

FROM THE LEFT THE NEWSLETTER OF THE MARXIST SECTION OF THE AMERICAN SOCIOLOGY ASSOCIATION

FALL 1995: V 18 No 3 T.R. Young, Senior Editor

WELCOME to the Hard Copy of the new MARXIST NEWSLETTER. Beginning with this issue, the newsletter will first appear on the Progressive Scholars Network as an electronic edition of the Marxist Section Newsletter. For each Issue, I will set forth a preprint of a page of the Marxist Sociology Newsletter for comment and critique. I will include the more trenchant postings in the printed form mailed out by the ASA. In effect, each of those who comment will serve as correspondent/contributing editor of the Newsletter. Each page will offer a topic for comment. The final version of the Newsletter will include the topic and PSN commentary. If you are not yet on PSN, I urge you to subscribe as soon as possible. Do so by sending a post to:

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PSN is managed by MARTHA GIMENEZ and DON ROPER at the University of Colorado. We are much indebted to them for this forum. Don't miss it.

THIRD PARTY POLITICS. JOHN LEGGETT, Rutgers, organized a session at the recent Humanist Sociology Meetings in Columbus, Ohio. The topic of the session was the Value of Third Party Politics in the Coming Election. What follows is a summary of that session.

WALDA KATZ FISHMAN opened the session by making the point that the rich capitalist nations in the globalized economy had consolidated power on behalf of the capitalist class such that 3rd Party Politics were not likely to succeed. SEYMOUR FABER agreed with the analysis above and cited the New Democratic Party in Ontario as case in point: it came to power promising to serve the ends of social justice and was quickly reduced to the role of agent on behalf of capital. Political Parties end up doing the 'Dirty Work of Capitalism.' MARTY GLABERMAN added that the venue for emancipatory politics was not to be found in institutional politics with broad based parties but rather in class struggle with organized labor as the base for effective politics. An audience member agreed and mentioned the Berkeley City Council as case in point. A radical council was elected but their efforts were absorbed and minimized by the efforts of the larger staff in City Hall. ODILE HUGENOT made the point, supported by a member of the audience that while women were 'pushed aside' in institutional politics, still there were NGO's, non-governmental groups, which could serve as a base for emancipatory politics. She cited the recent meetings of women in China as case in point; she left that conference with considerable optimism about what she saw and about what women were doing around the world. GLABERMAN made the point that, too often, 3rd Party politics were reduced to a mere 'cult of the individual;' and gave Ross Perot as case in point. He noted that all successful parties have to work within the logic of capitalist economics; Mayor Coleman Young in Detroit was another case in point. GEORGE LORD noted that the New Party had successfully elected some 300-400 officials at the local level and they serve as a political infra-structure for progressive politics as we move into the 21st century. At the national and International level, one should watch and perchance participate in NGO activity.

JEROME SCOTT noted that even right wing movements such as Prop. 187 as well as the growing unrest among minorities stressed capitalist hegemony.

GLABERMAN added that Clinton received 51% of 39% of eligible voters; there is a powerful voting bloc not tapped by offerings from any party.

The session ended on a more positive note with contributions from LYNDA ANN EWEN who made the point that, given the validity of the first point [Katz Fishman and Faber], still there was much ferment and much local rebellion and resistance to capitalist hegemony. Ewen agreed that social progress would be very uneven but there were openings and vulnerabilities to capitalist hegemony; family issues and local problems serve as sites for progressive politics.

THE PUBLIC INTELLECTUAL: There are over 600 Right Wing think tanks, most of which are well funded. There are some 6 or 10 Centers for radical scholars, most of which are just hanging on. One solution to this great imbalance in the knowledge/action process is suggested by ED ROYCE at the recent Humanist Sociology Meetings in Columbus, Ohio. Royce has interviewed some 50 Public Intellectuals and has extracted a few suggestions designed to help transform Academic Intellectuals on the Left into Public Intellectuals. His effort derives from the assumption that the audiences to which we speak in academia do not make public policy; students and others in university seldom effect the political process in the larger community much less in state and national politics. PSN helps us talk among ourselves and, too often exaggerate the small differences among those of us on the Left. TRY. Royce begins with some lessons from Russell Jacoby on the differences between Public Intellectuals and Academic Intellectuals:

1. Public Intellectuals have celebrity status: Academics much less so.
2. Public Intellectuals address informed readers in the General Public. Academics address special expert audiences at conferences.
3. Public Intellectuals write in clear prose; academics in technical hence excluding language/jargon.
4. Public Intellectuals are independent and write as autonomous critics. Academic Intellectuals are constrained by their status in university.
5. Public Intellectuals write on diverse issues; Academics tackle special issues of interest only to other intellectuals.

