forming: favorable youth demographics, heightened immiseration and conditions of electoral instability which usually produces party competition and responsiveness. This movement, it should be noted, enjoys the added bonus of cheap, widespread digital communication technology and the benefit of youthful audacity.

In the midst of precarity, this younger generation appears to have found both its legs and its voice. Occupy is boldly staking ground and announcing "Enough". In this sense, the Occupy movement indicates a positive, resilient response to precarity and a healthy desire to *overcome* widespread anomie, to roll up their sleeves and seek large-scale solutions. Occupy demonstrates a generational longing for community, for civic camaraderie, for collective processes and problem-solving and, perhaps most poignantly, it speaks directly to the young's need for hope in a viable collective future. Occupy's trigger, it seems, was discovered in the dissonant insight that their future was the ransom willingly paid by government to voracious corporate and bank elites

### *Ok, So What About Obama?*

Right before the 2008 election, I published a piece in the online journal *Logos* commenting on the percolating and increasing activism by young American's leading up to 2008 and speculated as to how interests might play out in the context of the election and beyond:

…what exactly is the source of this new youth engagement? Does it indicate a new faith in traditional politics on the part of the young or does it reflect a deeper, more widespread sense of social and political discontent? If the latter is true (as I will argue) then the question arises whether this discontent is sharp enough– or deep enough– to break out of the channels of electoral routines and demand more serious attention through the leverage of protest. Following then, on what issues can young people best use their leverage? What should they demand? Or, more tellingly, what happens if students don't apply the leverage of protest? Might they allow themselves to be used by the Democratic Party in close contests in November which may very well turn on the new youth vote? ….If history is any indicator, young people's newly energized electoral influence will not alone guarantee leverage. Instead, as argued below, their electoral influence will only win them concessions if combined with strategic protest on select issues logically connected to specific institutional targets.[6]

In the 2008 elections cycle, the simple fact is that Obama made direct and specific appeals to the "young" *because he needed them.* He promised them specific relief. Obama's rhetoric and

social media outreach gave him overwhelming support among the young. His message of hope, his commitment to job creation (particularly to green jobs), his promise to end the Iraq war and to increase funding for education at all levels were all appealing messages to a generation feeling anxious about its future. We now know that without the youth vote, Obama stood to lose in several important, close state races (Florida, Ohio, and Virginia among them.) With 51.6% of 18-29 year olds voting in 2008–the second strongest electoral showing of American youth since 18 year olds won the vote in 1972– Obama captured the greatest share of the youth vote of any presidential candidate on record. More than 2/3rd of young voters supported Obama. In that process, I believe these now Occupying-young-Americans caught a glimpse of their untapped generational leverage refracted back to them in the electoral edge they gave Obama and the sense of "victory" they rightly owned in its wake.

But by 2009 and certainly by the 2010 midterm election, young people were beginning to signal growing disappointment with Obama: his pro-corporate appointments, his continuation of Bush-styled bank bailouts, his lack of fight back with the Republican Congress, his concessions on key social spending cuts, Race to the Top, the two on-going wars and expanded troop commitments, the lack of jobs creation and, the now rapidly growing and acute sense that nothing is being done to help them with the looming student loan-default crisis.

Where then is a generation to turn, for help? For sympathizers, allies or even curious spectators, important roles can be played by attending, writing about, financially supporting and generally engaging the Occupy near you. Its cannot be denied that the intervention and message of Occupy has already changed the terms of the 2012 election. By encouraging good analysis of the Occupy movement, all generations insure that the debates that will frame the 2012 election will not be determined either by corporate interests or Tea Party nativism.

***One Foot in the Ballot Box, One Foot in the Streets***

This early phase of the Occupy movement is best understood as a logical response by a generation in crisis; a generation demanding to be seen and heard and who are in fact entitled to positive governmental response. Their lives serve as prism through which the much broader deterioration of the American social fabric can be understood and the political choices of the last thirty years confronted. While logical and reasonable, these young people should also be recognized as brave and courageous. With one foot in the ballot box and one foot in the streets, this generation has alerted the nation that they are a significant force and should not be ignored. But without a broader base of support, this embryonic movement may be subject to a range of attacks, seeking to isolate and repress their powerful critique.

For those on the sidelines, frightened by the prospects of non-violent disruption or fearful of the collapse of the liberal order, the question must be asked: what kind of liberal order is worth the price of a generation or two? What kind of democracy is it that we ordinary Americans—the 99%–are trying to preserve if it requires we sacrifice our young? What, we must ask ourselves, have we permitted to be done to our childrens' lives and futures?

It seems imperative that we also resist the two related but perverse moments enacted in the streets of Chicago in August of 1968: 1) we must make clear that state-sanctioned repression of dissent at any level of government must not be tolerated in a democratic society, and 2) we must creatively and non-violently confront repression and resist the illusory idea that there is, somewhere, a safe spot for us on the sidelines. Instead, collectively, we must refuse to be reduced, either metaphorically or literally, to first-aid squads, bandaging our young in the lobbies of Wall Street corporations.

Now is the time to listen to these young people who are bravely demanding accountability from the 1% and reinvestment in the 99%. Reprioritizing the US economy and budget will first require an end to the perpetual-war-spending that motors so much US debt and second, a dramatic over-haul of the current tax system as a necessary pre-condition for reinvestment. If we take our cue from the threats confronting this generation, a broad outline then emerges for 2012: Create Jobs, Shrink Jails, Forgive Debt and Sustain the Planet.

Occupy!

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[1] See "The Millenials", Pew Foundation, December 2009. https://pewresearch.org/pubs/1437/millennials-profile

[2]Department of Labor, "Employment and Unemployment of Youth Summary" July, 2010. See https://bls.gov/news.release/youth.nr0.htm

[3] Tamar Lewin, "Burden of College Loans on Graduates Grow" New York Times, April 11, 2011.

[4] Project on Student Debt "Sharp Uptick in Federal Student Default Rates", September 11th, 2011. See https://projectonstudentdebt.org/pub_view.php?idx=780 )

[5] In July of 2010, Consumer Reports reported that an estimated 20% of Americans will experience an anxiety disorder and 14% will experience a serious bout of depression in their life-spans. The report argues that SSRI and SSNI medications, now widely prescribed, are over-represented in treatment option materials despite the fact that consumers in their survey did not report these medications to be any more effective treating their disorders than those who undertook a series of talk-therapy treatments. See: https://www.consumerreports.org/health/conditions-and-treatments/depression-anxiety/depression-and-anxiety/index.htm

[6] Christine Kelly, “If Not Now When? How Student Protest Can Help Save U.S. Higher Education” *Logos: a journal of modern society and culture , 2008, vol. 7, no.2. See: https://logosog.chrismordadev.com/2011/kelly/*

# The Palestinian Statehood Question

By | 2011: vol. 10, issue 4

**Background**

In organizational terms the Palestinians have had a state for quite a long time. The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) began performing most of the duties of a state apparatus soon after Yasser Arafat took over the organization in 1969. Departments ranging from Health and Education to Internal Security were set up to provide services at first for Palestinian refugees and eventually for at some of those under occupation. The organization soon had executive, legislative, diplomatic and military branches. Following the Oslo Accords in 1993, the PLO also controlled territory, albeit tenuously, on the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip. As a consequence of this history the state of Palestine has received a good level of diplomatic recognition from 142 states – 105 of which have established full diplomatic relations with Palestine.

The problematic part of this story was the tenuous control of territory. Under the "guidance" of the United States a "peace process" began to try to bring about *a two-state solution* to the conflict that would create sovereign territory for the Palestinians. As described by William Quandt, who served as a member of both the Nixon and Carter National Security Council, this process was to constitute a "gradual, step by step, approach to resolving one of the world's most difficult conflicts." Quandt's judgment on the "peace process" is as follows, "at [its] worst, it has been little more than a slogan used to mask the marking of time." Actually, this is something of an understatement.

The "peace process" as described by Quandt, has been going on since the 1970s. Some of the milestones of the process have been the Rogers Plan (1970-1972) which sought a resolution to the 1967 War issues based on UN Resolution 242. The Israelis rejected this. In 1978 President Jimmy Carter arranged for the Camp David I Summit between Menachem Begin of Israel and Anwar Sedat of Egypt. This meeting was to create a "framework for Peace" that included, among other things, autonomy for the Palestinians. As is it turned out, according to Carter, Begin lied about his intentions to grant that autonomy and so that part of the Camp David process failed. In 1991-93 there was the Madrid Conference which sought resolutions of the Arab-Israeli conflict as well as Palestinian-Israeli issues through "direct bilateral and multilateral talks." This failed in good part due to Israeli intransigence. In 1993 came the Oslo Accords which saw the return to Palestine from exile in Tunisia of Yasser Arafat and the PLO. Israel allowed this under the assumption that Arafat would keep order among the Palestinians while the Israelis continued illegal expansion into the Occupied Territories. When the PLO refused to perform this role the Oslo Accords began to break down. In 2000 the Camp David II Summit took place under the auspices of the Clinton administration. At this meeting Israel allegedly offered Yasser Arafat most of the West Bank but configured in such a way that

it hardly came to more than a series of Bantustans. Arafat rejected the offer as not amounting to a functional state. In 2002 the Arab League offered up a plan for solving the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict that promised Israel full recognition from the Arab states and open trade in exchange for Israeli agreement to the 1967 line as the border of a Palestinian state. Israel refused. Finally, George Bush Jr. initiated the "Road Map" for peace. Under this same rubric, and pressured by the Obama administration, direct talks between Israelis and Palestinians took place in 2010. President Obama aimed at a viable two state solution. But these talks also soon bogged down, largely due to two factors: Israel's reluctance to compromise on issues that they felt they could simply resolve by main force and the introduction of a relatively new demand, the insistence that the Palestinian side explicitly accept not only Israel's right to exist (which the PLO had done as early as 1988) but that it accept Israel as an eternal "Jewish state." As the Palestinian Papers (leaked to the public in January 2011) detailing these negotiations made clear, the Palestinians agreed to the vast majority of Israeli demands. As the Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat told George Mitchell, the U.S. special envoy to the Middle East, "we did everything but convert to Zionism." And yet the Israelis turned up their noses and walked away. Thanks to U.S. support they could have all they want by virtue of their military superiority. And, what they want is the West Bank (Judea and Samaria)–all of it. Thus it was that the Road Map met the same fate as all other plans. It has proved a road to nowhere.

Well, not quite nowhere. Throughout this entire history of plans, summits, initiatives, and talks the Israelis have been the only party actually making "progress." Progress for the Israelis is defined as occupying Palestinian land. Actually, this is an illegal process of theft. There is no other way of putting it if you have any regard whatsoever for the international law. The Fourth Geneva Convention, to which both the United States and Israel are signatories, makes it illegal for an occupying power to "transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies." This program of transfer, pursued by all Israeli governments since 1967, has now resulted in close to 500,000 Israeli Jews living in 121 officially recognized (by the Israeli government) settlements. In other words, the peace process, supposedly designed to lead the way to a two state solution, has actually been serving as a cover for the destruction of the possibility of that solution.

As far as the Palestinians are concerned, there is a direct correlation between the lack of progress at the peace table and the "progress" of illegal settlement on the West Bank. Thus, by the end of the last round of unsuccessful face-to-face negotiations the determination of the Palestine Authority (PA) and its leader Mahmoud Abbas was that the Israelis were not negotiating in good faith and the United States as mediator was not functioning as an "honest broker." Amongst the whole array of politically active Palestinians (from Hamas in Gaza, to the various groups in the refugee camps, to the activists in the U.S. and Europe), the PA appears to have been the last to come to this realization. But now, if belatedly, they have. This being so, they made the decision not to go back to the bargaining table unless the Israelis demonstrated their good faith by ceasing settlement building. The Israelis have refused but have nevertheless insisted that the only way to peace is by returning to negotiations. They were obviously loath to lose their cover.

There was another reason that the PA representatives were not anxious to return to negotiations. The leaked Palestine Papers mentioned above were more than just embarrassing for Abbas, Erekat and other leaders. They showed a willingness to compromise with the Israelis that, in the eyes of some other Palestinians, came very close to treason. Certainly these revelations were a blow to a Palestine Authority already lacking in credibility. It will be recalled that in 2006 Fatah, Abbas's party, lost an internationally supervised democratic election to Hamas. Abbas has continued in office due to support from the United States and Israel. In exchange he cooperated with them as they literally beat back Hamas and imprisoned the people of Gaza. Therefore, legally, Abbas had no mandate for negotiations at which he appeared quite willing to give away the heritage of Palestine. There now seems no advantage to repeat that situation. So, Abbas and company have sought a new way to boost both the Palestinian changes for statehood, and simultaneously save their own reputations.

**Going To The UN**

Having hit a dead end with negotiations and badly needing to reestablish credibility, the PA leadership turned to the United Nations. Abbas, and almost every one else knows that seeking recognition of statehood from the United Nations will not actually change conditions on the ground in Palestine. However, the move was seen as a way of gaining leverage to more effectively make Israel a "rogue state" in the eyes of the rest of the world.

Being a full member of the United Nations, or alternatively being voted into an upgraded observer status by the General Assembly, will give the Palestinians access to an array of committees from which to voice their grievances and point fingers at Israel. And since a large majority of the UN member countries are sympathetic to the Palestinian cause, Israel will find itself increasingly isolated. Then there is the International Criminal Court. An increased level of standing at the UN means access to the Court and, one would hope, that the PA will seek to indict Israel at that venue the first moment it can.

There are two questions that can be asked about these expectations: 1) Will Israel care? They have never responded positively to UN condemnation in the past. For instance, the UN condemned Israel's December 1981 annexation of the Golan Heights and the Israelis took almost no notice. Israel occupied the southern part of Lebanon (a full member of the UN) from 1982 to 2000 and despite repeated condemnations the occupation went on. This lack of Israeli response to UN resolutions brings us to the second question: Does the world care? The UN and indeed the majority of the world's nation states have shown no interest at all in enforcing resolutions condemning Israel. And, in good part, this is why the Israelis do not respond. You can have laws, but if they are unenforceable one should not be surprised that criminals pay no attention. As Ali Abunimah has pointed out there is no reason to believe things will be any different if Palestine is recognized as a state by the United Nations.

Nonetheless, as we will see, the approach to the UN has made Israel and its ally, the United States, very nervous. They have claimed that the United Nations is not the right place to solve the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. But, as Henry Siegman, president of the US/Middle East Project

has pointed out, the opposite is true. The job of the UN is to seek resolution of disputes that could lead to war and, as we have seen, all efforts at peace negotiations outside the UN purvey have ended in failure. In a significant way it must be the UN that settles matters because it was the UN that created the problem when, in November of 1947 it passed resolution 181 which laid the groundwork for the establishment of the state of Israel (and a Palestinian state that was soon made impossible by Zionist and Jordanian aggression). Thus, the UN has a certain moral obligation to help resolve this conflict and it has the legal wherewithal to do it, at least in theory. Besides resolution 181 there are also UN resolutions 242 and 338. All these resolutions mandate peaceful settlement of the conflict. In addition Resolution 242 makes clear that there is to be no acquisition of territory as the result of war.

The Israelis reacted to the Palestinian intent to seek statehood recognition with high anxiety. Why should they do so if this move will not interfere with their absorption process on the ground? Here are a couple of suggestions. First, it may be recalled that it was a UN General Assembly vote that gave legal status to the State of Israel. A similar vote today would give equal legal legitimacy to a State of Palestine. The Palestinians could then get up in the world organization and say that their state is being invaded by another UN state. The pressure on Israel to withdraw to the 1967 line would go up accordingly, whether they chose to respond to it or not. Again, the International Criminal Court would soon be brought into the matter. Israeli isolation would increase. Secondly, the Israelis are, in general, fearful of any and all references to the 1967 armistice line as a border. Keep in mind that the Israelis do not want peace, they want the land. That is why the peace process has, to date, come to nothing. UN recognition of a Palestinian state would sanctify the 1967 armistice line as Palestine's western border. That would make Israeli territorial ambitions officially illegal.

**Complications On The Palestinian Side**

The reasons that the Israelis fear, at least on the level of perceptions, the Palestinian move at the United Nations are quite understandable. However, they are not the only ones who are upset at the maneuvers of Abbas and company. There are Palestinians who do not like this gambit at all. And, ironically, they do not like it for some of the same reasons the Israelis are against it.

The end game for the Abbas and the PA is *a two-state solution.* The move to the UN was made upon the belated recognition that Israel was using the peace negotiations as a cover for destroying any possibility of such a solution. Other Palestinians, particularly those in exile, have long ago understood that to be Israel's goal and moved on to support a one-state solution. The Palestinian one-state solution, of course, does not look like the Israeli one-state solution. The latter is a Jewish state in control of all the land from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean. The Palestinian single state is the classic secular democratic state as originally proposed by Arafat's PLO back in the late 1960's–a state in which all citizens regardless of religion or ethnicity are politically equal.

It is not surprising that there is a split among the Palestinians on this issue. The Palestinians on

the West Bank and in Gaza are under occupation. They want a solution that will relieve them of their suffering and a two state solution will do that. But it will not address the grievances of those in exile, many of whom have roots in pre 1948 Palestine. For these folks, a two state solution will forever close the door to their homeland. In this sense the two groups have grown apart in their interests. Of course, there is the fact that the one and half million Palestinians in Gaza are ruled by Hamas. Hamas has refused to endorse the PA's statehood bid. For ideological reasons, it is dedicated to a one state solution that looks different again from that of exiled Palestinian version. Hamas wants a one state Palestine that is Islamic. One may or may not want to see this end as something of a parallel vision to that of the Israelis.

Let's take a brief look at the main arguments of the Palestinians in exile who oppose the PA move to the UN. First and foremost is the issue of refugee rights. UN resolution 194 affirms the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland. Israel might not take this seriously, but the nearly 8 million Palestinians in exile do. Indeed, most consider it a non-negotiable right. Even those of second and third generations are dedicated to seeing this right recognized and realized. There is a great fear among in the Palestinian diaspora that the PA will sacrifice this and other rights of diaspora Palestinians. In other words, a two-state solution with a set border at the 1967 line would probably permanently close off the possibility of the Right of Return to Israel proper. Such a solution would also abandon the nearly 2 million Arab-Israelis to their fate as second class citizens who are systematically discriminated against economically, socially and in other ways as well.

A good example of the exile response to the PA bid for statehood was put forth by the US Palestinian Community Network. It described the move to the UN as a "distraction that unjustifiably and irresponsibly endangers Palestinian rights and institutions." This is so because instead of functioning to "protect and advance our inalienable rights" it serves to undermine them. Amongst these Palestinians, Abbas and company have no credibility and seeking statehood at the UN will result in less trust in the PA, not more.

**The Role of the United States**

If many Palestinians do not trust the Palestine Authority, fewer still trust the United States. And that distrust seems pointedly affirmed by the striking way the United States government has unhesitatingly gone out of its way to place itself outside the world consensus when it comes to Palestine. As the rest of the world slowly but surely comes to the conclusion that Israeli behavior is not only illegal but also reckless, the US embraces the Israeli point of view all the more and protects that country from the consequences of its own actions through the use of its veto at the UN Security Council.

This situation has not altered in the present circumstances. The Obama administration, after seeking rapprochement with the Arabs and declaring itself in favor of the 1967 border as the basis for a two state settlement, has sought to intimidate the PA leadership into dropping their UN bid for statehood based on that very borderline. Failing intimidation, the administration has threatened to veto the effort at the Security Council level. The US Congress is right in line

with this effort and has threatened to stop all aid to the Palestinian Authority (even though that funding subsidies the PA security forces that cooperate with Israel in keeping order on the West Bank) and to cease supporting any UN committee that admits the Palestinians to membership.  Why has the government acted in such a way?

