

BILL AYERS SPEAKS • OUR VAMPIRES, OURSELVES

DECEMBER 2008

IN THESE TIMES

Milk does the
man **proud**

El Salvador's
New Left



MANDATE FOR CHANGE

Voters to Obama: Think big.

BY DAVID SIROTA

\$3.50 USA \$3.50 CANADA



0 56698 84146 3 12

Dear Friend,

No more books or articles. No more Cubs games. No more bourbon. That's it!

But that doesn't mean I don't have any fight left.

I want to talk to you today about one way I'm planning to keep my fight alive, and that's by leaving a bequest in my will to *In These Times* magazine. Part of that agreement is that *In These Times* publish this letter after I am dead.

The big thing that bothers me is the lack of history in American life today. Gore Vidal used the phrase "United States of Amnesia" to describe our country. I call it the United States of Alzheimer's. Americans today forget what happened yesterday.

If you ask young people today about Eugene V. Debs, Jane Addams, FDR, Henry Wallace, Martin Luther King Jr. and what it was these people did, they wouldn't know. We can make sure that after you and I are gone, the legacies of these great Americans don't go with us.

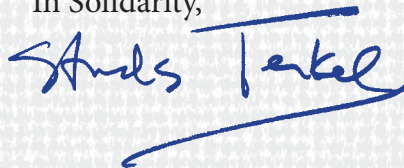
As a fellow member of the *In These Times* community, I am writing to ask you to join me in leaving a bequest to *In These Times* and keep great democratic ideals alive, keep history alive.

The Bush administration turned democracy into one big burlesque show. The education system that should be teaching our kids history is the pits. We can't make any choices about the future unless we connect to the past.

My old friend Jim Weinstein, the historian and founder of *In These Times*, insisted we remember the past in order to understand the present and prepare for the future. And, in part, because of my bequest, I know the good fight—the fight for democracy, for civil rights, for the rights of workers—has a future, for these values will live on in the pages of *In These Times* now that I'm gone.

Thanks for your time.

In Solidarity,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Studs Terkel". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style. There is a long horizontal line underlining the signature.

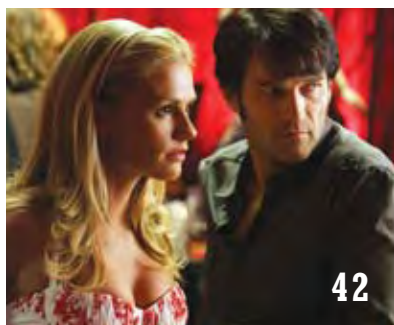
Studs Terkel



P.S. If you have any questions, or would like to let *In These Times* know that you've taken action and made a bequest, call Editor & Publisher Joel Bleifuss at (773) 772-0100, write him at *In These Times*, 2040 N. Milwaukee, Chicago, IL 60647, or e-mail him at jbleifuss@inthesetimes.com.

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We Have Much to Celebrate

NEXT YEAR, PRESIDENT Barack Obama and the solidly Democratic Congress can pass legislation that provides universal healthcare, establishes a sustainable energy program, reforms labor laws and restores environmental safeguards.

In addition, the current economic crisis gives progressives an opportunity to pursue institutional reforms that have previously been off the table. We have nationalized elements of our financial system, but its institutions remain unresponsive to the needs of the American people. How can we hold the banks that we now own accountable? What adjustments can we make in our economic model so that the tremendous productivity of American workers will translate into higher wages and better lives?

We can also put on the agenda issues that were ignored during the presidential campaign. To give three examples:

First, the crisis in urban communities, where a generation of young men—who are denied opportunities that many Americans take for granted—are shackled to a broken criminal justice system.

Second, the foolish drug laws that provide the human-fuel for the prison-industrial complex and wreak political havoc in Latin America and elsewhere.

Third, a short-sighted national transportation policy that revolves around cars and trucks, and the haphazard sprawl that reliance engenders.