ROYCE wants to broaden and democratize the role of the Public Intellectual. To that end, Royce has several suggestions:

A. Take it to the local community: Royce cites the case of a Latino Historian who set up a multi-media exhibit in the local library which attracted hundreds in the community. He used a concise historical text, photos and other display items to engage emancipatory impulses.

B. Set up special classes/workshops on issues of special concern your community.

C. Look for more encouraging 'subcultures' outside the university in order to escape limitations set by university. Royce mentioned a variety which nourished those to whom he spoke: the Caucus for a New Political Science; the Marxist Section of ASA; The Association of Radical Historians; URPE; AHS; and editorial collectives of Radical America, Dollars and Sense, Socialist Review.

I would add the South End Press and Critical [Insurgent] Sociology. Roycelater mentions the Center for Popular Economics at Amherst. TRY. D. Use your status as University Professor. Don't beshy or too modest since such titles do weigh with those in the media and the public. All universities give weight to 'community' service. Your job is to serve those without a voice; labor unions, excluded minorities, homeless families and such.

E. Specialize and publish in scholarly journals to besure; it protects your location in the production of knowledge but try to expand/translate/make the same points accessible in timely fashion to those in community or state who need the expert knowledge you are privileged to gain.

H. Make sure that local leaders, news media, emerging groups and other linkages to the larger community know about your special knowledge and know your availability to speak. If you have special knowledge about AIDS, Environmental issues, labor history, the sources of racism or gender violence, welfare reform, macro-economics and the global economy, homophobia, uses and misuses of I.Q. tests, police violence or any other concern of immediate interest, do write a simple and balanced Letter to the Editor; prepare a short and thoughtful 3 minute tape for the local radio stations; set up a panel discussion with announcements in the media.

There are any number of ways by which those of us on the Left can work togive balance and weight to the knowledge process in the public sphere. Royce, I and the members of the Marxist Section encourage you to do just that. Have fun but do a good job.

From THE RED FEATHER DICTIONARY: QUANTIFICATION. The process by which the incredible complexity of natural and social dynamics are translated into number systems. There are four numbers systems: nominal, ordinal, interval and rational. The last three are used to encode information from nature and society; much mischief is done to the knowledge process in quantification. one discards information as when behavior is converted into words; more information is lost when words are converted into numbers and still more information is thrown away when measures of central tendency and of dispersion are generated.

The nonlinear nature of most social and natural dynamical regimes is, erroneously, tranformed into the neat and tidy dynamics of linear mechanics when manipulated by arithmetic and algebraic rules.

The complex feedback loops found in nonlinear dynamics are transformed into simple unidirectional causal models when inferences are drawn from linear mechanics. In brief, quantification is the process of generating the kind of truth statements one wants to see in operation in armies, schools, factories, religions and politics. The half-life of such truth claims is very short.

The President's Page: SARA SCHOONMAKER, President ofthe Marxist Section, offers these brief comments about points of interest for those who research and teach about the Global Economy. Comments, Additions, and Constructive Criticisms are welcome. [TRY] I have been asked to offer a marxist perspective which can be useful in analyzing three arenas of social change in the Global Economy.

First, ask who made the clothes on our backs? Production has been reorganized on a global scale as corporations have left the U.S. for Mexico, Malaysia and other countries where they can hire workers for cheaper wages and with fewer protections while at work. Women workers are generally hired for these jobs, which leads to changing gender relationships in families and communities. Women may be liberated from some of their traditional gender roles but they also experience new forms of exploitation and oppression in transnational factories. [Ong, Aihwa. -Spiri of Resistance and Capita SUNY-Albany Press. 19873.

Second, ask how corporations maintain control of operations as they spread to far corners of the world? Most firms need access to hightech communications and specialized services in finance, management, advertizing and such to keep their global operations humming. They tend to keep their headquarters in major 'global' cities' such as New York or Tokyo so control stays centralized even though production and distribution take place in distant locations [Sassen, Saskia 'The Global City' Princeton University Press. 1991). These forms of control provide strategies for firms to 'compress time/space' Harvey, David. 'The Postmodern Condition,' Basil Blackwood Press. 1989.