The answer has to do with the very nature of American politics. Although the United States is a democracy wherein citizens elect their leaders, it is not the case that, between elections, the voting citizenry counts for very much. The case of the Palestinians is a good example of this. The truth of the matter is that a politician can be critical of Israel and even sympathetic to the Palestinians and still, at least potentially, get elected to office in the United States. Very recent polls by the Pew Research Center show that 42% of Americans are in favor of US recognition of Palestinian statehood as against 26 % opposed. 32% had no opinion. That means that a energetic and savvy politician running for national office, who is also publically in favor of Palestinian statehood, would have a pool of 74% of American voters to work on. The numbers are even more impressive when considering only Democratic voters. There 54% are in favor of Palestinian statehood and only 14% opposed. These are telling numbers for a politician with pro-Palestinian sympathies, but it has not impacted party stands on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at all. Why? Because voters are only important at the actual time of election. At all other times the politicians' constituencies are special interest groups.

It is the special interests that supply the resources the politicians actually use to manipulate the voters at election time.  The political parties know this very well. They know that what political suicide actually consists of is putting forth a candidate that displeases the special interests. In the case of the Israeli-Palestinian issue, the vast majority of the time both Democrat and Republican parties won't even nominate a candidate who expresses opinions favorable to the Palestinians. Thus the American political response to the Palestinian bid for statehood has nothing to do with popular opinion. It has to do with the present overwhelming power of pro-Zionist interest groups and their ability to shape foreign policy in areas of their interest.

As a consequence, American interests in all areas of the Middle East outside of Israel must and do suffer. US influence throughout the Arab lands is waning and might be going down hill even faster in the Muslim world in general. The region's leaders are loath to be identified with a country whose policies on key issues appears to be so manipulated by Zionist agents. As for the Israeli leadership, they too just as soon insult an American president as take his advice. It seems no one loves a puppet, not even the puppeteer. As a position paper by Yousef Munayyer of the Washington based Palestine Center put it, "Washington is broken and won't be fixed any time soon."

**Probable Consequences of the Bid for Statehood**

On September 23rd Mahmoud Abbas went before the UN General Assembly and made his government's formal bid for statehood. As of this writing the application resides in the Security Council where it has been referred to the Admissions Panel. It could linger at this stage for a

very long time and ultimately it faces a US veto. At any point in this process the PA has the option of seeking upgraded observer status from the UN General Assembly where there is no veto. As of now (October 2011) it is unclear if Abbas will take up this option. If he does not the possibility is strong that the entire PA maneuver will have been an exercise in futility.

The most severe consequences of the PA action is liable to come in Israel and the West Bank where the Palestinian move has raised the anxiety level of the Zionist establishment and energized elements within the country's very right-wing Knesset. Here there are increasing demands for annexation of the West Bank. News reports suggest that the Knesset will vote on annexation at the end of October, 2011. The Knesset Speaker, Danny Danon, says the annexation bill will also nullify any financial obligations Israel has to the Palestinians as a function of previous agreements. Since the Israelis more often than not steal PA tax receipts this is not much of a threat. The bill will also nullify the Oslo Accords which, in any case, have been a dead letter for a long time. However, the annexation of the West Bank, which will serve as a requiem for the two state solution, is likely to let loose a wave of Israeli settler violence toward the Palestinians resident there. This violence, which may well reach the level of pogroms, will be part of an organized effort at ethnic cleansing – seeking to initiate yet another mass exodus of West Bank Palestinians in the direction of Jordan. The present leadership of Israel is no doubt in real sympathy with this goal. In the repression of non-violent protests in West Bank towns such as Bilin, Nebi Saleh and Walaja, Israeli soldiers have acted brutally and when witnessing settler violence against Palestinians they have more often than not stood by and let it happen. As Israel's military chief Amos Gilad has noted, "we [Israelis] don't do Gandhi very well." True enough. There behavior toward Palestinian protesters much more reflects the tactics of the Monarchy of Bahrain, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the dictatorship of Syria.

If there is any pressure from the United States on Israel to avoid such draconian actions it will come from the executive branch. Yet, by now, the Israelis have made turning up their noses at the Obama administration something of a high art. President Obama, in turn, has been at best inconsistent in his actions toward the Palestinians. On the other hand, the House of Representatives is very likely to stand up and cheer as the Israelis proceed on the path to annexation.

Leading the cheer will be Congressman Joe Walsh of the 8$^{th}$ district in Illinois. Congressman Walsh, along with thirty other co-sponsors, has already submitted a House Resolution in support of Israel's right to annex the West Bank. According to Knesset Speaker Danny Danon, the two annexation bills, one in the Knesset and one in the US House of Representatives, are actually being coordinated. Walsh, who is also identified with the Tea Party movement and the National Rifle Association, two regressive conservative phenomena, seems to perceive the Middle East through the distorting lens of an AIPAC briefing book. According to his understanding of the matter Israel is free to move forward with annexation because the Palestinian move to the UN nullifies the Oslo Accords. It does so because it is a unilateral act seeking to change the status quo on the ground in the West Bank, and this is specifically forbidden by the Accords. However, as Henry Siegman has pointed out, if this is the

case, Israel actions in terms of settlements and the building of the Wall, both unilateral and condemned by international law, has long ago destroyed the viability of this particular Oslo statute and freed the Palestinians to go their own way. Obviously, Mr. Walsh is oblivious to this history and as a consequence he has wittingly or unwittingly, chosen to vocalize in America the bigotry of the racist Israeli right-wing.

Thus the likelihood is that the Palestinian bid for statehood at the UN will lead to an acceleration of Israeli appropriation of what is left of the West Bank. Perhaps this will also result in the collapse of what is left of the Palestine Authority and the political career of Mahmoud Abbas. If events go this way the nation states of the world, including the Arab ones, will most likely sit on the sidelines watching passively, and the Congress of the United States, as presently constituted, will clap loudly. Tens of millions of Christian fundamentalists will praise God and watch ever  more closely for the second coming of Jesus Christ. A majority of Jewish rabbis of all denominations will find ways of rationalizing the resulting barbarism of their brethren in Israel, while a sub-group of that number will gleefully reveal themselves as Jewish fascists. Meanwhile a humanitarian minority of Jews, both lay persons and rabbis, will try to explain that irreparable damage has been done not only to the Palestinians, but to the Jews and Judaism as well. The Palestinians themselves will have to pick up the pieces, probably going back to the job of revamping the PLO as a real representative of Palestinians worldwide. As such the organization has potential to become, once more, the base of future leadership to carry on the struggle for Palestinian rights. Hopefully it will do so in close alliance with the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement against Israel (BDS). BDS will no doubt build at an accelerated pace, having established itself as the only practicable approach to the original and still worthy dream of a one state solution–that is  Israel/Palestine as a democratic secular state.

# Another Side of C.Wright Mills: The Theory of Mass Society

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Now that the 50th anniversary commemorations of C. Wright Mills's sociological triptych of America in the latter half of the 20th century, *The Power Elite*, *White Collar*, *The Sociological Imagination*, have come and gone, there are still many reasons for continued interest in C. Wright Mills's, *The Power Elite*. Before the end of Barack Obama's first term in office the nation struggles with many "Millsian" concerns: how to make sense of the (false) populism of the radical right in America, the undeniable center-right turn by the Democratic Party, corporate and financial sector malfeasance, publically financed fiscal bailouts, Democratic and Republican Party attacks on unionized labor and an seemingly endless (and untouchable) expansion of the nation's military.

What makes *The Power Elite* most relevant today, and much more than an analysis of the institutional structure of America in the late 1950's, is that Mills's thesis relies upon a compelling description of the social structure in America at the bottom level of society, what he calls a mass society. Mills suggests that, in the present, democracy exists in form and rhetoric rather than in substance and practice. *The Power Elite* considers the implications of structured domination in modern democratic society and how this generates not merely political apathy but the occlusion of thought in both public life and social analysis. Exploring the underdeveloped side of Mills's *The Power Elite* as it relates to his understanding of America's movement from a society of publics into a mass society poses many questions for democratic theory: regarding political agency, the shrinking of the public sphere and the manipulation of public discourse, the neoliberal turn within the Democratic Party, the corporate agenda inherent in the conservative "populist outsiders" who compose the right wing of the Republican party and the diminishing returns of democratic politics in America.

Mills's mass society thesis illustrates how power in America effects individuals and the ways in which social theory may need to reassess its embrace of pluralism as the guiding principle of American political society. As this essay will argue, many sociological and political theorists, in their eagerness to rationalize and embrace the ideology of 19th century pluralism, have overlooked the significance of Mills's mass society thesis or rejected it outright for being too pessimistic and dismissive. His theory of mass society posits a public that is atomized and alienated. It might even be the case that Mills's mass society thesis has been seen as a challenge by the contemporary political and sociological democratic theorists who have invested their perspective on the pluralistic potentialities within the structure and distribution of power in America.

All too often, *The Power Elite* has been interpreted as arguing that an elite, ruling class

dominates the structure of power in America (Dahl 1961; Polsby 1963; Domhoff 1967; Dye 1990; Green 1996; Rothman 1998). At a minimum, *The Power Elite* certainly is a book about the structure of power in America as it identifies the close relationship between military, corporate and political elites. These interpretations of Mills's thesis remain simplistic and of little use to current scholarship by political and social scientists interested in Mills's contribution to democratic theory. More recently, scholars who have revisited Mills continue to focus – by and large – on his theory of power from the top; whether Mills's thesis on the structure of power in America and its influence on society is still valid or if there's something to be gleaned from Mills that might be of benefit to democratic theory (Peschek: 2008, Piven: 2008, Domhoff: 2007, Barrow: 2007, Aronowitz: 2003). These more recent articles clearly hold positive interpretations of Mills's work. From Domhoff, "The book, (*The Power Elite*) still has astonishing relevance and freshness…today Mills looks even better than he did fifty years ago." Peschek, bringing Mills into contemporary public discourse, suggests, "Mills would encourage us to take into account Obama's campaign contributions, key advisors, actual policy statements…in order to have a realistic view of what kind of changes an Obama presidency would and would not bring." Yet, these praiseworthy treatments of Mills still focus on power at the top of American society at the expense of considering his mass society thesis. By revisiting Mills's chapter, "The Theory of Mass Society" in *The Power Elite* we might make a contribution to the current state of Mills scholarship while helping make sense of today's political condition as well. While Mills's perspective clearly endures today, the final measure of his work must be judged by how well current social inquiry can utilize his theoretical and analytical perspective to assist in our understanding of the present.

Traditional democratic theory assumes that citizens will, and do play a central role in politics. Mills challenges this view by illustrating the shortcomings within contemporary democratic theory, particularly its naïve treatment of pluralism, power and participation. The way power and decision making in America has become monopolized by elites who dominate the major decisions of the day is described by Mills as a set of power relations that both foster and rest upon a society of passive masses rather than a society of active publics. This movement within society – from active publics to passive masses – is crucial to our understanding of Mills's thesis in both *White Collar* and *The Power Elite* and illustrates the shortcomings in contemporary sociological and political analyses of democratic society. Mills states, "the transformation of public into mass is of particular concern to us…for it provides an important clue to the meaning of the power elite."(Mills 1956:302).

For Mills, America is simply not a society of publics, and the idea of it as such is nothing more than traditional democratic theory's embrace of "romantic pluralism," a nostalgic image – and maintaining itself ideologically – of the structure of power in America (Mills 1956:244). In reality, power and decision making is the domain of an elite, but not because they constitute a ruling class. Rather, the existence of the power elite he describes is the result of a void created by the movement of American society from one of genuine, active publics into a passive mass. For Mills, the power elite could not exist if society was composed of genuine publics who act in a manner similar to the way traditional democratic theory suggests publics behave: active, empowered and efficacious. The power elite prevail as a direct result of this shift from a

society of publics to a mass; because recent structural conditions have significantly diminished civic engagement at the middle and bottom levels of society. Today, the image of an engaged citizenry is pure romantic pluralism, nothing more than an idealized image of balance rather than real pluralism, or balance itself. This romantic view of civic sentiment is, for Mills, an ideological construction of American society fostered by elites and the social scientific community.

Alan Wolfe, in his afterward to the reissued anniversary edition of *The Power Elite*, says of Mills's theory of a mass society, "he seems to have lost all hope that the American people could find themselves and put a stop to the abuses he detected" and goes on to characterize Mills as "resigned…cantankerous…sour in his anger…". (Mills 2000; 380). Mills's description of a mass society troubles Wolfe as it leaves no room for further study. In *Social Forces*, Paul Bernstein comments, "Sociologists might benefit from drawing on pluralist approaches" in order to understand the relationship between government and the public (Bernstein 1998:49). Bernstein suggests that not only should social and political theorists move away from the days when emphasis was placed "more on Marx than Madison", but also that the time may be ripe for a theoretical "paradigm shift" (Bernstein 1998:46-50). Before we abandon the paradigm of a mass society marked by mass publics and a massified culture because it makes us uncomfortable to consider – and it does – I suggest we take one more look at Mills' treatment of society's movement from a public into a mass in an effort to find out how we can foster societal well being, capable decision making, substantive policy deliberation and real democratic participation rather than its continued atrophy. If we can better understand the fundamentals of Mills's mass society thesis we might suggest ways in which social science might be more useful to contemporary American society.

Mills work is a blending of social science with social criticism. Beginning with a description of contemporary society as one dominated by a set of elites, in the second half of *The Power Elite* Mills moves away from this model and towards a structural analysis of American society at large. It is this analysis, specifically his mass society thesis, which Wolfe calls his lackluster social criticism that makes *The Power Elite* compelling today. If we accept Wolfe's criticism of these "social critique" chapters we condemn *The Power Elite* to the dusty shelves of American social history. At the point where Wolfe views Mills shift from doing something well – social science – to doing something poorly – social criticism – Mills discussion gains rather than loses traction. Mills clarifies the movement away from his analysis of elite domination and towards social criticism by stating, "the rise of the power elite…rests upon, and in some ways is part of, the transformation of the public in America into a mass society" (Mills1956: 297).

### *The Power Elite Revisited: The Theory of Balance*

According to Mills, traditional democratic theory relies on the composition of a political system in balance and a structure of power that stems from the wishes and actions of an active public. The political structure of society is assumed to rest upon consent by informed, publicly engaged, self interested individuals. As the final court of appeal, political actors and decision makers acknowledge that it is the public who holds sway in determining policy, or as Mills

says, are “the loom of classic eighteenth – century democracy” (Mills 1956: 299). Justifying this position is the belief that through discussion and deliberation – – the legitimate grounds for consent in democratic theory – – rational, just policies will emerge. Contemporary democratic theory, and society, is built upon the theory of balance: a pluralistic model of an engaged public who decides their own fate through rational deliberation as a community at large. Society is structured in such a way that the interests of the greatest number are served, or that competing interests are adequately refereed by active government.

This description of the structure and justification of power in modern society is, for Mills “liberal rhetoric,” a romantic ideal rather than a real, descriptive fact in contemporary American society (Mills 1956:337). Mills argues that traditional democratic theory, and the social theorists who analyze society from this tradition end up supporting a model of society which is both inadequate as an analytical, explanatory framework and deceptive in that it is largely untrue. The conditions and consequences of this movement in society, from one of a public into a mass, need reassessment.

### *From A Society of Publics to A Mass Society*

According to Mills, when misinformation and distraction dominate as rational discourse, a mass society emerges which simply makes room for a power elite. Mills outlines the structural changes that have taken place in society to support his argument. First, Mills comments that government today is less of a pluralistic framework than traditional liberal theory assumes. As stated earlier, liberal democratic theory posits that pluralism is active in America as a system wherein contending interests pressure and jockey for positioning through public debate. Instead, Mills argues that pluralism exists as a social and political fact only within the sphere of the power elite: between private interests and government deliberation over what he calls the middle levels of power. Highly organized interests do engage one another in government at this middle level but not in an adversarial manner. According to Mills, at the middle levels of power, i.e. local and national legislative governance, private interests interact in a struggle over obtaining a particular piece of the rewards system. While many scholars argue that business does not always get its way in politics, and government does have autonomy, Mills suggests that these competing interests are not divided over any issues of decisive political importance. Elites’ interests do engage one another at the middle levels of power but they are entrenched in provincial, countervailing debates that create little more than a form of political stalemate, interpreted by the public as either a system of organized chaos, or in today’s terms, as political gridlock. Breeding public contempt and cynicism, the clamor of these clashing private interests are then appropriated by the mass media. The net effect then is that the public is presented with a set of mid level issues, from culture war topics such as abortion or interpretations of the Second Amendment to term limit legislation or repealing the estate tax, all with little significant impact on society at large pawning themselves off as the decisive issues of the day. To the public, the struggle over these private interests over the middle level of power are treated by the mass media as being identical with the interests of the community at large, occluding rather than clarifying decision-making and the structure of power in America (Mills 1956: 267).

Moving from his treatment of the middle levels of power Mills considers the second 'factor' in this structural shift, the formalized media and its role in furthering the movement in society from a public into a mass (Mills 1956:302). In a mass society communication stems from the formal media. As a result of mass society's information system being tied to centralized points of control fewer people end up expressing opinions while ever larger numbers become passive receivers of information. In a society of publics, "communication" emerges from a multitude of small, fairly independent opinion producers who, in their attempts to clarify the public's stake in an issue, create what has come to be called a marketplace of ideas. While some argue that today's internet based modes of communication, from twitter to Skype, allow for diverse, intensely pluralistic points of view to enter (and at times define) public discourse, Mills's nineteenth century view is based on person to person discussion where deliberation occurs in public places. For Mills, communication needs to be dialogue based, with an emphasis on feedback, forethought and without censor. While some countries, most typically undemocratic authoritarian nations, have been unable to control the power and deliberative influence of the internet, we've seen little indication that the members of democratically composed nations utilize this medium for political and social discourse in any substantive way. In Mills's mass society the community is not defined by the people. In contemporary mass society, the idea of what constitutes the community interest is what the media packages and presents as the community's interest (Mills 1956:313). From there the new information industry, including the internet here in America, begins its dissemination. Even within these new information outlets community is defined by the formalized media's preoccupation with the middle levels of power. The political community, once treated by the mass media, becomes little more than a media market.

Mills's view has been interpreted by some social scientists, most prominently Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz, as media "agenda setting", where the field of issues that society considers relevant have been organized or mobilized by formal political and media institutions to favor certain issues and exclude others. What is viewed as the community's own concerns are often manufactured; in other words, public concerns appear to be more organic than they really are. The end result of the structural changes that occur in the movement from a society of publics into a society of masses is that the formalized media replace individual autonomy of thought, leaving collective forms of discourse largely predetermined. The formalized media have discovered that irrational appeals to citizen's concerns by professional opinion managers and advertising agencies who are skilled in the control, management and manipulation of both issues and individuals in a mass society works to their own benefit (Mills 1956:310). For Mills, the largest outlets of the mass media have done less to enlarge and animate discussions of public significance than they have transformed the public into a politically illiterate mass. The question still remains though; whether the increase in internet based sources of information are truly different from rather than merely a response to major media institutions and whether, in America at least, anyone really wants to find out more than what's already considered "interesting and popular".