Can we resist the deficit hawks in both major parties and make the public investments in infrastructure and social services that we desperately need to pull us out of this recession? With our government having obviously failed to serve and protect, dare we dream to revive what 100 years ago was known in Midwestern cities as “sewer socialism.”

Respectable pundits and editorial boards will demand that Obama be “responsible” and curb spending. But fiscal austerity will only deepen this economic downturn, and the stern sermons of these neo-Hooverians ought to be cheerfully ignored.

The election of Obama shows us, people have power.

Yes, we can do all of the above. But will we?

The multiracial, progressive electorate that put Obama in the White House cannot rest on its November laurels.

The Republican right will sic their wily attack dogs on him. We must beat them off.

K-street’s corporate lobbyists (a number of whom are Democrats) are already greasing their propaganda machines to prevent Obama from using his mandate to disrupt the status quo. We must put a wrench in their works.

The mavens of the mainstream media, “schoolmasters of the people,” will try to ensure that Obama’s promised “change” remains framed within the confines of conventional wisdom. We must remember that, as Obama said, “change doesn’t come from the top down, it comes from the bottom up.”

Our job is to support Obama as he makes good on his promises and hold him to account if he does not. The coalition of war-weary, recession-battered voters that gave him the presidency deserves no less.

Through the next four years, *In These Times* will, as our mission statement puts it, “provide an accessible forum for debate about the public policies that shape our future.”

We will work to expand the national discourse to address the hopes and aspirations of those Americans, who said on Nov. 4, “Yes, we can,” and changed history.

—Joel Bleifuss

IN THESE TIMES

“With liberty and justice for all...”

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mixed reaction

JUST THE FACTS



\$8,565 Credit card debt, on average, in a U.S. household

35 Percentage of U.S. consumers estimated to cut holiday spending this year

\$832 Expected spending per consumer this holiday season

\$440,000 Amount that executives at American International Group (AIG) spent on a vacation at an exclusive resort, less than one week after receiving government bailout funds

“

[B]anking establishments are more dangerous than standing armies; and that the principle of spending money to be paid by posterity, under the name of funding, is but swindling futurity on a large scale.”

”

—THOMAS JEFFERSON, IN AN 1816 LETTER

LABANARAMA BY TERRY LABAN



QUID PRO QUO

THE QUID:

ITT didn't have to look far for this month's Quid: Our HQ at 2040 N. Milwaukee Ave. is part of the Chicago congressional district of Democratic Rep. Luis Gutierrez.

According to the Oct. 29 *Chicago Tribune*, on July 7, 2004, Gutierrez wrote a letter on U.S. House stationery to Chicago Mayor Richard Daley, lobbying him to back the controversial Galewood Yards housing project on

the city's west side. In particular, he wanted to make sure that Daley knew that the widespread characterization of developer Calvin Boender as "a bad guy of sorts" was completely false.

THE QUO:

Gutierrez would know. Only two months earlier, Boender lent him \$200,000 to buy some property. That's in addition to the \$41,000 that Boender and his associates have contributed to Gutierrez's re-election campaigns



throughout the years.

In March 2006, the city gave Boender the go-ahead for Galewood Yards. Six days after the *Tribune's* front-page exposé, Gutierrez won re-election with 81 percent of the vote.

Letters



I Scream, You Scream

You really got us with Dave Mulcahey's column about PETA tactics (Appall-O-Meter, November). At first we thought he was serious. Good one!

Social critics—from Jonathan Swift to Jon Stewart—have long used humor and satire to slip uncomfortable truths past peoples' preconceptions. Our suggestion that Ben & Jerry's use human breast milk was clearly absurd, but it prompted discussion about how, if consuming human mammary secretions is disgusting (and it is), isn't consuming cow mammary secretions even more so?