Finally, ask what are the politics of global restructuring? As production and distribution have been reorganized to global dimensions, new politics conflicts have arisen. Transnational corporations as well as the governments in highly industrialized countries tend to favor free trade policies which gives their own firms maximum leeway to enter markets all over the world. Postcolonial governments in the 3rd world often prefer to exert more control over industry and trade in order to encourage and protect industrial development for their own countries. These kinds of conflict are found in GATT, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade as well as in globalized agencies such as the UN, IMF, and the World Bank which police on behalf of transnational capital. Different kinds of dynamics occur in the formation of economics blocs such as NAFTA; in this case, there is an uneasy peace between core countries and postcolonial countries as the former seek investment opportunities for 'surplus' capital and the later seek investment capital for for factories and jobs. These latter foster the globalization of the economy [Krasner, Stephen. -Structural Conflict: the Third World Against Global Liberalism- U.California Press. 1985; Schoonmaker, Sara. 'Regulation Theory and the Politics of Global Restructuring., in -Current Perspectives in Social Theory- V. 15, pp. 213 -244. 1995. Brief Bio: Blaise Pascal was born in 1623. A world class mathematician, Pascal reworked the proofs in Euclidean Geometry at age eleven. His contributions to number theory and conic sections still stand. He constructed a mechanical calculator and did the basic work which lead to barometers and vacuum pumps. In 1654, he had a mid-life crises created by the tension between premodern concerns with value, purpose and mystery on the one side and modern concerns with reason, research, quantification and certainty on the other side. In that most famous epistemic break, Pascal reports that his experience was comprised of 'fire, certitude, joy, peace, and a sense of union with Christ.' Pascal embodied the struggle between personal conviction and enduring skepticism in which every thoughtful, honest person engages. Pascal left two enduring contributions to the knowledge process: first his belief that there are two pathways to knowledge: llesprit geometrique which we would call quantification and positive knowledge based upon empirical studies and llesprit finesse, what we would call inspiration, intuition and those leaps of insight which are common to both science and theology. Pascal held that llesprit finesse was essential to llesprit geometrique. Then too, Pascal gave us two of the

laws of PROBABILITY: 1) to calculate the odds of any two events happening at the same time, one multiplies the separate probabilities of each. 2) to figure the probability of either of two events occurring, one adds the separate probabilities of each. A third legacy Pascal gave us is in his well known saying which sums up the former: 'The Heart has reasons of which Reason knows nought'

What Pascal would make of the new sciences of Chaos and Complexity is, to me, fascinating speculation. In a short 30 years, these new findings have grounded a postmodern philosophy of science in which change, disorder, variety, contrariety, surprize and an elegant and most precise transition from order to disorder. 'Twould be good to have the genius of an Aristotle, Pascal, Hegel or Marx to help us sort it out and connect it to the pursuit of social justice. Failing that, we will just have to get on with it best we can.

NOTES ON FRIENDLY AND UNFRIENDLY FASCISM: Alan Spector, Purdue, is working on a structural analysis of fascism in AdvancedCapitalist Countries. This page features his working notes and are taken from a larger body of work in progress. I have added observations, in fine print, to supplement his most interesting ideas. TRY 1. In its present embodiment in the USA, fascism is an attempt of majorsectors of the capitalist class to impose order/discipline on the working class, upon a large and growing underclass, as well as upon unruly segments of the capitalist class itself. 2. The major dynamics pushing contemporary fascist activities include: a) increased competition between advanced and emerging capitalistcountries. b) falling rates of profit in those lines of production with the mostcompetition/constraints c) the crises of 'lover-production' in the central core. d) worker unrest, consumer complaints, and small business distress. 3. There are similarities to other decaying systems--Tsarist Russia, AncientRome and so on, but the difference are fundamental. 4. Ideology is important but not the essential core offascism. Fascism is not the 'triumph of madness' or the result of evil genius. Fascism is a structural adjustment of capitalism, greatly intensifying already existing exploitation/oppression. 5. Structural Changes: Increased monopoly of high profit lines of production;cuts in 'lemon' socialism as the capitalist state itself abandons low profit lines of production/cuts back on programs of social justice. Increased effort to 'Irrationalize' the more unruly/intractable sectors of society including competition within and between segments of globalized capital. Increased forms of political repression. Young adds that much of the new forms of political repression are in the private sector. a) the medical profession manages a growing number of 'patients' withpharmaceuticals. b) the private security system is larger and expanding faster than thepublich security system [control remains in the hands of corporate managers]. c) the Criminal Justice System is 'rationalized' by plea bargainingprivate prisons, private courts systems, and increase in painful sentencing practices. d) the welfare system is used to police the life styles of those severly under/sub/unemployed. e) the number and efficacy of state agencies which police corporate crime increase and come underattack by 'free mark advocates. d) fundamentalist religion adds its weight to discipline and punishment institutions. g) Peer Review systems struggle to maintain control over the policing of white collar crime as... h) the civil court system and private suits expand greatly. [Young adds as well that the dramaturgical image of the liberal state is maintained when most of the political repression is done in the private sector or in non-criminalized control agencies.