Mills describes how political and media institutions in modern mass society manipulate people into a crowd rather than as a group capable of autonomous thought and action. Mills believes

that the information provided by the mass media both guides experiences and sets standards; that the image of what constitutes political reality may be set more by the media than by ones' own experiences. Mills argues, when common sense becomes more common than sense, one must recognize that the problems facing contemporary society may be a result of changes in social traditions and the stereotyped image of society carried by the media (Mills 1956:313). Communications theorist Neil Postman, in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, argues that so much of our psychological and political literacy comes from the formalized media that we tend to believe the world we see on television rather than the one that we walk through in our daily lives. The expanding role of the media, in all its forms, and its pervasiveness throughout society is undeniable: from the internet to computer-based at home college instruction the face and substance of knowledge has changed.

For Mills, the media, as the primary factor in this trend towards a mass society, disconnects individuals from rational insight into society's problems. The mass media serves to distract and obscure political realities while limiting opportunities to understand ideas and their relationship to society. Mills, like other critics of mass society, including the members of The Frankfurt School and some post-modern theorists, believe that the mass media fastens people's attention to artificial frenzies rather than political and social realities. What remains marginal to social science practices is whether the media may be such a powerful force in society that one must seriously consider whether it occludes or worse, absorbs critical thought. The occlusion of thought may therefore be the result of a set of institutional arrangements in society – – whether they be schools, civic organizations or the media – – that fail in their ability to adequately address the relationship between individual and society.

As Walter Lippman noted years before C. Wright Mills, "the public" may be more of a phantom category standing for "vagueness, a lack of involvement and disinterestedness rather than a group with explicitly defined, organized and clamorous interests" (Mills 1956:306). If, as Mills says, mass society is marked by an embrace of the narrow view, individuals will accept and defend public vagueness as open mindedness, consider a lack of public involvement as reasonedness, and a disinterest in public affairs as tolerance (Mills 1956:307). As a result of what Mills describes as a breakdown in public responsibility and a trend towards a society of masses, a loss of political and social meaning has occurred.

For Mills, the task for a democratic society, its public institutions, and the field of social science is obvious. In order to counter this trend towards a mass society public conditions must be translated into issues and issues into a set of prerogatives that has meaning for individuals and their communities. Mills argues for a type of social inquiry that strives to provide individuals with the tools necessary for this structural view of society. Mills believes that in today's mass society real chaos goes unnoticed because individuals simply cannot see it, while what is accepted as the organized chaos of politics has become nothing more than a pseudo world of chaotic events: manufactured by a mass media preoccupied with entertainment, distraction and manipulation rather than providing the public with relevant information. The commonly accepted view by many social scientists today follows the idea finely stated by Maxwell McCombs, that the formalized media "doesn't tell people what to think

as it does tell people what to think about."

Mills's commentary can be viewed in a similar manner to what may be described, by Emile Durkheim, as a modern form of anomie, or what Jürgen Habermas refers to as crisis tendencies. Insulated from the truth of the society they live in, individuals lose their confidence as public actors, feel pointless, and become politically non-efficacious, with no belief in their capacity to impact the political structure. With the middle levels of power locked in organized stalemate the individual in a mass society has become, in Mills' words, "trapped by his confining circle…cut off…alienated…from any understanding of the structure and the process of society" (Mills 1956:321).

These structural trends in modern society, in conjunction with the manipulative character of the formalized media, result in a decline in the components necessary for a public society. The loss of political communication, of community structure, the decline in voluntary organizations, and the loss of the structural arrangements that connected publics with the centers of power all reflect the conditions of a mass society. In the end, the will for rationally deliberated decisions and political action is lost. As a result, the power elite simply maneuvers to fill this vacuum created by the shift from a society of publics into a mass society, and serve their interests. Contrary to most interpretations of Mills's book, political will is realized at the higher levels of society not because power in America is maintained by a ruling class, but as a direct result of structural trends which have created a mass society marked by reduced levels of public engagement in decision making, and a loss of political will at the bottom level.

Mills states that "only where publics and leaders are responsive and responsible are human affairs in democratic order…only when the mind has an autonomous basis, independent of power but powerfully related to it can mind exert a force on the shaping of human affairs" (Mills 1956:355). For Mills, this active public mind can only develop when knowledge has political relevance. Mills's concept of the higher immorality emerges when individuals live in a condition that disallows political efficacy. The higher immorality refers not to a form of dogmatic thought in American politics that is unwilling to be held accountable for its actions, but rather to the virtual absence of public thought. At a minimum, dogmatic thought has some kind of ethos or justification for its ideas and values no matter how repugnant it may be. In contrast, for Mills, what is so alarming about American political discourse today is that it has no ethos. It has become mindless, disinterested and fearful of all knowledge that may have a public, politically relevant role (Mills: 1956:356). As a result of these structural, social, and psychological changes in the conditions of contemporary society, the power elite simply takes advantage of the institutional power arrangements concentrated in the domains where they interact. Because vagueness, liberal rhetoric and irresponsibility have been raised to the level of principle, political power exists only in the hands of a small few. As historian Herbert Storing proclaims, in America during the founding period, the fear of the anti – Federalists was that political liberty would be lost in the new republic because "the few never sleep while the many are rarely truly awake." Storing's anti – Federalist quote can be read as an acknowledgment that quiescence, disinterestedness, and an inability to publicly engage political power would be the rule rather than the exception in American public life.

Mills's thesis points to a larger issue than simply the structure of power at the top of American society. Instead, he has more to say about the middle and lower levels of society where a disorganized system of "organized irresponsibility" prevails (Mills 1956:361). This organized irresponsibility seen as an immoral system where social obligation and public responsibility have become, in mass society, nothing more than hollowed out ideals cynically fostered by the mass media permeate and ridicule all levels of public life.

At the end of his analysis of the movement toward a mass society, Mills outlines the conditions that must be addressed if this process is to be reversed. In other words, Mills articulates what must happen in order for the reemergence of an active public consonant with the logic of traditional democratic theory. Once again Wolfe misses an opportunity to best address Mills's legacy. Wolfe says instead, "…missing from the book is a statement of what concretely could be done to make the world accord more with the values in which Mills believed." Mills does turn towards an inquiry into how American society can ensure that the ideals of democratic society become practices, or that the many remain truly awake. We must now turn to Mills's conclusion in order to understand hi prescription for contemporary society's disease.

### *Conclusion: From a Mass Society to a Society of Publics*

From my analysis of Mills's argument I have identified key variables which must be realized by individuals and adequately explained by social theorists – – as practical components and not simply ideals – – in order for a stable democratic society to emerge in an era where the movement towards a mass society appears to be irreversible (Mills 1956:324). The conditions that must be remedied in order to recreate a society of publics are: 1. A rational deliberation and decision – making structure 2. A realizable sense of political obligation 3. A realizable notion of political will 4. A (relatively) high degree of public engagement. Ironically, Mills acknowledges that these essential conditions for a democratic society already do exist in contemporary society. His description of the power elite is detailed in such a manner that one comes to the realization that the reason elites succeed as an organized group, and subsequently why the bottom of society remains disorganized, is because the basic conditions for public life are being met exclusively by the power elite. Mills noticed that the power elite simply posses the practical components of democratic, public life because the rest of American society has become a disorganized mass.

In a mass society the individual has little rational deliberation or decision making power or access to it. As a group, the mass public has no training, nor any of the tools necessary to articulate and address their wants and needs. Instead they are ruled by the logic of a mass society: common sense and stereotype. In contrast, the individual in the higher circles has the ability to rationally deliberate within the decision-making structures of power. The individuals in the higher circles are highly educated and encouraged to articulate their interests. In addition, Mills argues that those in the higher circles think in stereotypes (about class, race, social issues, for example) too instead of common sense, but, in contrast to the individual in the mass, elites' stereotyped common sense view of society works to their benefit.

Second, in contrast to the higher circles, the individual in a mass society has no realizable sense of political obligation. In a mass society, the individual is a member of an alienated, leaderless group, becoming cynical and politically quiescent. For Mills, the problem of the individual in a mass society is that they grow to learn they simply do not belong to a society of publics. Political engagement is viewed as having no payoff, and payoff is what determines one's actions in an instrumental society of self – interested actors and "smart-rackets" (Mills 1956:347). The power elite, or the individual in the higher circles is indebted to the political system. Their political obligation is realizable; it pays off and provides fulfillment. In addition, the higher circles have efficient institutional structures which coordinate like-minded organizations, such as interest and civic groups, which assist them in obtaining their rewards for civic engagement.

Third, in contrast to the higher circles, the individual in a mass society has no realizable sense of political will. Their will is absent because it has become unrealized. Like political obligation, there are no structural features in society to assist in its realization. At the bottom level of society the formalized media channels the mass will into spectacles and entertainment, serving to distract and occlude critical thought. In the higher circles, political will formation is realized because it is an operative fact of life; it is encouraged because it is rewarded. Operating in a cumulative manner, this system of rewards brings additional will formation, with higher degrees of political obligation. Its opposite also holds true. In stark contrast to the higher circles, its absence is real for the individual in a mass society because there are so few, if any opportunities for ones political will to be realized.

Finally, Mills addresses the matter of social theory's retreat from structural inquiry towards a preoccupation with the idea of a democratic society in balance as the prevailing view (Mills 1956:336). Mills levels his attack against academic social science because much of what social science research does is the study of observable political behavior. This situation may be due to the fact that the social sciences, and political science in particular, are ideologically blinded by democratic theory; uncritical of the basic core assumptions of liberal democratic theory and political pluralism. The belief that there remains a plurality of competing groups throughout society who form a balanced political system is, unfortunately, accepted as fact by many political scientists. It would be a step backwards if this viewpoint begins to influence current research in sociological theory.

Although some social scientists, including political scientists, may not be entirely convinced of pluralism's accuracy as a social fact, their preoccupation with positivistic research methods force them to consider it as a theoretical standard from which power and politics are understood. Mills's concern with this theory of romantic pluralism is that its logical result is the systematic study of elections and voters (Mills 1956:359). This furthers a kind of public and intellectual confusion wherein social scientists examine the superficial levels of society where manufactured "political" issues are debated and minimally resolved – – what Mills would call the middle levels of power – – thereby reinforcing liberal optimism which clings to a formal model of democratic society. For Mills, social scientists' preoccupation with the study of clashing interests and electoral behavior as being of primary significance to democratic theory

is little more than a mythical understanding of democracy as a self -regulating system where power is distributed through formal procedure. This narrow view of American politics is not only romantic and mythic; it fails as a critical form of social analysis. Mills, if for no other reason, deserves a second look for his understanding of this theoretical and practical insight. Social theory should direct its focus beyond the mere enumeration of facts and towards an understanding of social theorizing from his vantage point. For Mills, one must begin with an inquiry into how a multitude of social forces fit together, form a determinant model of society and act to maintain certain social relations that benefit some and exclude others.

Mills, to his own academic marginalization, passionately argued that it is the primary task of both a liberal society and social science to inform publics. Like the model of deliberative democracy that contemporary society is built upon, Mills believes social science, through critical social analysis, has an obligation to inform publics and to translate private troubles into public issues that have meaning for individuals and their communities. For the individual in a mass society, public engagement is low, if not nearly non- existent. Individuals occasionally vote, but beyond this limited method of political behavior, there is little else that could qualify as engagement with public life, if we understand engagement as an attempt to control the outcome of one's fate through public actions. At the bottom level of society limited forms of engagement do occur, but little of it is of a similar type to the forms of engagement that elite practices currently embody. Elites' public engagement allows individuals to play a part in the outcome of decisions that affect their lives. Voting, associational ties, civic groups, letter writing, lobbying, and a multitude of various public acts come into play in the lives of those in the higher circles. Engagement levels are certainly greater within the higher circles, but on the average they still remain low. However, unlike the bottom levels of society, relatively low degrees of public engagement by those in the higher circles still works to their benefit.

These are the conditions that Mills argues must be addressed by social theorists and concerned political actors if America is to move away from its present structure of inequality and towards a society that allocates political rewards and encourages civic engagement in a more egalitarian manner. To argue, as current academic social scientists do, that society is a system of relatively balanced, pluralistic interests where the publics wishes are understood as "clear" and "influential" is to evaluate the status quo as both satisfactory, and even good. This view has the effect, Mills says, of turning a hopeful 18$^{th}$ century liberal ideal of balance into a political fact that ends up hiding the truth about contemporary society. Ideologically and politically, it is the higher circles that emerge as the dominant group in society; they have the most to gain from this image of balance. The impact of this ideological maneuver serves the higher circles by making their interests appear to be identical with the interests of the whole community, a view that reinforces apolitical behavior at the bottom levels of society. In fact, one may even wish to consider whether the attempt to achieve procedural "balance" in society may itself serve the formalized ideological rubric of modern power.

At the bottom of society lies a disorganized public, ostracized from public affairs, unable to sense political accomplishment, cynical and mistrustful. Mills comments that individuals at this level of society have lost their political will because they see no way to realize it, they have

no sense of belonging because they simply do not belong (Mills 1956: 324). The present system of power in America – – politically and in academic circles – -argues that society is a self-regulating plurality of conflicting groups with no authoritarian center and no chance for despotism. Checks and balances, as an ideological image of a just society, operates so pervasively as a way of reinforcing the structure of power in America that even social scientists have come to believe that so long as power is not nakedly displayed, it must not be power (Mills 1956:244).

For Mills, the present system of power in America is not egalitarian, and is explicit in its ability to operate in an ideologically deceptive manner. This too may be an exceptionally relevant and enduring aspect of *The Power Elite*. Instead of limiting Mills's description of American society to little more than an elite model of power, current sociological and political theorists who wish to understand the conditions and the context of modern democratic society and the theory of balance it rests upon should reconsider his description of the movement from a society of publics to a society of masses. *The Power Elite,* and Mills' mass society thesis, endures as a challenge to social theorists to find new critical ways of understanding and clarifying the relationship between contemporary liberal democratic theory and the quiescent, disenchanted society it rests upon.

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# Bringing Authoritarianism Back In: Reification, Latent Prejudice, and Economic Threat

By | 2011: vol. 10, issue 4

**Introduction**

During the run up to the 2010 mid-term elections in the United States, the NAACP published a controversial report on "Tea Party Nationalism," documenting what was perceived as racist elements within the emergent conservative grassroots organization.[1] The NAACP's report became a lightning rod against which supporters and critics of the Tea Party vented their accusations of the other side's "racism." Despite the promise of the country's first black president, Barack Obama, the post-racial era had not yet arrived. Meanwhile, the Southern Poverty Law Center reported a 244 percent jump in right-wing extremist groups and militias from 2008 to 2009.[2] Public fixation on figures such as Glenn Beck who has been called a racist for calling the president a racist, indicate that racial sentiments are on the rise in American public discourse.[3] While many studies have been conducted to determine the scope of the Tea Party and what percentage within the group can be deemed "racist,"[4] an equally interesting question is the fact that a clear definition of racism is yet to be accepted by opposed sides of the argument, perhaps reflecting George Lakoff's cognitive analysis of politics from the perspective of there being different, incommensurable languages of morality that divide conservative and liberal political opinion.[5]

Perhaps for this reason as well, political sociologists seem to be facing misrecognition of where the clear anger and hostility the Tea Party directs at the government and, in certain instances, other racial groups such as blacks and immigrants, comes from. Whereas much attention is paid to the Tea Party and right-wing reactions to the president's race and otherness, whether expressed as questions of his birth or religion, not enough attention has been paid to the actual condition of high unemployment, the recession, and the economic insecurity many are facing. At the same time, in efforts to be "objective," social scientists may avoid calling this behavior what it is – namely, a manifestation of the authoritarian personality theorized by the Frankfurt School critical theorists during the 1930s, 40s, and 50s.

In relation to the issues mentioned above, we argue that the theoretical perspective of authoritarianism, particularly when directed at the sociological, rather than psychological aspects of the phenomena, provides a useful analytic tool that helps us understand the emergence of racialized sentiments that had previously remained latent. Under certain social conditions, especially perceived economic threat, authoritarians' latent prejudice is far more

likely to become activated into confirmed racist attitudes and/or actions. In this sense, authoritarianism exists latently, or, in the words of Adorno and his colleagues, as "prefacism." We focus on the connection between economic threat and latent prejudice, and our findings indicate that while economic threat does have an influence on manifest racial attitudes, it is partially mediated through an underlying authoritarian personality construct. By conceptualizing this mediating effect in terms of the process of reification we can theorize that authoritarians likely hold a relatively narrow and rigid conception of the world, which may not be conceived of as something that is "socially constructed." Thus, as threatening information, such as indicators of a poor economy, enter an authoritarian's worldview the manner through which he or she processes it could be to project that feeling onto an outgroup, for example, an immigrant or minority population.

The relationship between economic threat and authoritarianism is especially relevant in 2011 as we persist within the longest recession since the Great Depression, with the highest unemployment rate since the early 1980s. The ongoing adversities of the 2008 financial crisis clearly represent an economic threat to many Americans, and indications point to a slow recovery in middle and working class employment despite official claims that we are already out of the recession.[6] Our analysis highlights important implications about the future of American political culture and has great significance for understanding the parallel between periods of high unemployment and the emergence of racialized sentiments within the Tea Party.

**BACKGROUND**

*The Authoritarian Personality* was published in 1950 by a group of social scientists at the University of California, Berkeley including Theodor W. Adorno.[7] The study was one of five works in a series of publications devoted to examining authoritarianism and conformity in the United States from a critical social-psychology perspective. The study was funded by the American Jewish Committee and examined the relationship between authoritarianism, ethnocentricism and their interaction with external social situations. The study sought to uncover underlying social and psychological factors that were common among survey and interview participants who exhibited anti-Semitic attitudes and prejudices. Following a number of stages of survey and questionnaire development, the Berkeley group identified sentiments such as anti-democratic attitudes, sexual repressiveness, and irrational belief systems, which pointed to a participant's value on what was termed an "F-Scale." The F-Scale was said to measure "prefascism" – an underlying, often unconscious worldview and psychological outlook that predisposed oneself to anti-democratic and anti-Semitic attitudes. Theoretically, the psychologist could then determine whether one was inclined toward fascism or racism – an admission that few would actually make publicly – via asking seemingly more innocent or neutral questions, such as one's feelings concerning the statements: "*A person who has bad manners, habits, and breeding can hardly expect to be liked and accepted by decent people*," or "*The true American way of life is disappearing so fast that force may be necessary to preserve it.*"[8] The project emerged out of an urgent interest on the part of the American Jewish Committee and the US Government to understand the roots of European Fascism and

Anti-Fascism which played such large roles in the recently resolved Second World War.

Since its publication, the original *Authoritarian Personality* project has been the subject of numerous critiques.[9] One author estimates that more than 1,200 publications had addressed the subject by 1987, most of these peaking during the 1970s, during which time 750 articles and books related to the theory were published.[10] Though it would be nearly impossible to read every one of these texts, two themes crop up regularly in many of these sources, which we will argue has distracted attention from the original core theory. These are: an overemphasis on the psychological origins of "where" the authoritarian personality comes from, and an overconcern for whether authoritarianism is a quality that is limited to bearers of right-wing ideological views, or if there is evidence of authoritarianism within adherents of leftist ideology as well. Our goals are two-fold – first we wish to recover the core theory as outlined by the Berkeley group and its theoretical predecessors to indicate its relevance in the present sociopolitical context. Secondly, we wish to direct our study to the *social* rather than the *psychological* aspects of the authoritarian personality. Following Howard Gabbenesch,[11] Erich Fromm,[12] Theodor Adorno,[13] and Berger and Pullberg[14] authoritarianism is assumed to be an objective social fact.[15] We will not attempt to confirm, deny, or explain the psychological origins of the authoritarian personality, in terms of family upbringing or cultural values, but will rather direct our research toward uncovering patterns of authoritarianism within US population samples using secondary data analysis focusing on the relationship between latent prejudice, ethnocentrism, and social situation.