Corporations targeted by our campaigns spend huge sums on advertising. The media is usually reluctant to cover our actions unless we do something they can't ignore. Provocative—even silly—campaigns make the difference between keeping important subjects invisible and having them seen widely.

Animal rights is a progressive issue. Readers who wish to learn more about both our

antics and groundbreaking work to help all beings can visit www.PETA.org.

*Bruce Friedrich
Vice President, PETA
Norfolk, Va.*

One of Us! One of Us!

I was appalled by Mulcahey's attack on PETA. The PETA actions cited seem to me to be simply over-the-top irony, not always effective but irony nonetheless. I wonder why you have a semi-

'If consuming human mammary secretions is disgusting (and it is), isn't consuming cow mammary secretions even more disgusting?'

humorous column written by someone who himself seems to be an irony-free zone?

Most objectionable, though, is the spittle offered up at the end: "Stay the freak away from us, you freaking freaks," says Mulcahey. I am a PETA member as well as an *ITT* sustainer. PETA has about 2 million members, so I am probably not the only one to overlap between PETA membership and *ITT* readership. You should be careful what you wish for.

Your supporter and freaking freak,

*Bob Skomro
Via E-mail*

DAVE MULCAHEY RESPONDS

Bruce, Bob, get in here for a group hug, you freakin' freaks. I love you guys. Really, I do. Now, here's my beef

with PETA: Your concept of satire is wanting. From Jonathan Swift to Mencken to those Danish cartoons of a certain prophet, the point of satire has been to make the other guy see red. In this way, you separate your intended audience from the fools and knaves. If the reaction you provoke among your targets (not to mention your fellow travelers) is, "Christ, what a bunch of douchebags!" you're not doing it right. And the

pity of it is that while you're not doing it to them, they are doing it to you. And that hurts me, man, it really does.

Portland Can Do Better

I don't disagree with Adam Doster's suggestion that Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.) would make a great transportation secretary ("22 To Know," October), but I question his assertion that "Blumenauer couldn't be more representative of his liberal district."

A free trader at heart, Blumenauer voted "yes" on the Peru Free Trade Agreement last fall, after I, along with two other Portland activists, were arrested at his office. We barricaded the doors with bags of rice and corn to symbolize the subsidized U.S. ag goods that would flood the Peruvian market and drive *campesinos* off their land.

Portland could do a lot better than Blumenauer.

*Daniel Denvir
Quito, Ecuador*

INTHESETIMES.COM

Two new books on labor and workers' rights will be excerpted on InTheseTimes.com—before they arrive in bookstores.

Beyond The Fields: Cesar Chavez, The UFW, and the Struggle for Justice in the 21st Century, by longtime activist Randy Shaw, chronicles how the late Cesar Chavez's grassroots strategies are still being used today, especially in progressive campaigns.

Wage Theft in America: Why Millions of Working Americans Are Not Getting Paid—And What We Can Do About It, by Kim Bobo, details how billions of dollars in wages are stolen from U.S. workers each year. Read these excerpts first at InTheseTimes.com.



contributors

Dear Reader,

You receive this issue at a momentous time in history. Three days before we went to press, Sen. Barack Obama was elected the 44th president of the United States. Most of our staff went to Chicago's Grant Park for his acceptance speech, and we took part in the jubilant celebrations.

Yet, after the euphoria subsides, the hard work begins. *In These Times* pledges to bring you insightful coverage and analysis of the new administration and Congress.

But we can't do it without your support.

More than 70 percent of our revenue comes from donations from readers like you.

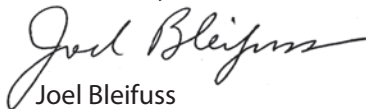
Unfortunately, these donations and the number of subscriptions fall off during a Democratic presidency. That's what happened during the Clinton years, when many people seemed to think that there was nothing left to fight for.

Citizens must be informed if they are to hold Obama to the mandate voters have given him.

Please help keep us strong and independent. Any amount you can give would be appreciated.