5. Ideological trends: Spector holds that modern fascism does not rely on a coherent

ideological core. There are common features which are similar in the USA and other core countries; a) racism/racist ideology combines with sexism to privilege white males in a declining economy. b) individualism exculpates the larger society from problems faced by large sectors while forced conformity is the reality for those same sectors. c) nationalism joins racism to reduce the number of those 'deserving of justice, equity, and legal protections. d) attack on scientific reasoning and the idea of progress. This includes recourse to mysticism, spiritualism and fatalism. These ideas reside on the outer fringes; both the state and modernistic capitalism have faith in 'Irrationality' to solve problems.

e) Culture of Dehumanization in general. This justifies both 'life boat' ethics and pretheoretical recourse to pain and punishment; oppression and brutality by those marginalized by the great shifts in capital, profits and life style as capital is globalized.

6. Outlook: Spector makes the case that the future is bleak; this combination of friendly and unfriendly fascism, dispersed over the major institutions of society cannot be prevented as long as capitalism exists. Temporary remedies engineered by the liberal wing only shifts fascism elsewhere.

7. Solution: Spector insists that the struggle against racism is very, very important [note the call for a strike against racism by Spector elsewhere on PSN]. However, the fate of social justice remains with the working class and its struggle for egalitarian institutions; its struggle against this mad system oriented blindly to profits which kills tens of millions of workers in its present form.

8. Young adds that the postmodern critique of discourse, media and image management should be located in the same political economy as indeed Jameson locates it. Several disciplines/professions hire out to advertising/Madison Avenue to manage workers, citizens, consumers and the underclass: psychology offers its insights on neurosis and anxieties; sociology offers its methods on surveys, polls and samples as well as its structural-functional ideologies, theatre offers actors, scripts, performances and campaigns. Mass electronic media offer access to millions and now billions as satellite communications are put in place. The bill for all this is picked up by national and trans-national capital while the costs are passed on to consumers/taxpayers.

In all this, layer upon layer of managers, doctors, wardens, accountants, inspectors, supervisors and counsellors are added to the labor force in the effort to manage the larger irrationalities and shifting contradictions of advanced monopoly capital.

In other issues of FROM THE LEFT, we will bring readers some of the more promising avenues out of this friendly and not so friendly fascism.

FROM THE RED FEATHER DICTIONARY:

FASCISM: Latin: fascis = bundle. A bundle of rods signified the unity of the people and was a symbol of authority of magistrates in ancient Rome. The word is now used to refer to a form of government in which state power is used to reproduce the privilege of some elite: racial, ethnic, class, religious or gender. The fascism state has two general functions: suppression of dissent at home and exploitation of other countries on behalf of its own

citizens. The fascism state gathers into its own hands the entire state apparatus, schools, universities, news media and all worker organizations. Although small businesses support and expect to benefit from fascism, as do many workers, the usual case is that inequality increases while the costs of managing dissent explode.

As Trotsky said, 'Out of the human dust, fascism unites and arms the scattered masses. It gives the petty bourgeois the illusion of an independent force. it begins to imagine it will really command the state.'

FASCISM, TECHNO-: The use of computers and other high tech devices with which to monitor the behavior of workers, voters, students, consumers and petty criminals. These vary from the software programs which monitor for key words, time telecommunications workers, or use electronic 'dogs' to sniff out forbidden chemicals. Soon every automobile will come with a computer chip to monitor speed, location, and performance via communication satellites. Have a good day.