### *The Authoritarian Personality:* A Theoretical Model

The original theoretical basis of *The Authoritarian Personality* had its roots in the research conducted at the so-called "Frankfurt School" in Frankfurt, Germany during the late 1920 and 1930s. The psychologist, Erich Fromm, was particularly instrumental in developing a perspective that tied the depressed social conditions of the Weimar era to the emerging radical right and popular anti-Semitism. Fromm later fleshed out this perspective in his works *Escape From Freedom*,[16] *The Sane Society*,[17] and *An Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*.[18] Understanding and acknowledging the contradiction between modern democratic society and the actualization of human freedom was paramount to early critical social theory. This critical theoretical perspective rooted authoritarian research in an uncompromising recognition of the limits of the Enlightenment project and an acute awareness of the centralization and concentration of the means of mass manipulation.[19] Fromm and the Berkeley Group argued that under certain social conditions, especially economic threat, totalitarianism and fascism can occur—the explanation of which could not be reduced to the crazed actions of isolated individuals. One of the goals of their authoritarian research was to understand the interaction between fascist tendencies and social perceptions within individuals that continued in late capitalist mass democracy.

In *Escape from Freedom*, Fromm argued that this "crisis of democracy" was a "problem of every modern state".[20] Likewise, Adorno outlined the sociological condition of the "damaged" individual in a "totally" administered world, confronted by mass culture,

disenchantment, and alienation.[21] Explaining the approach to *The Authoritarian Personality,* Adorno said,

"We followed what I believe to be the plausible idea that in the present society the objective institutions and developmental tendencies have attained such an overwhelming power over individuals that people…are becoming, and evidently in increasing measure, functionaries of the predominant tendencies operating over their heads".[22]

For the critical theorists, the relationship between consciousness and society was dialectical. One-dimensional conceptualizations of this relationship, for example, in the Enlightment dualisms between mind/body and "Man"/Nature, dominated social science particularly during the postwar era in which positivist and empiricist conceptions of social research were encouraged due to the centralized needs of the military industrial complex.[23] The problem with a one-sided individualistic approach is that it implicitly identifies the cause of fascism in the fallibilities of individuals themselves. In contrast, critical theory eschewed rigid disciplinary boundaries and Adorno's theoretical perspective was especially ill-suited for compartmentalization. *The Authoritarian Personality*, reflecting Adorno's theoretical concerns, did not adhere to the epistemological dichotomies often constructed from a rigid disciplinary boundary between psychology and sociology. The study aimed "to take into account not only the psychological structure of the individual but the total objective situation in which he (sic) lives".[24]

Figure 1 shows the basic theoretical approach we have drawn from these and other early studies on authoritarianism.[25] The focus is on the interrelationship of three processes: latent prejudice, social situation, and ethnocentrism. The authors of the original study constructed an F-scale used to measure, "the potentially anti-democratic personality" in order to indicate latent prejudice within the individual.[26] The distinction between latent and manifest prejudice was significant because the "threat to democratic societies arises not just from the attitude and behavior of a relatively small minority of declared fascists, but from the syndrome of an unexpressed, potential fascism that comes from the hidden layer of the personality" which can be "traced back to deeper-seated character-structures that predispose people toward authoritarianism".[27] This can be summarized in the following diagram:

Unlike psychological research into the authoritarian personality, we follow the critical theorists' notion that these "deep-seated character-structures" are thoroughly social in so far as the fascist potential within individuals cannot be distinguished from the social forms and structures within which this potential remains latent or becomes manifest. The present study adopts this original conceptualization of social situation, referring to the "external stimuli to which Fascist predispositions within the individual have created and continue to react."[28] Ethnocentrism is defined as the general rejection of outgroups with the simultaneous reification of ingroups.[29] Horkheimer and Adorno had earlier credited this process to the psychological projection of all that one feels insecure about onto the outgroup, for example, as

when the Germans projected their own unwanted materialist sentiments and potential for treachery onto the Jewish population.[30]

A major shortcoming of individualistic approaches is the dismissal of the quantity, quality, and interconnectedness of points of analysis.[31] Theoretical explanations of individual alienation, for example, rely on personality disorders defined by professionals. This approach is problematic because, once institutionalized, it assumes a frame of reference that hides the fact that social institutions are human creations. This (mis)understanding has political consequences in instances where individuals are unable to process a social situation, such as economic threat, as being man-made and instead project these threats on to an already reified understanding of the world.[32] Theoretical explanations that do not deal with this contradiction do so at the risk of perpetuating social contradictions that are part and parcel of the very processes of alienation which they seek to explain.[33]

Berger and Pullberg[34] offer useful points of clarification for conceptualizing the relationship between authoritarianism and economic threat in their distinction between objectivation, objectification, alienation, and reification. *Objectivation* refers to the basic process by which humans transform the external world to meet their needs. *Objectification* refers to the ways in which people make sense out of transforming the external world. *Alienation* is the "process by which the unity of the producing and the product is broken"; redefining social reality and consciousness in such a way as to make this process oblique.[35] *Reification* specifies a certain moment in the process of alienation wherein this redefinition becomes standard objective reality. That is, "reification is objectification in an alienated mode."[36] Berger and Pullberg stress that objectivation and objectification are "anthropologically necessary" while reification and alienation are not. Conflating objectivation, objectification, reification, and alienation has important implications for or against the notion that authoritarianism is to be found within the individual alone. Fromm's insights are apt here since if the social situation is defined (by the analyst) in alienated terms, "then those who share this definition will be psychologically healthy."[37] Failure to distinguish between these four concepts hides a main theoretical assumption this paper seeks to uncover, namely, that social institutions are human in origin and that these social institutions can be perceived by actors as either "natural" (i.e., reified), or as socially constructed.

Any discussion of the authoritarian personality theory must confront the great deal of debate that has surrounded the issue of whether authoritarianism is exclusively the property of a right-wing political perspective or whether it is also evident within adherents of leftist ideology.[38] However, as interesting as this debate is, for our purposes and research question, we feel this issue can be reconciled by reflecting back on the definition of one critic who has challenged the "right-only" authoritarian theories. John Ray suggested that the authoritarian personality model is "nothing but a measure of conservatism, but conservatism of a particularly old-fashioned and tough-minded sort."[39] Thus, instead of retorting in the vein of other scholars who would insist that "Left-Wing Authoritarianism is a Myth,"[40] we can put the matter behind us by suggesting that we are studying the persistence of *this* authoritarianism, whether it is old-fashioned, re-fashioned, conservative, or liberal. Our

conception of authoritarianism refers to the presence of a particularly-reified worldview, which can then be indicated via latent qualities that are likely related to actual manifest ethnocentrism and racist attitudes.

Indeed, research on authoritarianism has consistently shown a strong positive correlation between authoritarianism and ethnocentrism/racism. In addition, research has supported Fromm's hypothesis of the link between authoritarianism and economic threat.[41] This relationship between economic threat and authoritarianism is especially relevant in 2011 as we persist within the longest recession since the Great Depression, with the highest unemployment rate since the early 1980s. The ongoing adversities of the 2008 financial crisis clearly represent an economic threat to many Americans, and indications point to a slow recovery in middle and working class employment despite official claims that we are already out of the recession.[42] We therefore take seriously the possibility that many Americans may not be able to process hardships of the economic crisis in relation to the actual sources of these social threats and instead project these threats onto a reified world. The critical theoretical approach of Adorno and others appears to be all the more relevant today.

Recent research on the growth of extreme right-wing movements has failed to pay attention to the important theoretical insights that can be gleaned from *The Authoritarian Personality.* This is unfortunate given that the growth of these movements has occurred during an ongoing financial crisis that began in 2008 which might be understood in terms of the interplay between socioeconomic structure and authoritarianism. The original theoretical focus within authoritarian personality research (especially those that attended to the interrelationships between latent prejudice, social situation, and ethnocentrism) has the potential to connect the conceptual divide often constructed between the undemocratic actions of seemingly-irrational individual members of society and their objective social world.

## DATA AND METHODS

Data for this study are taken from the General Social Survey (GSS). The GSS is a sociological survey used to collect data on attitudes and demographic traits of residents across the United States. GSS data are now collected bi-annually via face to face interviews using standard questionnaires. The survey follows a full probability sample design that covers approximately 97.3% of the residents of the United States.

### Dependent Variable: Racism

Drawing on the theoretical perspective of authoritarianism, racism is conceptually defined as the general rejection of outgroups and the simultaneous reification of ingroups. The early critical theorists who developed the theory of authoritarianism had credited this process to the psychological projection of all that one feels insecure about onto the outgroup. Our dependent variable, racism, is based on previous GSS research on racial attitudes, particularly toward blacks, and is operationalized by a standardized scale based on survey questions that indicate racist attitudes (e.g., support for discriminatory laws that would segregate neighborhoods,

disfavor for interracial marriage, negative feelings regarding black social improvement, etc.).

## Predictor Variables

Based on the original theoretical perspective of authoritarianism, threatening social situations may activate latent prejudice within a population, igniting manifest racism. From this perspective, authoritarianism may act as an essential mediating variable between perceived economic threat and manifest racism. That is, under certain social conditions, especially perceived economic threat, the latent prejudice characteristic of authoritarians is far more likely to become activated into confirmed racist attitudes and/or actions than would otherwise be the case.

*Economic Threat*

Research on authoritarianism has consistently shown a strong positive relationship between economic threat and racism. Data used for the construction of our first predictor variable come from respondents' *impression* of whether the economy has gotten better; stayed the same; or gotten worse. The response that the economy is "getting better" was used as the reference category.

*Authoritarianism*

Our second predictor variable is constructed by selecting several groups of variables that relatively correspond with the questionnaires used in the original *Authoritarian Personality* study and then narrowing these groups down to scales that have the highest alpha scores and corresponded well with authoritarianism in previous studies to construct an authoritarian index.

## Data Limitations

Use of the GSS or other large secondary survey data to analyze sociological trends in authoritarianism is less common than psychological analyses. This is reflective of the controversy surrounding the psychological origins of authoritarianism, whether in the family, religion, or another psychic source.[43] The primary limitation of the present study is that the variable "economic threat" is only available in the 1994 GSS, which unfortunately limited our analysis to this year. Results should be interpreted by keeping this caveat in mind. Our approach will assume that authoritarianism does exist in some degree in the population and that the theoretical explanation for the correlation between economic threat and ethnocentrism is likely to be mediated through authoritarianism. Our analysis does not in any way "prove" the authoritarian personality theory. Empirical evidence is presented in order to urge social scientists to reconsider the contemporary significance of the original authoritarian personality theory. Our goal is to demonstrate the use-value of the authoritarian personality concept, and the manner in which it can draw our attention to the relationship between latent prejudice, racism, and economic threat.

## Method

Our first model is a basic linear (OLS) regression analysis with “racism” as the dependent variable and “authoritarianism” as the independent variable. The second model looks at the relationship between economic threat and ethnocentrism. This is a typical model in many studies of racial attitudes during periods of high unemployment. The variable “economic threat” provides a very direct indicator of respondents’ feelings about the economy, and is thus a better indicator than models used in research that traces a linear relationship between unemployment rates and racism.

The final model incorporates authoritarianism as a predictor in the bi-variate analysis conducted in Model 2. This allows us to test whether economic threat is mediated by an authoritarian personality in predicting respondents’ racial attitudes. Although a more complex analysis is theoretically possible, we justify the use of such parsimonious regression models because we are only interested in the mediating effects of our three variables (racism, economic threat, and authoritarianism). We do not attempt to explain individual racism apart from these predictors.

## RESULTS

Table 1 (see Appendix) contains the standardized regression coefficients of authoritarianism and economic threat on racism. Results of Model 1 show a strong correlation between authoritarianism and racism, indicating that an increase in authoritarianism is significantly associated with an increase in racist attitudes. This finding supports the original theories of Adorno and his colleagues, and most subsequent sociological researchers.

Estimates of Model 2 indicate that respondents who thought the economy had “gotten worse” were significantly more likely to exhibit racist attitudes than those who thought the economy had “gotten better.” This finding supports research that indicates that during periods of perceived economic threat, for example, periods of unemployment, racist attitudes increase.

Provided certain data limitations outlined above, Model 3 suggests a striking finding in regard to our theory of authoritarianism and its relationship to perceived economic threat and racist attitudes. When authoritarianism is added as a predictor variable in addition to economic threat, a strong mediating effect is observable in so far as the main effect of economic threat on racism drops from 0.19 (Model 2) to 0.11 (Model 3). Furthermore, results indicate that authoritarianism is a much more significant predictor of racism than feelings of economic threat. Our analysis, therefore, indicates that while economic threat does have an influence on manifest racial attitudes, it is partially mediated through an underlying authoritarian personality construct. In this sense, authoritarianism could exist latently. Then, following an event that can be perceived as economic threat, for example a sense in which the economy is getting worse, this may make the latent prejudice a confirmed racist attitude. By conceptualizing the mediating effect of authoritarianism in terms of the concept of reification we can theorize that those who score high on the authoritarian index likely hold a relatively

narrow and rigid conception of the world, which may not be conceived of as something that is "socially constructed." Thus, as threatening information, such as indicators of a poor economy, enter that respondent's worldview the manner through which he or she processes it could be to project that feeling onto an outgroup, for example, an immigrant or minority population.

The confirmation of an underlying authoritarian construct as partially mediating the effect of perceived economic threat on expressed racism has great significance for our understanding of racism during periods of unemployment, such as the recession we are presently in. Unfortunately, the GSS data, which deals with relatively general questions, and not specifically related to authoritarian personality questions, are not able to provide us with the necessary variables to track, for example, the sub-scale of "traditional familialism" used in the authoritarian index past 1998, or the very important variable of "economic threat" other than in year 1994.[44] However, this initial test of the theory of authoritarianism indicates that a more substantial survey expressly dedicated to determining Americans' authoritarian personality constructs would prove to be of great interest in 2011 as the recession, high unemployment, and racialized discourse surrounding the Tea Party and other groups persist.

**CONCLUSION**

In this paper we argued that recent research on the growth of extreme right-wing movements has failed to pay attention to the important theoretical insights that can be gleaned from *The Authoritarian Personality*. Although our data analysis cannot confirm or deny the relationship between authoritarianism and racism and the growth of the Tea Party, it is clear that the original theoretical orientation of *The Authoritarian Personality* provides a useful analytic tool that helps us understand the emergence of racialized sentiments that had previously remained latent and is thus worthy of reconsideration. Our regression analyses support the original authoritarian personality theory, indicating a strong correlation between authoritarianism and racism. Results also indicate that while economic threat does have an influence on manifest racial attitudes, it is partially mediated by an underlying authoritarian personality construct. We explained alienation and reification as two key concepts in this process, pointing to a rigid, narrowly defined worldview that leads to the projection of social threats onto outgroups. We did not concern ourselves with whether or not authoritarianism is exclusively the property of the political right or left because like Adorno and his colleagues, we were interested in studying the persistence of authoritarianism qua authoritarianism, whatever its manifest form. Having conceived of authoritarianism as an *objective social fact*, we directed our attention to social conditions, specifically economic threat, that activate latent prejudice.

Our analysis also highlights important issues surrounding the future of American political culture. The recognition of the social fact of authoritarian personalities changes the landscape of the sociopolitical phenomena we seek to address. By definition, authoritarianism is "reactionary"—policy or social opinions are not "driving" attitudes so to speak, these opinions are manifestations of certain ways of seeing the world. This has implications for both progressive hopes for a "double-movement" as well as political sociological research which needs to recognize that not all members of the polity are operating with the same worldviews,

or with the same capacity to conceive of competing worldviews. However, perhaps because of a break between theory and practice, it appears academics and progressives may not be paying adequate attention to the original concept of authoritarianism developed by the Frankfurt School critical theorists during the 1930s, 40s, and 50s. Progressives may regularly throw around the term fascist without breaking down analytically what they mean[45] while academics have taken the original theory of authoritarianism and reduced it into an uninteresting, unusable framework in efforts to be objective.[46]

This is all the more relevant when one considers the original inspiration of the Frankfurt School theorists. These scholars were interested in understanding the ways in which the working class in Germany shifted to the political right instead of the left, as traditional Marxists would have expected. The authoritarian personality model provides an explanation for why this may occur. To be sure, and as certain scholars point out,[47] limits to democratic politics result from systematically grounded exploitation and inequality. Overcoming these would involve overcoming the conditions of modern society that predetermine social action.[48] Because of the implications of the authoritarian personality, different models of political analysis and activism may need to be conceived. This is one of the "hard truths" we can glean from *The Authoritarian Personality*, and potentially one of the reasons it has been neglected. Dealing with the social fact of authoritarianism problematizes the entire progressive political agenda. That is, the solutions to a problem of reified worldviews are, in fact, much more difficult than reconfiguring the relations of production, and are in fact a necessary precondition for the latter potentially to emerge. What the strategies and possibilities for this type of action might be cannot be directly predetermined by the research at hand, but certainly the spheres of education, media, and political discourse need to be considered in the light of this project.

## Appendix

Table 1. Standardized Regression Coefficients of Authoritarianism on Racism

| **Model 1** | | **Model 2** | | **Model 3** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Racism | | Racism | | Racism | |
| Authoritarianism | 0.41*** | Economic Threat | 0.19*** | Economic Threat | 0.11* |
| | | | | Authoritarianism | 0.42*** |

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001 N=2955 (Model 1) N=1431 (Model 2 and Model 3)

## Notes

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# On Weber’s and Habermas’ Democratic Theories: A Reconstruction and Comparison

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**Preliminary Observations.**

While the meaning and possibility in modern times of democracy has been a central concern for Weber and Habermas, and both thinkers’ political theories have been the subject of several inquiries, there is a lack of comparative investigations on this particular subject. This may be surprising as Habermas is himself a Weberian scholar, and Weber has been one of his most important theoretical sources. Our first task will be to introduce the comparative literature on Weber and Habermas as thinkers of modern Parliamentary democracy. The democratic theories of these two authors will be then reconstructed; their ideological orientations outlined; and their conceptual definitions and theoretical propositions compared. This comparison, it is hoped, will not only fill a gap in the literature, but also contribute to contemporary democratic theory and political philosophy. This potential contribution will be dealt with in the last part of the article.

**A paucity of comparative investigations.**

As well known, Habermas has extensively dealt with Weber’s thought. This has occurred chiefly in the first volume of his major work: “The Theory of Communicatively Action” (Habermas 1984), but elsewhere as well. Habermas dwells on Weber’s concept of rationality and modernity, and his theories of meaning and culture. Weber’s discussion of the ambivalent effects of rationalization, and his differentiation of value spheres and sociology of law, are also mentioned (see Habermas 1985: 206-211; 1990: 1-4, 112-113, 115, 338; 2007: 5-18). Still, Weber’s concept and theory of democracy have received no attention in this or other works by Habermas, aside from cursory and critical references to Weber as a representative of democratic elitism along with Schumpeter and other elitist theorists (Habermas 1975: 123-124; 1992: 451). Habermas’ “Between Facts and Norms” (1996), in which a procedural concept of democracy is formulated, refers to Weber insofar as his sociology of law is concerned, but not as an author who has contributed a sociological theory of democracy (Habermas 1996: 66-74, 330-341).