For your convenience, an addressed, postage-paid envelope is between pages 26 and 27.

In solidarity,



Joel Bleifuss
Editor & Publisher

P.S. On a sad note, we went to press a week after our friend Studs Terkel, a longtime supporter of *In These Times*, passed away. We will miss him.



BILL AYERS is a Distinguished Professor of Education and Senior University Scholar at the University of Illinois at Chicago. He is author of *Fugitive Days* (Beacon) and co-author with Bernardine Dohrn of *Race Course: Against White Supremacy* (Third World Press).



LAIN BERGESON is a writer, editor and TV enthusiast based in Minneapolis. When she's not channel-surfing, she gardens and spends time with her better half and their three large dogs. She thinks "True Blood," which she reviews on page 42 of this issue, is almost as

good as ABC's '60s classic "Dark Shadows"—but not quite.



ROBERT S. ESELMAN is a New York City-based journalist. His articles have appeared in the *Brooklyn Rail*, *In These Times*, *The Nation* and *TomDispatch.com*.

GARY BARLOW is a Chicago-based writer. He is a former managing editor and staff reporter for the *Chicago Free Press*, the *Dallas Voice* and *Windy City Times*. In the 1990s, he helped organize campaigns that defeated anti-gay ballot initiatives in Florida and Idaho.

ALEX VAN SCHAICK is a North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA) research associate based in New York City. He recently completed a Fulbright Scholarship to Bolivia where he researched politics and land conflict.



The work of these writers is supported by the Puffin Foundation First Amendment Fund.

how to reach us

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Sulaiman Safdar and Soraj Ghulam Habib hold the proclamation from the mayor of Lansing, Mich., announcing 'cluster bomb awareness week.'

COURTESY OF THE FRIENDS COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL LEGISLATION

Ban the Cluster Bomb

More than 100 countries have agreed to stop using them. Guess which one hasn't

BY BRIAN COOK

IN LATE 2001, SORAJ Ghulam Habib, a 10-year-old boy living in Herat Province in western Afghanistan, was walking home from a picnic with his cousin and some friends when he noticed a yellow canister. Because its color was the same as the parcels of food aid that the U.S. military had been dropping during its campaign against the Taliban, Soraj picked it up and attempted to pry it open.

The canister, however, wasn't food aid, but an unexploded BLU-97—one of the hundreds of "bomblets" or submunitions released from U.S. cluster bombs. As Soraj tried to open it, it suddenly became hot, and he threw it to the ground, where it exploded. The blast killed his

cousin, injured three of his friends and cost Soraj his right index finger and both of his legs.

"I had a lot of dreams at the beginning of my life," Soraj, now 17, said through his Dari interpreter Sulaiman Safdar, at the Cluster Bomb Survivors Tour's Oct. 7 stop in Chicago. "But cluster submunitions destroyed all my dreams and put me in a wheelchair."

The event—sponsored by the Friends Committee on National Legislation, a Quaker peace lobby—also included heart-rending testimony from Raed Mokeded, whose son Ahmad was killed in a 1999 submunitions accident while celebrating his fifth birthday at a park in southern Lebanon; and from Lynn Bra-

dach, whose 21-year-old son Travis, a U.S. Marine, was killed in 2003 while attempting to detonate unexploded cluster submunitions outside of Kerbala, Iraq.

The Survivors Tour traveled through several Midwestern states in October to rally public and political support for banning cluster bombs, a weapon decried by human rights organizations for its indiscriminate effects on civilians and for its failure to explode rates of up to 30 percent.

In particular, the tour focused on the Cluster Munitions Civilian Protection Act—a congressional bill that would restrict the use, sale and transfer of cluster munitions with a failure rate higher than 1 percent—and the Oslo Process, an international treaty banning the weapons that will open for signatory countries on Dec. 3.

Norway initiated the Oslo Process in February 2007, partly in frustration over U.S. foot-dragging during discussions from 2001 to 2006 to ban the weapons through the U.N. Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) treaty. (Nine months after Oslo was launched, the United States reversed its stance, and now insists that restrictions on cluster bombs should *only* be addressed through the CCW.) The treaty negotiations proceeded quickly, and on May 28, 2008, 107 countries—including Britain and other NATO allies—reached an agreement in Dublin, Ireland, to ban cluster bombs.

The treaty calls for its signatories to end cluster bomb use and destroy all stockpiles within eight years, as well as for the clearance of all unexploded ordnance within 10 years. It also includes a provision that requires countries to provide "victim assistance" to those harmed by cluster bombs. Oslo's provisions will become international law six months after the legislatures of 30 signatory countries have ratified it.

Questions remain, however, over whether the treaty's lofty goals—in particular, its provisions on clearing cluster bombs within a decade—can be met.

In Laos, for instance, where the United States dropped 2 million tons of bombs during its "Secret War" from 1964 and 1973, at least 9 million cluster bomblets are still strewn throughout the country.

Also speaking at the tour's Chicago event was Jim Harris, a retired Wisconsin schoolteacher who now runs We Help War Victims, a nongovernmental organization. Harris has worked with foreign companies that detonate unexploded ordinance in Laos, and he estimates the number of bombs that his crew was able to clear in one year was 1,600.

"Never in my lifetime, in Lao, will we clean up the mess that we created there," Harris says. "Unless we stop using this ordinance, it's going to be here to haunt us for generations to come."

Equally problematic are the powerful countries that haven't signed the treaty: China, India, Israel, Pakistan, Russia, South Korea and, of course, the United States, which Human Rights Watch (HRW) estimates has a stockpile of up to 1 billion submunitions.

But Steve Goose, executive director

of the arms division at HRW, believes the treaty's stigmatization of cluster bombs can affect the behavior of even the countries that don't sign on. He cites the 1999 Ottawa landmine treaty, which, despite not being signed by any of the aforementioned nations, has essentially stopped all countries from trading landmines or further employing them.

"By stigmatizing a weapon, by making just the consideration of its use beyond the pale," Goose says, "you can have an impact even on those who are not part of the treaty."

For Soraj, what's most frustrating about Washington's intransigence to the Oslo Process is that the United States has also heavily pressured Afghanistan not to join. Asked what he might say to President Obama if he should meet him, Soraj says, "Think for a moment of your children and what you would do if they were like me, and let Afghanistan join the Oslo Process."

He adds with a smile: "And when the United States participates in Oslo, it will feel like I got my legs back." ■

Reach Out and Rob Someone

HELIODORA VERA FREQUENTLY uses phone cards to call her family in Mexico, but she and many other customers often suspected they weren't getting all of the minutes they paid for. Now government and consumer studies back their suspicions.

Investigations by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), several state attorney generals' offices and consumer advocacy groups have found that many calling card companies practice deceptive advertising and deduct calling minutes through hidden fees.

"The cards always end before the minutes that [are] stated on the cards," says Vera, a Spanish Harlem resident who frequently phones abroad to speak with her daughters. "It's bad because they're robbing us. They give us certain minutes to call and it's not true. They're stealing our minutes."

Prepaid phone cards are a \$4 billion

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A VOICE FOR IMMIGRANTS

Thousands of immigrants silently suffer civil abuses every year. The Human Rights Immigrant Community Action Network (HURRICANE) attempts to give them a voice.

HURRICANE launched two years ago as part of the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, a national grassroots organization. Its aim is to reduce violations against civil rights—regardless of immigration status—by documenting abuse.

In January, HURRICANE published “Over-Raided, Under Siege,” a collection of more than 100 personal accounts of abuse—ranging from detentions and deportations, to raids and border deaths.

The project encourages victims to share their stories, using the social justice database at Martus.org. Martus, the Greek word for “witness,” contains translation software in Arabic, French, Nepali, Russian and Spanish.