The secondary literature on either Weber or Habermas has not considered, generally speaking, their democratic theories from a comparative viewpoint. Not only comparisons between Weber’s and Habermas’ thought have concerned aspects that are different than their democratic theories, but there is also an asymmetry in the secondary literature on these two

authors. Most Weber scholars have ignored Habermas (for an exception, see Turner 1981: 98-102). On the other hand, several Habermas scholars have dealt with Weber one way or the other; and yet, even scholars who have given consideration to Weber in conjunction to Habermas have devoted little attention to their common theme of democracy.

True, Joas and Knöbl (2005: 242-243), Ingram (1987: 164-166, 173-174), McCarthy (1991: 131-133), and White (1988: 138-143) refer to Habermas' writings on democracy, and also cite Weber very frequently. Joas and Knöbl, moreover, emphasize Habermas' adoption of the Weberian hermeneutic epistemology of the social sciences and their common themes of rationality, rationalization and objectification (Joas, Knöbl 2009: 206, 208, 244-245, 555). All these authors, however, do not compare systematically Weber's and Habermas' democratic theories. They have stressed Max Weber's and Habermas' concern with cultural and societal rationalization in the broader context provided by the Frankfurt School, rather than dwelling on other common themes (Outhwaite 1994: 72-80, 92; Turner 1981: 94-101). Some comparative considerations of Weber and Habermas have focused on more specific themes, which may include other aspects of their political sociologies.

Brunkhorst, Crespo, Lukes, Ingram, and McCarthy are cases in point. They dwell on a variety of Habermasian themes, none of which however regards specifically Habermas' democratic theory, or the theme of legitimacy and legality in Weber and Habermas (See Brunkhorst 2008: 91, Crespo 2008, Lukes 1982: 134, Ingram 1996: 150-151, 176, 276, and McCarthy 1985: 185; 1992: 58). Most Habermas scholars, furthermore, have not inquired whether Habermas' principle of a normatively based and discursively attained rational consensus is a precondition to democracy and morality also for Weber. Their lack of consideration, which extends to Weber's political sociology in general, is matched by a similar neglect of Habermas' democratic theory on the part of most Weberian scholarship (for noteworthy exceptions, see Wellmer 1994: 52, 56-57; Chambers 1995: 242; 1996: 96).

**An outline of Weber's democratic theory.**

That there is a theory of democracy implicit in the political writings of Max Weber – in the sense of a coherent set of normative and/or empirical statements bearing on this subject – should not be taken for granted. One of the purposes of this article is, in fact, to show that there is indeed one. To this end, some core elements of Weber's political writings will be identified, formulated, and connected. Weber considered political education necessary to the consolidation of Parliamentary democracy. Its absence in Wilhelmine Germany caused, in his judgment, the impossibility to forestall the advance of bureaucratic domination, and prevent the curtailment of human rights (Joas 2005: 376). Still, he deemed human rights and the safeguards provided by the legal order not renounceable in modern times by anybody, no matter how conservatively oriented. For, they provide the foundation of the social and political order, which, in his judgment, Bismarck's authoritarian State had violated (Weber 1984: 449, 462-467, 551).

As Weber argued, modern societies can be democratic only in a limited sense. In modern mass

States Parliamentary strength depends, according to Weber, on several conditions, in addition to equal and universal suffrage. They are, first of all, institutionalized competition between political parties and between their leaders, in order to select the most talented leaders, and providing them with political training; further, the Government's responsibility before the Parliament, and indirectly before the electorate; and finally, some political representation of the electorate's desiderata to prevent the complete domination of the public administration and capitalist interests on the part of the public administration and capitalist interests (Weber 1984: 393-394, 465-466, 473-492; 1989: 270; 1996: 99-100).

Being a responsible political leader is, according to Weber, a consequence not only of the leader's personal qualities, but also of the nation's political maturity (*politische Reife*). This expression, which was recurrent in Weber's political writings, conveys different but compatible meanings. Political maturity means for Weber the ability on the part of a nation's electorate to grasp her lasting interests. It also implies the citizen's ability and will to exert steady control on the public administration, and capitalist influences on the political institutions, by means of Parliamentary committees and investigations. Finally, political maturity promotes the ability and will to take active part in determining the nation's political course. This ability and will follows from, and points to, the existence of proud democratic traditions, as instantiated by the English, rather than the German, people (Weber 1992: 551, 593-596).

Charismatic leaders can check the undemocratic tendencies inherent in modern capitalist societies, as long as the leaders' charismatic appeal is compatible with the values and institutions embodied in Parliamentary democracy. Demagogy is no synonymous of irresponsible leadership. The British political leader Gladstone proved to be a responsible politician, and still made large use of his demagogical appeal (Weber 1992: 207-218). Weber considered England a model of an effective parliamentary democracy. This was, in his opinion, a consequence both of the rational organization of British political parties, and the steady control exerted by Trade Unions on their members' "emotional radicalism" (Weber 1984: 550). British unions had promoted in their members "the feeling of honor and solidarity", which had been shaped in their daily economic struggles with capitalist interests, and which was of decisive importance for their moral education (Weber 1984: 448). Uncontrolled and irrational emotions receive free expression, by way of contrast, in those countries – like Imperial Germany – which are not constrained by the institutional counterweights provided by the organizations of parties and unions.

As a set of norms, Parliamentary democracy draws its moral legitimacy from these following sources. Firstly, as "a duty imposed by moral decency" those who have endured great hardship on behalf of their country ought to receive equal and full political rights. Secondly, Parliamentary democracy can, and ought to, cover the basic needs of those who as consumers cannot sustain themselves in a capitalist economy because of their lack of patrimony and income. Finally, Parliamentary democracy performs a valuable function of political education (Weber 1984: 217-221; see also Segre 1981). In Weber's judgment, all social classes that composed the German nation at the turn of the nineteenth century displayed a lamentable absence of political education, which resulted from the absence of democratic traditions. This

was the legacy of Bismarck's autocratic style of leadership, and his aversion to Parliamentary democracy (Weber 1984: 449-450; 1993: 370-374).

According to this reconstruction, Weber supported civil and political rights, and parliamentary democracy. The legitimacy of the political institutions upholds, according to Weber, the legal order in a Parliamentary democracy, as long as democracy is based on universal suffrage and well-organized political parties and civil associations, such as trade unions. Procedural legality is, accordingly, not sufficient to achieve the stability of the political order. This reconstruction differs from other, which stress the elitist and non-democratic aspects of Weber's thought (see Beetham 1974; Fleischmann 1984: 215-216; Mommsen 1963: 308-317; see also 1965, 1970, 1974a, 1974b, 1989),

It also differs from interpretations – such as Peter Breiner's – which seriously underestimate the importance of democratic participation in Weber's political thought, both as a value worth pursuing per se, and a concrete possibility in times in which mass politics prevail (Breiner 1996). As Weber argued, this social-psychological condition, and also the opposed one of political maturity, follow from contingent historical circumstances, as shown respectively by Bismarck's Germany and Gladstone's England. Direct democracy may be found, according to Weber, "only under certain conditions absent in the modern world, notably those concerning population size and complexity of economic function" (Thomas 1984: 216). For such conditions, as instantiated by some Swiss cantons, are exceptional and cannot to be found in the modern mass States. Whatever public goods may accrue from direct democracy would result from collective action in support of political parties, and in conformance to the norms and rules of Parliamentary democracy, as shown by Trade Unions in Britain (Weber 1968: 290, 1455-1456; 1971: 287; 1984: 394-395).

Furthermore, this reconstruction of Weber's democratic theory differs from the one, which Ira Cohen has formulated (1985). This Author contends that "Weber exaggerates the forces" which impede the democratic agenda (Cohen 1985: 284). Domination and inequality as embodied in and a consequence of bureaucratized party structures, and the power of the private and public administrations, are viewed as causes of the formation of powerful professional elites (Cohen 1985: 287-288, 291, 293-294). As it has been pointed, however, democratic political reforms were advocated by Weber with great consistency and passion. Weber's advocacy may be accounted for by his deep-seated fear that an unholy alliance of those elites might prevail in Germany, and maintain his country in a condition he considered of political immaturity. Finally, this reconstruction differs from interpretations, such as Held's (Held 2006: 141-152), which argue for a continuity between Weber's and Schumpeter's theories of democracy (for Schumpeter's democratic theory, see Schumpeter 1994: 269-273).

Major flaws in Held's knowledge of Weber's concern with aspects of modern democracies, which Schumpeter has neglected, cast serious doubts on Held's interpretation (Segre 1991: 130-131). On the other hand, this reconstruction conforms to interpretations which stress the importance, which Weber conferred from a normative viewpoint, to a Parliamentary democracy endowed with the right of Parliamentary inquiry. Of great relevance were to him the values of

individual freedom, democratic participation and human rights, all of which he considered imperiled by the advance of bureaucratic domination (see Bergsträsser 1961; *Loewenstein 1961; and* most recently, Kelly 2004; Titunik 2005). The reconstruction of Weber's political thought, which has been here proposed, is in line with these interpretations. The core elements of Weber's democratic theory would then be as follows:

Firstly, the safeguard of human and political rights, as values worth preserving on moral grounds and also as a source of legitimacy of the political institutions; secondly, political education as a condition to a well-functioning Parliamentary democracy; thirdly, a strong Parliament, based on universal suffrage, as a training ground for would-be leaders, and capable to exert control on the public administration, capitalist elites, and political leaders; fourthly, the inevitability of demagogic appeals in contemporary large-scale societies, but the existence of fundamental differences in the use and effects of demagogy in mass democracies and authoritarian regimes; finally, the importance of institutionalizing the discussion of public affairs by means of organized parties and unions, in order to avoid irresponsible talk on the part of intellectuals who idle their time away in public places.

**An outline of Habermas' democratic theory.**

Habermas' theory of democracy, as formulated chiefly in Facts and Norms, is an attempt to overcome the tension between "the social facticity of observable political processes" and "the normative self-understanding of the constitutional State, as explained in discourse-theoretic terms" (Habermas 1996: 287-288). This tension between facts and norms has found expression in the incompatibility between the empiricist and normative models of democracy. The empiricist model refers to rational choice theory in order to establish the conditions of actual acceptance of political authority's validity claims on the part of rational citizens. Legitimacy is conceived of as one among such conditions. This model fails, as Habermas argues, to explain why rational citizens observe the procedural rules of democracy. The normative model, which lays stress on norm-acceptance out of free consent, does not explain why minorities should accept decisions made by majorities. This model must be, therefore, integrated by a consideration of the institutionalized procedures of communication and bargaining that constitute the public sphere, and are inherent to and legitimate the democratic process.

The evaluation of the relevance of the normative model for the democratic process depends on which conception of democracy is followed. Discourse theory provides one of these conceptions. It emphasizes argumentations that aim to obtain understanding and persuasion in decision making according not only to democratic procedures, but also by means of a communicative network. This network includes a variety of voluntary associations composing civil society, and extends only to the public sphere of those who enjoy political rights. The liberal model conception focuses on the pursuit, compromise and integration of interests, while the normative background is limited to the protection of basic rights against encroachments on the part of other citizens or the State. The republican conception of democracy, finally, stresses shared normative consensus among citizens, who on this basis form a self-determining community of mutually respecting citizens. The notion of popular sovereignty, which goes back

to the political thought of Bodin and Rousseau, conforms to this latter model (Habermas 1996: 268-274, 289-302, 472-475; 2005: 277-292).

Habermas' democratic theory comes close to discourse theory, but complements it by adding the condition that only forms of communication prevail which comply with "the ideal procedure of deliberation and decision making" (Habermas 1996: 306). In keeping with discourse theory, democracy draws its legitimacy from two sources. As a first legitimacy source, the discussions preceding deliberations proceed from the peripheral process of rational will and opinion formation to the centre. These discussions, which provide "a rationalization of the life world", are deemed essential to the democratic process. For, in Habermas' words, "the only regulations and ways of acting that can claim legitimacy are those to which all who are possibly affected could assent as participants in rational discourses" (Habermas 1996: 458; see also 1992: 452-457).

The political-legal system of the Parliament, the government, the public administration, and the courts formally in charge of implementing the deliberations, constitutes this centre of formation of a rational public opinion. Government bureaucracies and capitalist interests have posed a threat to system, social, and political integration, and ultimately to democratic opinion and will formation (Habermas 1996: 299, 501). The Welfare State crisis has caused a profound uncertainty, moreover, on the opportunities for democratic participation in capitalist post-Welfare States. This crisis, both financial and ideological, has in recent times negatively affected the very possibility of formulating rational discourses (Habermas 1985b). In addition to discussions on public issues, a further source of legitimacy is the observance of democratic and constitutionally guaranteed procedures.

Formal institutionalized procedures apply to bargaining conditions, and either aim to achieve a compromise among interests, according to the liberal view of the democratic process, or contribute to society's political self-organization, according to the republican view. The democratic process paves the way to an institutional-normative connotation of democracy in either case. A sufficiently alert public opinion, which originates from a network of voluntary associations constituting the public sphere and is a prerequisite to democracy, may bring to the courts and the Parliament's attention all the problem that may threaten social integration. These problems are politically relevant only as long as conditions of social and ideological pluralism obtain.  In the political public sphere, legitimate power, which is produced discursively and spontaneously, interpenetrates with administrative power, which is also legitimate but (in contrast to power produced in the public sphere) is institutionally structured.

These two legitimate sources of power are provided with orientation and constrains by a political culture, when supported by tradition and socialization patterns. This culture is a prerequisite to, and a consequence of, the proper functioning (in Habermas' own wording) of the "institutionalized procedures of rational collective will-formation".  Rational will and opinion formation on the part of intellectuals can be relevant to democratic procedures only if there be a number of autonomous public spheres, none of which is hegemonic and monopolizes political communication, while they are all engaged in a cooperative search for rationality and

truth.

The ultimate aim of this search – to overcome the opposition between facts and norms – is in line with a critical theory of society, which shows how the public spheres have been endangered by the process of systemic rationalization. In contemporary mass and post-traditional societies, electronic mass media have had an ambivalent effect on the democratic potential of the public spheres. Democratic procedures, as long as institutionalized and "under conditions of social and ideological pluralism" (Habermas 1987: 458), provide law-making with legitimacy. For, in keeping with the discourse principle the process of law-making has been accompanied by equal opportunities for all citizens to debate and actively participate in political decisions. The moral and democratic principles complement the discourse principle as long as they establish valid norms.

Norms' validity is no longer taken for granted in our age of post-conventional morality, but must be justified. The discourse principle justifies moral norms with arguments, while the principle of democracy presupposes that moral principles have already been established. The discourse principle, and as a consequence also the moral and democratic principles, assume that people interact as members of the same, discursively constituted, language community. In keeping with the discourse principle it is possible to distinguish between Enlightenment and manipulation, and therefore the emancipation and repression aspects of social rationalization (Habermas 1987: 389-390; 1990: 338; 1992; 1996: 107-111, 278-279, 296-305, 339-341, 356-358, 457-460, and 483-490; 2005: 277-308).

Habermas also presents, briefly discusses, and evaluates some contributions to democratic theory which differ from his own. Bobbio's "procedural minimum" is considered insufficient in that it pays no attention to the discursive processes that lead to the formation of political opinions. Dahl's indicators of democracy fail to show how to determine "the rational potentials already at work in society … that can be taken up and developed by the political system" (Habermas 1996: 298, 303-304, 315-321). These two authors have apparently provided Habermas with a foil to illustrate his own democratic theory. Their criticisms, which are made in keeping with it, point to the relevance of discourses for a normative foundation of the democratic processes in civil and political society. Habermas' democratic theory focuses then on discussions preceding deliberations, and the observance of the legal procedures, as sources of normative legitimacy available to democracy in civil and political society.

No direct evaluation of Habermas democratic theory will be here produced; rather, the theory may be indirectly evaluated by briefly discussing some of its interpretations. As with Weber, also with Habermas there have been quite different appraisals, positive and negative. Among the positive appraisals, Chambers' in-depth study of Habermas' democratic theory defends the author against the charge that the theory is so vague that is indeterminate (for this often repeated charge, see for example Affuso 2010: 37-38). According to Chambers, Habermas' discourse theory indicates how a political culture can be rational, stable, moral, non-coercive, legitimate, and conducive to social integration (Chambers 1996: 13, 193-211).

Several other commentators have also shown appreciation for Habermas' democratic project. As Ceppa (2007: 153-155) and Petrucciani (2004: 142-159) remark, Habermas formulates a democratic project which conforms to the discourse, moral and democratic principles; includes political rights and moral solidarity; and brings civil and political societies into harmony. Wellmer (1985: 65-66) and White (1988: 124, 138-143) have maintained that Habermas' "communicative model" is suited to explain and understand the various elements – strategic, normative, and dramaturgical – that are found in new social movements, thus giving a new meaning to democracy and communicative rationalization. Bernstein praises Habermas' "powerful, comprehensive, critical understanding of social and cultural modernity" (Bernstein 1985: 3; see also 1995: 195-196). William Rehg points to the "complexity and abstractness" of Habermas' Facts and Norms, which makes this work "a rich and suggestive source of insight for reflections on the problems facing contemporary constitutional democracies" (1996: xxxiv).

On the other hand, some students of Habermas have remarked that the impact of the new communication media, such as Internet, on the public sphere has been left out of consideration in his analysis of democracy (Kellner 2000: 274-279); and that Habermas expects too much from the ability of discursive procedures to promote a rational public opinion, and democracy as a consequence. Habermas democratic theory has paid insufficient attention – it has been further contended – to the possibility that civil and political society might fragment in a number of autonomous public spheres (Baynes 1995: 212-218). It would then be impossible to "communicate seriously about basic differences among members of a public sphere", and distinguish objectively "private from public across the range of discourses" (Calhoun 1995: 244, 246).

Interpreters have also questioned Habermas' ability to "adequately thematize the role of identity-forming, culture-forming public activity" (Calhoun 1995: 247); the integrative capacity Habermas confers to the legal system and to the public spheres (Fraser 1992: 115-137; Joas, Knöbl 2009: 247); the very possibility to clearly distinguish, with a radically proceduralist discourse, between a public sphere and private matters (Benhabib 1992: 85-95); and the necessity to give rational interpretations to ethical judgments, as Habermas contends (McCarthy 1985: 184-186). Considering these different evaluations of Habermas' democratic theory, its comparison with Weber's will focus on its core elements only. These core elements are, according to this reconstruction: a developed a public sphere, which is produced and maintained in a civil society by means of a discursively constituted consensus; constitutionally grounded legal procedures; and finally, an established democratic culture, based on widely known and accepted norms. According to Habermas, a stable representative democracy is premised on these conditions.

**The normative foundations of Weber and Habermas' democratic theories.**

Liberalism has provided the democratic theories of these two authors with common normative foundations; for they shared an emphasis on the importance not only of a democratic culture, but also of democratic procedures and civil and political rights. Still, the existence of fundamental differences between them should not be gainsaid. Habermas has theoretical

concerns of his own, especially regarding the connections between the themes of intersubjectivity, ethic, and discourse. One of their common traits – a specific aspect of political liberalism, which makes legal safeguards a prerequisite to political freedom, and freedom in general – may be found in the philosophy of Kant and John Stuart Mill, Weber's "philosophical eclecticism" (Fleischmann 1964) notwithstanding. These two philosophers are considered here to be representatives of political liberalism and, to this extent, possible orientation sources for Weber and Habermas. As it will be argued, other possible sources, such as Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche, were not relevant to their democratic theories.

In Weber's political writings Hegel is never cited, and there is only a very cursory reference to Marx's "fragmented system" (*zerbrochenes System*) (Weber 1971: 26). Weber – it has been authoritatively stated – "disagrees with Marx in both tone and substance about Western democracy" (Cohen 1985: 285). The complex intellectual relationship of Weber with the legacy of Marx was in other respects, especially insofar as class analysis is concerned (Wright 2005). As for Nietzsche, the scholarly debate has concerned not his possible influence on Weber's democratic theory, but rather whether and how Weber and Nietzsche differed in their definition of this personality ideal; for Nietzsche pursued an autonomous self emerging on the basis of a transvaluation of all values, whereas Weber's ideal personality was that of a self-reflexive, rational and mature citizen who is active in liberal democratic institutions (Fleischmann 1964: 237-238; Hennis 1991: 214-220; Kemple 1998; Mommsen 1981: 38-39; Scaff 1989: 127-133).

Habermas' notion of civil society, which is of central importance to his democratic theory, has been used in a sense quite different from Hegel, Marx, and what Habermas designates in general as "the 'bourgeois society' of the liberal tradition". As Habermas points out, Marx, in contrast to Hegel, conceived of civil society as been prevented from becoming a social whole as long as capitalist relations prevail. Habermas, having a notion of his own of civil society, formulates his democratic theory without any detectable influence from Hegel or Marx (Habermas 1996: 45-46, 366-367). The Kantian notion of constitutional State (Rechtsstaat) deserves attention here. This notion, which originates in Kant's political and legal philosophy and asserts "the priority of the right over the good" (Chambers 1996: 21), points to a major difference between Kant and Nietzsche (Eden 1983: 97).

In The Metaphysics of Morals (Vol. 2: 194), Kant defined the State as "the association of a given number of people under juridical laws". Not all citizens – Kant added (Vol. 2: 198) – should possess equal political rights, and be active in this sense. In his celebrated essay on What is Enlightenment, moreover, Kant (1999) argued in favor of a public use of Reason, which involves freedom of thought and speech, and which he contrasted to the private use of Reason, as exerted within one's own occupation or community. To the extent that the scholarly literature has investigated possible influences of Kant on Weber, attention has been directed to the influences of neo-Kantians such as Fischer, Rickert and Windelband, rather than Kant himself (Burger 1987: 70-72; Bruun 2007: 11-17, 84-85; Eliaeson 1990; Habermas 1985: 206; Turner, Factor 1994: 13-16). Kelly (2004) has argued for Weber's selective but positive reception of the philosopher Georg Jellinek, especially insofar as Weber's conceptions of

citizenship and human rights are concerned, but has also made no reference to Kant.

Thus, the question has remained unexplored of Weber's possible connection with Kant insofar as the norms and values embodied in a constitutional State are concerned, though neo-Kantian sources of influence have been detected. This lack of attention is possibly due to the fact that "there is no evidence of any systematic study of Kant on Weber's part" (Turner, Factor 1994: 180). It may then be advisable to recall that Kant and Weber were major exponents of German liberalism (De Ruggiero 1959: 218-219; Mommsen 1974b: 95-115), and had therefore similar ideological orientations and ethical concerns. These similarities probably account for the remarkable continuity of Kant's and Weber's values and theoretical concerns.

Even less attention has been devoted to Weber's ideological proximity to John Stuart Mill. Mill, the illustrious exponent of English liberalism, advocated not only juridical laws valid for all citizens – for he "never supposed that there could be any important freedom without law" (Sabine 1961: 712) – but also universal political rights. As Mill wrote, popular government produces "the invigorating effect of freedom". Its absence or limitation – he added – turns "the bulk of the community" into "a flock of sheep innocently nibbling the grass side by side". Since all cannot in large communities participate personally in the public business, the principle of representation – he contended – should not be extended to everyone.

Mill was, like Kant, opposed to universal suffrage at least in those countries in which, for lack of political education and democratic traditions, "equality alone is cared for, but not liberty" (Mill 1861: 66, 69, 78, 83), and the tyranny of the majority may prevail (Mill 1859: 13-14; see also De Ruggiero 1959: 144-146; Sabine 1937: 709-711). Mill used expressions to this effect that are not only similar to Weber – they both insisted, in particular, on democratic procedures, legal safeguards, and education to political freedom – but also close in their meaning to Habermas. Habermas has approvingly cited Mill's "On Liberty" for having "united equality and liberty in the idea of the discursive public sphere" (Habermas 1996: 474). What is more, according to Habermas Mill – and Kant and Dewey as well – "analyzed the principle of publicity and the role an informed public opinion should have in feeding and monitoring parliament" (Habermas 1996: 474).

There are important differences, though, between Mill's project and analysis of democracy on the one hand, and Weber and Habermas' on the other. Not only Weber and Habermas make explicit references to the Enlightenment, which are absent in Mill. Also, their democratic projects comprehend universal suffrage as a fundamental element, in contrast to Mill's. Weber's and Habermas' endorsement of representative democracy on normative grounds has been, to some extent, differently argued, their adherence to political liberalism notwithstanding.[1] Weber shared with Kant and Mill an endorsement of civil and political rights, representative democracy, and – at least as far as Kant is concerned – also the Enlightenment project. He did not share, on the other hand, their reservations on the principle of representative democracy, and universal suffrage in particular.

As a philosopher and political thinker, rather than as a sociologist like Weber, Habermas also

has declared himself a follower of the Enlightenment, and sympathetic with the Kantian project of autonomy, responsibility, and emancipation. Habermas has formulated this stance not only in the Kantian and Enlightenment terms of modernity and emancipation, as Weber, but also in those of rational and undistorted communicative action. In compliance with the Enlightenment's emancipation project, Habermas has advocated on moral grounds representative democracy based on universal suffrage and a well-developed public sphere (Habermas 1971: 191-213; 1990: 18-20, 260-261, 337-338; see also Ingram 1987: 173-177; McCarthy 1990: x-xi, xvi-xvii; Wellmer 1985: 40-43).

**A Comparison of Weber and Habermas' Democratic Theories.**

It is then preferable to consider Kant and Mill, and in general the philosophical or ideological background of Weber and Habermas, as sources of inspiration of their Liberalism rather than of direct influence on them. The ideal of undistorted communication has been necessary to Habermas to counter "the destructive forms of Enlightenment thought", as represented by "unbounded instrumentality" (Bernstein 1995: 27; see also: 87). Legal procedures and an established democratic culture are indispensable to this end. Habermas has rejected the Weberian value pluralism and differentiation of the value spheres, and advocated instead a rationally grounded and intersubjectively achieved consensus as a precondition to democratic culture and institutions in a world, in which the ideal situation of communicative rationality cannot even be approximated[2]. Habermas has formulated in The Theory of Communicative Action (1987) his well-known thesis that the losses of meaning and freedom, and the cultural impoverishment of daily communicative praxis, have been a consequence of the penetration of instrumental rationality into the lifeworld, and the ensuing curtailment of meaningful intersubjectivity.

Weber's instrumental rationality has given way in Habermas to a more general critique of systemic rationality (Habermas 1985a: 206-211). Kant and Weber have imputed objective validity to moral norms, as the foundation of a principled morality; but, this validity has been deemed incompatible with our age's post-metaphysical morality and cognitive indeterminacy (Habermas 1996: 94-118; 2001: 295-296, 308-309). The burden of forming moral judgment has been taken over by "Parliamentary legislative procedures, judicial decision making, and the doctrinal jurisprudence" (Habermas 1996: 115). Individuals as legal persons have been thereby relieved of this task. Habermas shares with Weber the value of a democracy based on political rights extended to the whole adult population.

They concur in considering irrenounceable representative democracy's political institutions and juridical safeguards, which, however, can no longer insure popular control on the public administration and private interests. Another preliminary condition – it may be recalled – is for Habermas a discursively established public sphere as a source of rational debates and public opinion formation. A "subjectless communication form arenas" are thereby produced that constitute "the communicative network of public spheres … both inside and outside the parliamentary complex and its deliberative bodies" (Habermas 1996: 299; see in general 1992: 449-452; 1996: 299-300, 359-366; see also Baynes 1995: 216-217). Habermas also dwells in the

closing pages of his Theory of Communicative action on the new social movements, which are viewed as potential resources for civil society insofar as they counteract the colonization of the lifeworld.

Weber, like Habermas, has insisted on the importance for stable representative democracies of a developed civil society and a consolidated democratic tradition. In this sense, discourse is for both authors conducive to democratic practices. For Habermas, as for Weber, the premises of an effective democracy may be found both within and outside of the Parliament. However, Weber's constitutive components of civil society are at least in part different than Habermas'. Habermas considers informal discussions in public places as a prerequisite to civil society. Weber holds the opposite view that such informal and inconclusive interactions are oftentimes empty talk, which is carried on by idle intellectuals. They are also detrimental to democracy, and little practiced in mature democracies. Constructive interactions in civil society take place only if they are institutionally regimented and constrained, as in trade unions or the Parliament.

The "feelings of honor and solidarity", which in these circumstances thrive in some institutional components of civil society, in Weber's view benefit society as a whole; only, however, if the population has developed a strong democratic tradition, as indicated by its ability of controlling the capitalist class and the public administration by means of an effective Parliament. England provides for Weber the model of such a democracy. Informal discussions on public affairs are considered incompatible with this model, if conducted in non-institutional milieux. Habermas has not neglected to consider that "salon chatters" (Protti 1984: 112) might prevail over rational discourse aiming at reaching a consensus; but this occurrence would obtain only when the ideal conditions of communicative action are neither present nor approximated.[3]

As Weber and Habermas have maintained, social movements may be instrumental to approximate the ideal conditions of consensus formation in Parliamentary democracies. Still, Weber restricted this possibility to semi-institutionalized movements, such as working-class unions, and old social movements in general. Accordingly, he would have considered new social movements not supportive of democracy, but rather a threat to it. In contrast, Habermas has welcomed all those new social movements, which endeavor to promote resistance against the colonization of the lifeworld caused by the penetration of money and power into it. For Weber, democracy is upheld and continuously reconstituted in trade unions and Parliamentary committees, rather than in accidental and politically irresponsible gatherings. Public opinion, which Weber conceives of in the Habermasian terms of a "communicative network of public spheres" (Habermas 1996: 299), is not formed in cafés or other public places.

None of such places, in Weber's view, is conducive to voice problems affecting civil society, or to propose solutions to and "influentially thematize" (Habermas 1996: 359) them, in such a way that they can be dealt with by the political system. In comparison to Habermas, Weber defines therefore the public sphere much more restrictively. Those organized settings, where people assemble to discuss matters, profess values, and conform to norms, are for Weber the exclusive components of civil and political society. They have a general relevance, not only because they

all contribute to “the socially integrating force of solidarity” (Habermas 1996: 299), but also because they may be sounding boards and training grounds for leaders outside and inside of the Parliament, and the other political institutions.

**Weber and Habermas’ Democratic Theories: A Comparison in the Light of Some Contemporary Developments.**

This essay has provided an attempt to reconstruct and compare Weber’s and Habermas’ democratic theories. This reconstruction of Weber’s and Habermas’ writings on democracy has involved connecting their core elements in a unitary format. The theoretical interest of this attempt has been suggested not only by the scarcity of such comparisons so far, but by also the great consideration in which both these thinkers are currently held. These theories have been reconduced to the common liberal tradition of political liberalism, as represented especially by Kant and John Stuart Mill. Weber and Habermas have received from this tradition the principles of political representation and legal protection of basic rights; however, the principle of universal suffrage has not been accepted without reservations by liberal democratic thinkers. Weber and Habermas have fully endorsed this principle, whereas Kant and Mill were opposed to it. Beside their normative endorsement of full political representation and legal protection, Weber and Habermas have concurred in a number of other points.

These points, which have an empirical rather than normative character, may be recapitulated as follows: Firstly, the importance of democratic traditions and articulate civil societies for the effective functioning of representative democracy. Further, the threat produced by formal rationality, as embodied in the public administration and the capitalist firms. In their judgment, this threat jeopardizes the civil and political freedoms. Finally, the relevance of legal procedures for any democratic process; these procedures do not include democratic representation within the firms. These points of agreement should not deflect attention from considering some fundamental differences. Communicative rationality is viewed by Habermas, rather than Weber, as a precondition to achieve consensus in, and hence to legitimate, democratic societies. This consensus may be reached even informally in non-institutional settings. For Weber institutions, rather than communicative rationality, are sources of legitimacy.

As a consequence, there is a quite different stress imputed by Weber and Habermas to politically relevant intersubjectivity. This concept may be broadly defined as meaningful interactions between any large set of different people and social groups, as with Habermas; but also narrowly defined as meaningful relations between specific sets of people who act in their capacities as members of civil or political institutions, in keeping with Weber. To these different conceptions correspond different views, respectively, broad and narrow, of the public sphere. There is, furthermore, a dissimilar appraisal of the democratic promise of the new social movements. Habermas praises them as sources of innovation and resistance to the colonization of the lifeworld; while Weber considers them as causes of public disorder, which is politically and socially detrimental.

The potential fruitfulness of these partially different conceptions and theories of democracy is worth noting. Research may investigate how the public sphere, broadly defined in Habermasian terms, has promoted or followed processes of crisis, breakdown, and reconsolidation of democracies (Linz 1978). It may also inspire investigations on the consequences for democratic regimes of large versus narrow public spheres. A restricted public sphere (Habermas 1962; 1989) may supply the political system with well-articulated desiderata coming from an informed public opinion; at the cost, however, of preventing a substantial part of the population from full access to the democratic process. In contrast, Weber's democratic theory includes in political society (roughly equivalent to Habermas' public sphere) organizations providing voice and representation to different political and economic interests. Universal suffrage and the organized and law-abiding representation of all societal interests are necessary conditions to the successful pursuit of these ends.

A large part of the population would be thereby included in the political system. But the access barriers would not be easily overcome by the remaining part. The negative consideration in terms of desirability and effectiveness which Weber, in contrast to Habermas, gives to the new social movements may account for this different conclusion. A Weber-inspired research may then investigate the institutional conditions that promote the full inclusion of the socially disadvantaged classes into Parliamentary democracy; alternatively, the conditions which are conducive to its partial and inadequate incorporation, as was the case of the Social Democratic movement in Imperial Germany (Roth 1963); or, finally, the conditions in which "sterile political outbursts" (Weber 1984: 550-551) may occur. As previously emphasized, Weber was wary of them, and considered them signs of a defective democracy.

**Weber and Habermas' Democratic Theories as compared to other Formulations.**

According to contemporary democratic theory, there is a set of political rights and legal safeguards which are inherent to liberalism, and are also a necessary condition to democracy. At least to this extent, contemporary theory has been consistent with Weber and Habermas' theoretical positions. It has not, however, produced a comparative discussion or assessment of these two authors' contributions to contemporary democratic theory. In order to support this thesis it will be then focused on the writings on Dahl, Sartori, Bobbio, and Held, as major exponents of this field of study.

Since his celebrated work on polyarchal democracy (Dahl 1956), Dahl's basic question has been: How to attain and maximize political equality and popular sovereignty in order to protect the political opportunities, freedoms and interests of those who are subject to collective decisions. Dahl's answer is that procedures are necessary to make binding decisions that concerning members of an association, and of a country in particular. Procedural democracy involves some assumptions and criteria, as follows: Members are defined as all adults, except transients and the mentally defective. Democratic procedures entail that only members are equally qualified and able to control the political agenda, and express their political preferences.

They do so by participating in the process of decision making with equal voting. Moreover, voters are presumed to adequately understand the issues on which they express their preferences; and to possess identical and sufficient information on the political alternatives of leaders and choices. Democracy therefore presupposes competent citizens. The criterion of competence differs from, and is not necessarily compatible with, the majority rule (Dahl 1956: 63-84; 1982: 4-30; 1986: 191-225). Dahl has expressed concern lest there be sources of political power not subject to popular control, such as special interest groups or other autonomous organizations (Dahl 1982); and the right to self-government be not extended to those who are employed in economic enterprises (Dahl 1985). Furthermore, Dahl is aware of objections that may be raised against the majority rule: in particular, that a minority might be damaged as a consequence of this rule unless is protected by legal rights (see Dahl 1989; see also Pennock 1979: 7-9)).

According to Sartori (1987), nineteenth-century liberalism had a distinctive core, which, in keeping with Tocqueville and Mill, involves the constitutional protection of the minority, and competitive voting procedures (rather than direct, Rousseauian democracy) (Sartori 1987: 380; see also: 134-141). Modern liberalism has laid stress not only on liberty, and representative democracy based on competitive elections; but also on social and economic equality: "Democracy within Liberalism", as Sartori has put it succinctly (Sartori 1987: 240-247, 386-389).

In his revisitation of democratic theory, Sartori dwells very perfunctorily on Habermas, who is taken to task for his lack of concern for the fate of public opinion in the absence of a pluralistic society (Sartori 1987: 99 and 127, note 38). Weber is more extensively dealt with, especially insofar as his distinction between the ethic of responsibility and that of ultimate ends is concerned. Referring also to Kant's ethic and to what he considers the proper relation between ethics and politics, Sartori makes the following statement: "In Kantian-Weberian terms … our democracies suffer from a lack of moral basis" (Sartori 1987: 243). Sartori's own contribution to democratic theory has then strong roots in Liberalism, as a current of thought present both in philosophy and classical sociology.

Bobbio's formulation of democratic theory is close to Sartori's in some relevant ways. They both consider electoral procedures based on universal and equal suffrage as necessary to forming collective will, and making collective decisions (Bobbio 1976: 72-75). Like Sartori, furthermore, also Bobbio maintains that "only in a liberal state can democracy be put into effect" (Bobbio 2005: 49; see also: 37-39); and dwells on Tocqueville and Mill as ideological precursors of modern democratic theory (Bobbio 2005: 51-66). Bobbio adds that universal and equal suffrage should be complemented by citizens' access to the loci where economic decisions are made. This control should not be detrimental to democracy, conceived of as a set of procedural rules (Bobbio 1976: 17-20).

In this last respect, Bobbio's democratic theory differs from Sartori's, and also from those of Weber and Habermas. Bobbio briefly mentions Weber's concept of plebiscitarian democracy, but pays no attention to Habermas, an author with whom he seems to be not familiar (Bobbio

1987: 168-170). Dahl (1989), on the contrary, discusses Habermas' theory of communicative action, but ignores Weber. As Habermas observes, a procedural notion of democracy such as Bobbio's and Dahl's fails to consider discourses and bargaining processes that are instrumental to institutionalizing democratic procedures. According to Habermas, these procedures are not supported by the knowledge necessary to have an informed public opinion; and also to enable the parliament to control administrative action (Habermas 1996: 303-304, 315-321).

David Held (1995; 2006) has built on Robert Dahl's conditions for a polyarchal democratic system to formulate his own version of democratic theory. His theory emphasizes the principle of the autonomy of the person, and is connoted by "a shifting balance between descriptive-explanatory and normative statements" (2006: 6). In keeping with this principle, which he traces back to John Stuart Mill, the person is conceived of as capable "to reason self-consciously, to be self-reflective and to be self-determining" (Held 1995: 151). Held considers this principle "at the core of the modern liberal democratic project". It is represented in terms both of a democratic culture, and also of "a bundle of rights which people can enjoy as a result of their status as free and equal members of particular communities" (Held 1995: 149-150).

The modern liberal democratic project also includes the citizen's active involvement in collective decisions by means of the majority rule, as institutionally regulated and safeguarded; and the creation of the best circumstances to develop the citizen's abilities, talents, end economic opportunities (Held 1995: 150, 156-158). According to Held, Weber and Habermas' writings on democracy belong to two different models: competitive elitism and government overload, respectively. The former model is considered very restrictive, and therefore "undermining the essence of liberal political culture" (Held 2006: 125; see also 157, 197); the latter is unconvincing in that it underestimates the fragmented nature of contemporary democratic politics (Held 2006: 200). They also differ in their focusing, respectively, on the nation-State, as with Weber, or on cosmopolitanism, as with Kant and Habermas (Held 1995: 24).

**A few words by way of conclusion.**

In conclusion, contemporary democratic theory should perhaps pay more attention to some features of the liberal democratic project, which they seem to have neglected. In contrast, Habermas and Weber have considered these features relevant, though their formulations have differed in some respects. They have endorsed basic tenets of democratic liberalism, such as popular control, juridical defense, a developed civil society, and the autonomy of the person; but they have also inquired into the social presuppositions of these tenets, and have identified them in aspects of civil society – a discursively established public sphere, and institutionally organized political settings, respectively – to which other political thinkers have given less consideration so far. It is a task of future research to establish the consequences for civil and political society of these conceptions of the public sphere, whether considered separately or in their interrelations.

[1] Habermas has made extensive use of social-science knowledge – especially, the analysis of language and. cognitive and moral development – which was unavailable in Weber's time. This fact should prove no obstacle to a comparison between their democratic theories.

[2] For a comparison between Weber and Habermas' theories of the rationalization process, see White 1988: 92-103. It is not relevant here that Habermas' view of consensus as intersubjectively achieved has been found fraught with theoretical difficulties (Lukes 1982).

[3] Luhmann has argued in his debate with Habermas (Habermas, Luhmann 1971) that a consensus may not be reached anyway, even if such conditions obtain.

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# Review of Keith Richards (and James Fox), Life

By | 2011: vol. 10, issue 4

Did it start with Bowie, or was it Gary Glitter—that vast mid-1970s dumbing down that glam rock initiated and then perfected? “Outrageous” outfits, the androgyny fix, retro Space fantasies, and at the fringes the desiccated meth freaks for whom the Velvet Underground was alpha and omega. The Stones, Yardbirds, Animals and even purist Eric Clapton; the Ur Blues freaks suddenly relegated to B movie back story. Andy Warhol spouted mercantilist platitudes and his Super Stars wallowed in the death cult that Punk would later codify.

It was over, and the sad shadow of Edie Sedgwick and Warhol’s many victims surfaced briefly and were then assigned to that terminal place where fame meets a needle; where celebrity eats itself; where all the patent absurdities that were to follow the Sixties slowly devour anything with heart.  Dylan was forced further and further into absurdist posturing, all of it summed in the absolute narcissism of *Renaldo and Clara*; in the filmed final moment when, as at Altamont, the fabled 60s went belly up, victim to its icons.  The Grateful Dead end, not with Garcia, but long before as the spaced out acid fantasies of their audience terminate in the meaningless Peace symbology reduced to groovy hieroglyph for kids there for the tie-dye with oldsters still looking to Boogie.

Richards has long indicated with his skull rings and deaths head profile that all that Romance ends in death. Everything the Stones touched has now turned to Tales of Stoner Glory. The YouTube videos, in stark black and white featuring screaming teens pissing themselves while Jones smirks, Jagger dances and Richards batters a berserker fan, while good ol’ Bill and Charlie lay it down rock solid, like. (For the best account of the early Stones stage shows see Nik Cohn’s *Rock From the Beginning*, still the best book on the early English scene.)

And what of Andrew Loog Oldham, the manager, who oversaw some of their first definitive stuff, convinced them to play with make-up and androgyny, knew that the Beatles had to be countered, and that the Stones were what the kids really wanted; something nasty, Contra-wholesome brimming with hostility for the Established Order (King and Queen, Mom and Dad) which Sir Mick became. But not Keith whose middle distance stare, bottle and an advert for hedonism, and rasping whiskey voice once signaled London cool reaching for the nether regions where only The Funk could thrive.

Oldham is now rumored to be living in Columbia, still record producing for South American markets; a family man, relatives, the whole mishigas. Oldham who forced them to sit down and write their first tunes, Oldham who oversaw what he called the “ Edsel” that they had so carefully constructed those first heady years when everything was getting hammered into

place. The Stones have always generated not just help, but their own salvation, at just exactly the right moment. As if the Zeitgeist were convinced of their absolute necessity. Oldham appears as they are birthed in confusion and media promo. Jimmy Miller produces *Beggars Banquet* after the faux Pink Floyd disaster of *Their Satanic Majesties Request*. Allan Carr "out-thugs" the lawyers at Decca. Anita Pallenberg hovers as they grope for personal styles and not just a "look" but an attitude.

Attitude is the to be the real key to Post Stones rock . . . Instrumentalists who couldn't play, Johnny Rotten is the Ayn Rand of DIY rock.

Again and again there is someone there to point the way, even as they stumble, bumbling once again in the midst of that Pop mess they once inhabited before the deification and the Jann Wenner moment: what other group has had its fan letter masked as a rock journal?

Even Altamont, in all its murderous, racist horror helps further the legend, as the Maysles' document in *Gimme Shelter* the bands' reaction to the murder of James Meredith, the moment at which illusionist PR blends with America's poisoned *naïf* poses and the pool-cued fascism of the Hell's Angels. Godard film *Sympathy for the Devil* is unable to see that Jones is floundering, on his way out, and soon to die, either a suicide or murdered. Stoned lives turned into B movie fodder: wasted Brian smiling, staggering toward the street of Tabloid sadness.

Keith Richards positions himself here as the real conscience of the Stones; never sells out. Jagger attempts a privatized event but fails at a solo career.  Richards was drawn to the sons and daughters of the demimonde, seeking what he told a recovering Marianne Faithful was the "Holy Grail." Some of the lyrics blend the theological with the demonic- Richards knows his King James, the language still audible in Robert Johnson and Blind Willie; in Fred McDowell and the Blues legends. Men raised with the stunning language of the English Bible, and lives as tormented as the Man could make them. How's that for "lyrical" motivation?

Richards only does the purest drugs – unavailable to anyone but the best-heeled and best connected and best-served of the Druggerati. The best of the songs are tales of the street, of love gone wrong or wandering, of what those at the bottom can hope to encounter- who cares that some of it is top down?  Druggie affectations of the well-heeled playing at edgy life or based on works inspired by Black culture and the terrible price it paid?

Richards is capable of the occasional kindness and real generosity. He is also a ruthless SOB quite prepared to see those who can no longer 'cut it" be left to the jackals. As he ages he comes to resemble that other harbinger of Death, Bill Burroughs, whose desiccated face educated the kids bent on Hipness soon victim to the stone cold amorality of Manson or the Angels. The rocker stoners have had a terrible lesson to learn too late:  the wasted existence that was to set them free, murders them instead.

There is a chilling account, which does not appear in the biography, of one of the Stones tours when Richards was deeply addicted. He'd become attached to a street smart anarcho prince who had retained the touch for copping and insinuating himself in high places. This drug buddy

was deep trouble and brought with him what the Stones Security feared most – a deeply dangerous companion who reeked of imminent overdose.

It's axiomatic among junkies that sooner or later a shot will go bad; it needs to happen but once. It was decided that the guy had to be deep sixed and the once favored chap was beaten so badly that the message must remain engraved in his bones: he disappears. Richards moved on leaving the waster wasted. A junkie's tale? They're a sixpence a dozen those stories- but they tell you the truth, even when sweetened with a little too much anecdote.

Keith Richards began in Dartford, an end of the line bog near London; he's reared in Post War bleakness. England was a landscape so grim it could drive bands like the Stones and Beatles, Kinks and Pacemakers, Yardbirds and Pink Floyd into musical careers so focused and maniacal they leave the American competition in the dust generated by the semi-motivated. The Beach Boys were not desperate to escape Southern California, or the Dead to flee San Francisco. But the English, with their visions of America, really wanted out. Only a few made it. The elements in what became the "English Invasion" are almost invariable. Grinding poverty and Post-war angst, art school careers, music as salvation, bands and managers and finally celebrity, if not success. The Beatles were for a time the most famous people in the world, and the Stones and Oldham proved that nasty was completely marketable. Latecomers like Malcolm McLaren just build on the Stones "naughty" premise.

The mid-1960s were fertile ground for revolution, protest, and the sound track was rock. It never got any better, and in fact the fecund combination of Avant Gardeistas and a loose aggregate of Bohemians and Collectors, loose change Kapital and new media were never again duplicated.  Dylan, the Beatles, the Stones, the Antiwar resistance, the media's simplistic reduction of the whole period to drug-driven lunacy, and the gutter presses preoccupations with sexual titillation; the image of artist as genius/pervert; all of it was pushed by the Philistine fascination with deviance.  The dreams of the bourgeoisie remain sealed in this historical rewrite, and look what's come after: people for whom Lady Gaga's academic poses are as outsider as it gets, or the pathetic Grungers aping their moral and musical betters with whiner angst. Jesus: what a fucking comedown… as Keith himself has obliquely noted.

Richards was not alone in his preoccupations which, in Blues and popular music, were really about embracing the Black take on a culture which had tried to enslave it, and having failed at that, to lynch it out of existence. There is this terrible anxiety in the early Richards, you notice it in the books about those brief London days when it was all just coming together. The competition was fierce, the Blues purists unbearable esotericists, the club scene primitive and the press and public clueless about what motivated the first Stones. It was Muddy Waters, Howling Wolf, Chuck Berry, James Cotton, the Chess Records stable of Bluesmen overseen by Willie Dixon. Dixon's name appears as co-writer on hundreds of traditional Blues, Chess recordings. Why? Because Dixon was an enforcer for the Chess Brothers, and if you wanted the gig you gave away some of the publishing.

I once saw the man throw a recalcitrant guitarist down a flight of stairs at a Blues Festival in

Chicago. You didn't mess with Willie's three hundred pounds of joy. Richards and the band show up at Chess in the mid-Sixties and discover that Muddy Waters is a janitor, and if you want further insights listen to Sonny Boy Williamson talking to one of the Chess Brothers, in studio, during a session: "What do I want to call it… call it your Mother, I don't care what you call it." Richards and the Stones later put Marshall Chess, the erratic son, in charge of their own label, and then discover…but lets leave that for another episode. The Chess Brothers helped invent the modern record business, Polish Jews who set up a recording studio and begin to tape the songs and stories of Blacks driven from the South and into the ghettos of Chicago looking, as they used to say "for a better life."

Richards quickly sussed the Chicago Blues scene, which for someone raised within Britain's caste system must have seemed Paradise Found. Though Richards never formulates the "problem," his life offers ample evidence of what the Hipster obsession with drugs created. It is hardly ever mentioned out loud but the Hipster code has always held that at the top of the creative pantheon, an altar composed of Charlie Parker, Chet Baker, Lenny Bruce, and countless others, sits a bag of heroin. For anyone pushing the envelope, and Richards qualifies completely, right there with sexual experimentation, music, and the Bohemian edges, there has always been smack. Richards never tires of pointing out that he only did the best stuff. But its Chamber of Commerce material, inserted because a man with kids doesn't wind up being lumped with the pushers. That Blacks to the present moment continue to be copper fitted to drugs, addiction, and family dysfunction, is axiomatic in a country where the current political atmosphere is solidly racist, reactionary, and well-funded. Factor in Fox News and one sees just how every drug episode plays into the Right-wing agenda. But what a tale- a tale you don't need Johnny Depp to explain. Money, fame, celebrity, and talent can bring with them all that's necessary to the Good Life. What they can't do is redeem the players or change the game.

# David Price's Weaponizing Anthropology: Social Science in the Service of the Militarized State.

By | 2011: vol. 10, issue 4

In December 2006, several months before the completion of my dissertation fieldwork in Istanbul, I offered a preliminary presentation of my research on civil Islamic foundations and secularism at the American Research Institute in Turkey, which had partially funded my research. Although I had alerted several Turkish friends and colleagues of my talk, I was not terribly sanguine about the likelihood of a large or vocal audience—surely there were more attractive destinations along the Bosporus on that chill evening in early winter. I was surprised, therefore, when two well-dressed men arrived late to my presentation and conspicuously sat in the front row, several feet away from me. The first was exceptionally dapper; from his rigid posture and noticeable Ataturk lapel pin, I suspected that he might be Turkish military brass. The second was somewhat more casual, and, as I soon learned, American. After I finished my largely descriptive talk, I began to field questions in the traditional academic manner, almost all of which came from the second of the two latecomers.

He was relentless: "What would happen if one of these groups of you study wanted to overthrow the state? What kind of activities do they engage in covertly? Do you think they're armed?" I insistently demurred: the organizations of my study were all non-profits legally recognized by the state, not clandestine, militarized cells. The second man continued to badger me during the reception, with his Turkish military companion gazing silently on. When I finally asked him his name, he produced the most anonymous credential imaginable: a plain business card reading simply "John Smith, Photographer", without further contact information. As these two somewhat sinister audience members departed, my John Le Carre moment came into focus: the Turkish military and, in all probability, the CIA had taken interest in my research. They had attended my presentation, driving all the way to Istanbul from Ankara (as I later learned), in order to determine whether my ethnography might have some *strategic* value.

Immersed in the privileged naivete that is the prerogative of every first-time ethnographer, I was rather shocked by the military and intelligence interest in my research. I should not have been. The relationship between military projects and anthropology is arguably coeval with the discipline's founding itself; from the ventures of British colonialism to the American Bureau of Indian Affairs to Vietnam War-era Project Camelot, the expertise of ethnography has frequently been harnessed to strategic and tactical military ends. The recruitment of American anthropologists to warfare in Afghanistan and Iraq, under the guise of the controversial US Army Human Terrain System (HTS) Program is merely the most recent high water mark in the courtship of the scholars of culture by the brokers of war.

It is this troubled, troublesome courtship of anthropology and the military that occupies anthropologist David H. Price in his indispensable new volume, *Weaponizing Anthropology* (Counterpunch). While Price is no newcomer to this debate—indeed, along with other members of the Network of Concerned Anthropologists, his has been one of the most principled and adamant voices against military uses of anthropology in recent years—*Weaponizing Anthropology* constitutes his most forceful theoretical and political broadside against the military uses and abuses of anthropology to date.

*Weaponizing Anthropology* marshals an impressive battalion of arguments, aimed to appeal at specialists and non-specialists alike. In the first section of the book, Price offers a timely overview of earlier intersections of anthropological knowledge and military projects, placing particular emphasis on the fraught relationship between early American anthropologists such as Franz Boas and Margaret Mead and American military forays against Native Americans, the effects of the Nuremburg Trials on ethical debates within the social sciences, and the role of Vietnam War-era military uses of anthropology in spurring the American Anthropological Association (AAA) to draft and adopt explicit ethical codes and standards for its members.

From here, Price moves on to a comprehensive critique of the recent glut of militarily-funded programs on American university campuses, including the National Security Education Program (NSEP), the Pat Roberts Intelligence Scholars Program (PRISP) and the Intelligence Community Scholars Program (ICSP), many of which are funded directly by the CIA or the Department of Defense's Minerva Consortium. Price devotes special attention to Minerva monies—as he notes, "the Minerva Consortium (is) a Defense Department program designed to further link universities to Defense's prescribed views and analysis (p. 60)." While he goes to some length to distinguish between these different military intrusions upon the American academy, the ultimate effects of each of these programs are broadly the same: They directly undermine the principles of intellectual openness, independence from state and military interests, and peer review that define the Academy as we know and value it.

Price's discussion of military-funded programs on American universities, which constitutes the bulk of the first half of *Weaponizing Anthropology,* does not concern anthropology alone. Programs such as PRISP and NSEP have sinister implications for almost all of the social science disciplines, from area studies and political science to history and even library science. Price details at length the fascinating case of a proposed Intelligence Community Center of Academic Excellence (ICCAE), funded by the CIA, at the University of Washington. In contrast to the myopic enthusiasm of the financially-strapped UW administration for funding from any source, faculty from Latin American Studies, History, Southeast Asian Studies and research librarians from International Studies all questioned the probity and wisdom of accepting CIA lucre.

In the second half of *Weaponizing Anthropology*, Price focuses more specifically on the trouble for anthropology that military overtures and appropriations spell. Price neatly outlines three distinct types of problems inherent in militarized anthropology:

“Culturally informed counterinsurgency categorically presents three types of problems for anthropology, these categories are: ethical, political, and theoretical. The ethical problems concern voluntary informed consent, transparency, manipulation of studies populations, and the likelihood of harm befalling those researched; while the political problems most obviously concern using anthropology to support neo-colonial projects of conquest, occupation and domination (p. 179).”

Price’s immediate targets in the second half of the book are the military ethnographers of the David Petraeus-era U.S. Army, the professional anthropologists who have lent their intellectual capital and expertise to HTS, and the publication of *The U.S. Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Manual Field Manual*, which has provided the imprimatur of theoretical sophistication to HTS. He rightly notes that most Human Terrain Teams (HTTs) in war zones contain very few, if any, credentialed anthropologists—due to pervasive skepticism over the ethics and politics of HTS within American anthropology, the military has had to recruit impressionable graduate students and malleable social scientists from other disciplines to flesh out the ranks of the HTTs.

Price is especially scathing in his criticism of the anthropological boosters of HTS, such as Montgomery McFate, the Minerva Chair of Strategic Research at the U.S. Naval War College. When he accuses McFate and others of placing personal and professional gain above the ethical and political considerations inherent in the military appropriate of ethnography, it is difficult for the trained anthropologist not to nod in agreement. Price is equally unsparing in his attack on the *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*. As he demonstrates through a barrage of specific citations, compiled in a chapter titled “Commandeering Scholarship: The New Counterinsurgency Manual, Anthropology, and Academic Pillaging,” the authors of the *Manual* plagiarized freely from such notable anthropologists and social theorists as Victor Turner, Max Weber, Anthony Giddens, and Antonio Gramsci, not to mention the *Encyclopedia Britannica.*

By the end of *Weaponizing Anthropology*, Price succeeds in leaving the reader deeply unsettled over the possible effects of the current military uses of anthropology on the discipline itself. On the whole, ethical objections to anthropologists working for the military have tended to have more traction within the discipline than political arguments—professional bodies such as the AAA have confidently proclaimed informed consent and the imperative to do no harm to research subjects as *sine quibus non* of ethnographic work. Price clearly would prefer that anthropologists take a robust political stance against neo-imperialism and American military ventures as well, and I, for one, agree. Ultimately, however, his most trenchant and thought-provoking argument concerns the influence of militarized anthropology on anthropological theory itself.

Price persuasively argues that the military theorization of culture relies solely on anachronistic structural-functionalist concepts of culture—as he dryly observes, the experience of reading the *Counterinsurgency Field Manual* is akin to “that of reading a contemporary physics text relying on theories of aether to explain radio broadcasts, a chemistry text basing its analysis on inherent qualities of earth, wind and fire, or a geology manual with a chapter on Adam and Eve

(p. 141)." Despite his humor, however, Price is deadly serious in his assessment of the possibility of a full-scale theoretical revision and reversion within anthropology to suit military ends. And this, ultimately, is the most sinister prospect of HTS and the more general military flirtation with anthropology. Suspicious characters attending public lectures, in Istanbul or elsewhere, are certainly discomfiting. But they pale in comparison to the experience of hearing licensed social scientists voice theories of culture and politics that dovetail neatly—strategically—with military projects. This experience has become all-too-common in recent years; *Weaponizing Anthropology* provides a timely, urgent reminder that this should alarm anthropologists more than it already does.

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# Conor McCabe, Sins of the Father – Tracing the Decisions that Shaped the Irish Economy and Peadar Kirby and Mary P. Murphy: Towards a Second Republic – Irish politics after the Celtic Tiger. London: Pluto Press

By | 2011: vol. 10, issue 4

On a sweltering summer's evening the crowd packed into Connolly Books, Dublin's last radical bookshop, heard Conor McCabe's book presented as "an examination of the house itself and not just of the broken furniture" that could become a "weapon." The house and the furniture are seriously dilapidated. Following several years of steady growth in the economy and personal income, budget surpluses, even healthier trade surpluses and near-full employment – though also widening inequality – Ireland went into dramatic reversal from 2008. This small open economy on the periphery of Europe might have struggled just to deal with the impact of the global recession. But it was also hit by a near-terminal crisis in its banking system, collapse of the property development and construction sectors and major shortfalls in the public finances.

In late 2010 the then government of Fianna Fáil and the Green Party negotiated a bailout with the European Union, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund ("the troika") making up to $110 billion available in loans to the state on stringent conditions for reducing public expenditure. The one-time economic *wunderkind* of Europe now hosts quarterly visitations from troika representatives to check on its good behaviour. The Irish banks are now wholly or partly owned by the state and the whole population is paying – and will pay for many more years – to keep them afloat.

The crisis has generated a mini-industry in instant histories that produces best-sellers like an analysis by Irish Times journalist Simon Carswell of the rogue Anglo Irish Bank, whose massive property loans portfolio brought it down and a lot more with it. Business journalists Matt Cooper and Shane Ross have had a strong public response to their narratives of how Ireland went from boom to bust. Prominent essayist and muckraker Fintan O'Toole has detailed and denounced the corruption and stupidity of those in power. Economists Jim Power and Stephen Kinsella have analysed the bailouts of the banks and of the state. Burning bondholders, subordinated loans and debt forgiveness are part of everyday discourse on city streets and in the most remote rural areas.

Historian Conor McCabe told the bookshop gathering how his ambition grew to contribute something much more substantial to the debate. He started by trying to tell the story of his own working-class neighbourhood in Dublin but realised he needed a "macrohistory in order to tell the microhistory". He went searching for explanations and origins. His contributions to a radical blog, dublinopinion.ie, attracted a publisher's attention and the expanded blog posts have been shaped into a lively denunciation of key strategic choices that McCabe credits for the present mess the irish Republic is plunged in. These various origins of *Sins of the Father* are reflected in the book's considerable strengths and in its several weaknesses.

Having himself emerged from a neighborhood with a large proportion of public housing McCabe examines Ireland's housing sector. But there is also a more fundamental reason for starting here: the scandalous disproportion of economic effort in construction and property contributed decisively to Ireland's bubble and its bursting. Of the four chapters on key sectors of the Irish economy, this opening chapter, Housing, is the longest and strongest. McCabe's skill in archival research shows here to very good effect. He finds evidence in the reports of commissions that the earliest independent Irish governments knew the alternatives available to them. The choices they took deliberately favoured a speculator element in the growing middle class. The early heavy reliance on private property developers to provide housing and office space – including a large part of government office space – has stayed with us.

In considering the property bubble of the 2000s McCabe is a tad excessive perhaps on discounting a socio-cultural dimension to the 'property madness' that had young families financially over-stretched and committed to long commutes in their pursuit of home ownership, older couples investing in second, third and further houses as a form of pension and high wage-earners speculating in the totally unfamiliar Bulgarian and Hungarian property markets. McCabe reminds us of the forty-year-old recommendations of a government-appointed commission on controlling land prices that successive governments failed to enact. He successfully weaves the threads from key decisions taken seventy and eighty years ago to the contemporary over-exposure of the banks to property investment and speculative lending and a consequent collapse. In that important sense, we are having the sins of the father – what social scientists call a policy legacy – visited upon us.

McCabe's treatment of Irish agriculture is much less satisfactory. Following the same *cui bono* form of inquiry – which social group benefited from key decisions? – he examines, like prescient critics like Ray Crotty long before him, Irish over-reliance on live cattle exports. He identifies the principal beneficiaries as the sub-group of farmers who owned grazing land on which beef cattle were 'finished' for export. But live cattle for export have for many years ceased to be the major, or even a major, element of agricultural production. Meat and dairy products – no doubt less completely processed than they might be – are many times more important The chapter on industry is more rounded but also ends early with the critique of industrial strategy by the consulting group Telesis published thirty years ago. The case for strengthening indigenous manufacturing made by that group and by others before and since is valid. The case histories of the Gulf Oil terminal in County Cork and cheap sale of natural resources are well chosen to illustrate the deference to multinational corporations. But the terms of the argument also have

shifted with intensive globalisation and in the altered balance between services and manufacturing investment.

Here again McCabe is perhaps too single-minded in his critique, making no reference to the significant growth in employment over the period of export-led, foreign-investment-driven growth. Even with the drastic downturn of the last three years there are still 70 per cent more people employed in Ireland in 2011 than there were twenty years ago. More recently, he has shown that foreign industry contributed very little directly to employment growth. But the book argues that excessive attention to foreign investment was at a cost to the indigenous sector – so how did employment grow? McCabe is right to point to the benefits that groups like land-owners, builders, commercial property owners, lawyers and accountants derived from the dominant industrial strategy. Here he is building towards the conclusion's claim that "the middleman is the dominant force in modern Irish capitalism". He links this to international experience through occasional reference to an avid Irish *comprador* class but, surprisingly for a historian, does not refer to the emergence in the 19$^{th}$ century of the gombeen as a particular familiar type of Irishman.

The chapter on finance shows how several feasible options for reorganisation of the banking sector were available and how the choices made benefited speculative finance over productive finance. McCabe reminds us of two earlier state bailouts of over-stretched financial services companies. This wider context adds context to the analysis of the almost gratuitous 2008 state guarantee to Irish banks' loans as well as savers' deposits. In his narrative of the last few years McCabe acknowledges his debt to several of the instant histories mentioned earlier but the framework he has built is stable and allows him to show very recent (and contested) decisions as a consequence of earlier ones. The transition from essays and blog posts to chapters and a book needed a firmer editorial hand. There are too many repeated phrases and unfinished thoughts. There are too many claims to know what "the fact is" or "the real intention." McCabe also might have been encouraged to look at more of the critical literature of the past two or three decades on Ireland's economic and social development, which was ample if largely ignored or derided at the time.

Among those with a long and strong track record in critical analysis of Ireland's economy and society are Peadar Kirby and Mary Murphy. They take up historically where McCabe leaves off and, like him, they aim not just to interpret the world but also to change it. They examine Ireland's current financial, economic and political crisis in scholarly detail, drawing on a very large number of academic studies and commentaries. While McCabe presents a narrative, Kirby and Murphy offer a structural analysis based on political economy theory and, especially helpful, international comparisons. A more complex picture emerges of the key economic and political actors who generated the Celtic Tiger phenomenon, for good and/or ill.

The sections on the economy, political institutions and the role of the bureaucracy are replete with citations, statistics and conceptual distinctions; much of the book is densely presented, though with signposts to the prospective reader. Their critique of the neoliberal model of capitalism and of its political shaping is strong, though it wavers a bit under the weight of

analytical terms such as “technocractic developmentalism”, “fiscal latitude” and “competition state” and more popular denunciation of “crony capitalism”, “the Fianna Fáil state” and “cosy cartels”.

From the start they stress their interest in exploring realistic alternatives to the present model, though also noting the “passive citizenry”, as observed by other analysts, the “weak public intellectual tradition” and the “absence of counter-discourse” in Ireland. Later, however, they derive some comfort from the February 2011 general election, the wipe-out of Fianna Fáil and the commitment of the new coalition government, including the Labour Party, to significant political and constitutional reform. They consider the battlefield of ideas to be more open than at any time in the history of the state. They draw attention to many progressive civil society initiatives of the last few years and they consider the possibilities for new parties or movements to push for a progressive “second republic”. This, they say, would redefines traditional Irish republicanism in terms of social substance and be based on values of equality, sustainability and robust public debate.

The launch event for *Towards a Second Republic* was a more formal affair than that of *Sins of the Father* but it also celebrated the possibility of radical change and the contribution of well-informed analysis and argument to such change. There was an air of optimism too as a strong advocate of a new republic, Labour Party politician, academic and poet, Michael D Higgins, had just been elected president. The “communicative discourse” that Kirby and Murphy urge will have an talented and articulate proponent in the highest office of the land.

# Frank Dikötter, Mao's Great Famine

By | 2011: vol. 10, issue 4

When Mao Tse-Tung was alive he was cast alternately as bandit, communist leader, ruthless dictator, elder statesman, and mass murderer. Since his death the characterization is less ambivalent: hedonistic despot, reckless utopian, unbridled monster. The change is anchored in the twists and turns of history. The unfettering of capitalism in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union and China's manic opening to western capitalism has no interest in seeing Mao in shades of grey. He is part of the troika of twentieth century "Evil:" Hitler, Stalin, Mao Tse-Tung.

Mao's rap sheet encompasses two convulsive periods: the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. The former is the evidently clinching event proving Mao's personal culpability in the murder of tens of millions. So now we get the latest entry in the teeming "Mao is a monster" literature. Frank Dikötter's *Mao's Great Famine: The History of China's Most Devastating Catastrophe 1958-1962* is an examination of the Great Leap Forward period of rapid collectivization in the late 1950s early 60s, which coincided with a massive famine and the loss of life for many people. This book presents a revised and even more horrifying picture of what happened during the Great Leap. Dikötter's claim to originality is that not only has he studied this extensively, he has examined regional records in the provinces of China and thereby proclaims to etch a truly accurate picture of what *really* happened. The following breathless declaration gives us the flavor of Dikötter's approach:

As the fresh evidence presented in this book demonstrates coercion, terror and systematic violence were the foundation of the Great Leap Forward. Thanks to the often meticulous reports compiled by the party itself, we can infer that between 1958 and 1962 by a rough approximation 6 to 8 per cent of the victims were tortured to death or summarily killed — amounting to at least 2.5 million people.[1]

This declaration, if true, is damning and staggering. Yet a closer read reveals it as fallacious, as artful writing full of extrapolation and conjecture. Here we have reports that are "often meticulous," (and what of the ones less so?) yet nonetheless we can only arrive at a "rough approximation." To get to that dubious approximation we are given, without any explanation or elaboration, an arbitrary mathematical formula. Nowhere is there a table documenting the quantitative breakdown. There are no charts showing X number of victims in Y Province, or any other means for grounding us in exactly where these awesome numbers supposedly come from. What we have, in sum, are assertions based on tendentious guesswork. In short this claim — like others in the book — is incredible. This rather glaring handicap ought to have led to the work being taken with a large grain of salt, if not rejected out of hand. Instead there are only mainstream raves. This is a "masterly study" (the *UK Guardian*). Dikötter is "extremely careful with his evidence" (the *New Republic*), and this is "the best and last word on Mao's greatest

horror." (*Literary Review*, Edinburgh). So what is going on?

First and foremost this analysis is ripped out of the larger historical context. There is no mention of famine ever occurring before benighted Communist rule. An earlier work on the same subject, Jasper Becker's *Hungry Ghosts* at least offered background — albeit through its own skewed lens — noting that pre-Communist China "suffered no fewer than 1,828 major famines."[2] In other words in the modern era China — like India and other parts of Asia — has been racked by famine whose toll of suffering is beyond human comprehension, and certainly beyond anything Mao's opponents care to acknowledge. By not addressing previous famines Dikötter looks at China under Communist rule in a narrow vacuum, thus dispensing with the inconvenient fact that famine in this part of the world has been a recurring phenomenon, which Mao did not invent or even magnify.

This distorted lense, however, serves Dokotter's central thesis that the Great Leap famine was the progeny of the diabolical Mao Tse Tung alone. Dikötter has to stretch to get there, but stretch he does, "Unlike Stalin, he [Mao] did not drag his rivals into a dungeon to have them executed, but he did have the power to remove them from office, terminating their careers — and the many privileges which came with a top position in the party."[3] In this world, having your career unfairly terminated is a crime on the level of being unjustly executed. Actually looking at what Mao had to say — something the author is loath to do — might have been instructive:

People may be wrongly executed. Once a head is chopped off, history shows it can't be restored, nor can it grow again as chives do, after being cut. If you cut off a head by mistake, there is no way to rectify the mistake, even if you want to. [4]

Mao is repudiating Stalin's method here — which ought to be of interest for someone wanting to understand this fraught period. For Mao execution was not a moral issue, rather it was a matter of calculating how the practice fit into the overall aim of achieving his Sinified version of socialism and communism. This approach was too often instrumental and problematic — a point that lends credence to the book's attributing to Mao a certain 'ends justify the means' philosophy. But there seems to be no interest in exploring that practice in any nuanced way (such as comparing it with how his opponents behaved). Refusing to consider Mao on his own terms, if only as a device to sharpen the argument, makes such writing as Dikotter's the very kind of propaganda it is so incensed by when glimpsed in the work of enemies.

Also tellingly absent in this analysis is any political sense of proportion regarding the geopolitical situation. For example, we learn,"ever since the United States had started to provide military support for Taiwan and after the Americans introduced tactical nuclear missiles in March 1955, Mao had been set on having the bomb."[5] What Dikötter doesn't explore is the reason why, i.e., that the United States was preparing for the option of nuclear war with China. As a headline in *New York Times* from the period unambiguously put it, "US Called Ready to Use Atom Arms." The article quotes James H. Douglas, then Secretary of the US Air Force who coolly lays out the strategy, "the nuclear-armed missiles had a dual

capability and were not limited to nuclear retaliation; they could use conventional high explosive as well." [6] This was the threatening context in which China was racing to achieve modernization, self-sufficiency and yes, nuclear weapons. It is hardly an exaggeration to say the situation was a life and death struggle. It was not a good thing China ultimately obtained those weapons — or that any country did, including the United States — but to argue that Mao was "paranoid" in the abstract is disingenuous and misleading.

Under Mao's leadership China decisively broke the grip of colonialism, defeating both Japan and the US-backed Chiang Kai-Shek regime. This radical upstart regime was a major obstacle to the US in its quest for hegemony in post World War II Asia — and the US defeat in Vietnam cannot be understood fully without understanding the role of Communist China. Through a torturous and contentious process Mao and his adherents transformed China from the "Sick man of Asia" into a country that by the mid-1960s was able to feed, clothe and supply healthcare for its people, all done in conscious opposition to a market-based economy. While it is legitimate to argue as to how costly, even at times horrific, this process was, from the stand of virulent defenders of current capitalism to assert *anything* good about Mao is absolutely out of bounds. To do so would suggest that the miseries of capitalism that abound amid the splendor of present-day China, actually have an alternative. The desirability and content of such alternative is beyond our scope here, but *the very idea of alternative* is anathema in such neoliberal quarters. In order to reinforce the status quo, Mao must be cast ignominiously into the dustbin of history.

It is in this skewed context that we witness a proliferation of memoirs and biographies whose sole aim is to depict Mao as among the worst people to ever walk the earth. In this familiar enterprise there are elements that range from base to surreal. You encounter a former board member of the *New Left Review*, Jon Halliday who co-authored *Mao: The Unknown Story*, a biography so unrelentingly and sensationally harsh that a group of China scholars felt compelled to publish, "*Was Mao Really A Monster?*" in an effort to bring the debate somewhere back into the realm of rationality.[7] Here too you find a *New York Times* reviewer castigate an author for being "chillingly cavalier about the tens of millions of people who lost their lives during Mao's years in power,"[8] for failing to make a point of Mao's monstrousness. That the book under review was by Henry Kissinger — no stranger to crimes against humanity — is an irony completely lost on the critic.

Which brings us back to Dikotter. This is a large volume whose key selling point is that the author spent ages researching dusty local archives. Yet when he presents his data he repeatedly undercuts the legitimacy of these archives. For example he writes, "Even when cadres were willing to confront the harsh reality of famine, who could have kept track of an avalanche of death?"[9] While this may be true, what does it suggest about the punctilious accuracy he seeks? He further undercuts his claims when he writes of existing statistics, i.e., those compiled by local Party officials, investigations carried out immediately, and investigations conducted in the years after:

The result is not so much a neatly arranged set of statistics revealing some absolute truth in a

few telling numbers, but rather a mass of uneven and at times messy documentation compiled in different ways, at different times, for different reasons, by different entities, with different degrees of reliability."[10]

We might then conclude it is speculative to settle on a final figure. Instead we get the following:

Some historians speculate that the figures stand as high as 50 or 60 million people. It is unlikely we will know the full extent of the disaster until the archives are completely opened. But these are the figures informally discussed by a number of party historians. And these are also, according to Chen Yizi, the figures cited at internal meeting of senior party members under Zhao Ziyan. Yu Xiguan, an independent researcher with a great deal of experience, puts the figures at 55 million excess deaths.[11]

Here Dikötter is having his cake and eating it. At the very end of his book he throws out numbers 10 million higher than his introductory estimate and validates them by invoking "figures cited at internal meeting [s]," as if that makes them authoritative. At the same time he covers himself saying we will not know the actual story until the archives open up. He does not and cannot now know, yet he is saying he does.

All this foregoing criticism is not to say bad things did not take place in China in this period, that people died as a result, and that Mao bears no responsibility. They did and he does. That said — and this verdict will elicit a howl of outrage in certain quarters — these questions are not settled in any way. In this respect it is worth bearing in mind that common knowledge has held that "millions" were executed during the Great Purge in the Soviet Union and that "tens of millions" were executed during Stalin's rule. Because the Soviet archives opened up in an unprecedented way in the early 1990s historian J. Arch Getty was able to access formerly secret records and show such figures as wildly inflated — things are more in the realm of hundreds of thousands executed during the Great Purge and on the level of 2 million deaths overall due to repression.[12] That revised figure does not diminish the horror – but facts do matter.

The totality of what happened during the Great Leap Forward needs to be understood without blinkers. To the degree reckless policy, instrumentalist design, and utopian voluntarism played a role in causing enormous human suffering it needs to be identified and rejected. Yet to the degree that a dynamic was set loose that went beyond the control of those sitting at the levers of power –including natural forces such as drought — those factors too need to be understood. With this there is a need for a respect for history. What China went through in the twentieth century —and there were hideous things long before the Great Leap — is of a piece with what much of the rest of the world had to undergo in striving for development and some degree of justice . We do not need another simple-minded screed justifying *a priori* verdicts and the status quo. We need to understand what happened in China because any effort to get to a different and better future requires it.

## Notes

[1] Frank Dikötter. *Mao's Great Famine: The History of China's Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958-1962,* Walker and Company, 2010, xi.

[2] Jasper Becker. *Hungry Ghosts: Mao's Secret Famine*, Henry Holt, 1996, 9.

[3] Dikötter, xiii.

[4] MaoTseTung, "On the Ten Relationships."

https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_51.htm

[5] Dikötter,11.

[6] Jack Raymond. "US Called Read to Use Atom Arms." *New York Times*, September 28, 1958.

[7] For a fuller discussion see, Tariq Ali, "On Mao's Contradictions." *New Left Review* 66, November-December 2010

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[11] Dikötter 333-334.

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