For International Migrants Day on Dec. 18, HURRICANE is gearing up for a national campaign called Rollback the Raids, which calls for a moratorium on raids, detentions and deportations during the first 100 days of the new presidency.

“This campaign includes a documentation drive, where we will be calling on all our HURRICANE and member groups to report and share their stories of human rights violations in their communities,” says Laura Rivas, a coordinator with the organization.

For more information on how to get involved or to share a personal story, visit www.nnirr.org.

—Elizabeth Kiefer



annual industry. Domestic and international prepaid cards are sold for \$2 to \$20 at convenience stores, gas stations and newsstands—each claiming to offer the most minutes for the fewest dollars.

But two FTC studies conducted in March and May found that phone cards purchased from Alternatel Inc., a Florida company, delivered an average of 50 percent of the minutes advertised, while cards from New Jersey-based Clifton Telecard Alliance (CTA) delivered only 43 percent.

Many users had minutes subtracted when phone calls didn’t connect, or when they got a busy signal. They also had hidden connection charges tacked on. And some cards simply didn’t work.

What’s more, disclosures were often in small, illegible print and included charges—such as “hang up,” “maintenance fees” and “destination surcharges”—that reduced the cards’ values.

“Such fees are disclosed in tiny font and in vague terms that are mostly incomprehensible in any language,” the FTC said in a statement.

Calling card use has gone up in the United States, and it is projected to keep climbing. In 2000, 30 million households used calling cards. By 2005, the number had increased to 50 million, according to industry estimates.

According to Gus West, president of the Hispanic Institute, a nonprofit group, Latinos make up more than 70 percent of U.S. calling card consumers.

Says West: “Nearly everyone that we talked to in the Hispanic community ... felt they’ve been cheated out of minutes using these cards.”

The Hispanic Institute’s own study found that calling cards it tested delivered only 60 percent of the minutes advertised.

West says that many immigrants face language barriers that prevent them from filing a complaint. Cumulatively, the group estimates that fraudulent calling cards cost Latinos \$1 million a day.

With little federal oversight, state officials have started to crack down on the companies.

In May, Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott sued telecommunication provider Next-G Communications Inc., for alleg-



MARIO TAMAYO/GETTY IMAGES

Undocumented Mexican laborer Juan Sanchez calls his wife in Pasoamapa, Mexico, from New Orleans.

edly failing to provide the number of minutes advertised, and accused the company of providing vague disclosures on terms and conditions. The case is pending.

In Florida, Attorney General Bill McCollum reached a settlement with nine phone companies in June. The businesses are now required to cease false advertising, provide the minutes allotted, submit to an audit for three years and reimburse the attorney general’s office \$1 million for investigative and enforcement costs.

“The calling card industry has long been targeting non-English speakers and cheating consumers for whom these cards are often a lifeline to loved ones,” McCollum said in a June 11 statement.

In late September, the U.S. House passed the Calling Card Consumer Protection Act. The measure would require phone companies to state clearly all terms and fees, and to provide the number of minutes advertised.

The bill also enables the FTC to enforce the rules and gives states power to pursue civil actions. A similar measure is being considered in the Senate.

Sen. Bill Nelson (D-Fla.), the sponsor of that bill, says that in the last few years, the prepaid calling card market has seen “an influx of scam artists that are only interested in ripping consumers off.” He says, “We need national standards to push the bad actors out of this market, and ensure that consumers get the calling minutes they are paying for.”

—Akito Yoshikane

Dead Man Waiting

IN AN UNPRECEDENTED move, the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta recently stayed the Oct. 27 execution of Georgia death row prisoner Troy Davis.

On Oct. 24, the court said it would consider a new hearing on whether the Constitution's Eighth Amendment ban on cruel and unusual punishment prohibits the execution of the innocent.

In September, the U.S. Supreme Court halted Davis' execution to consider the issue but then denied to hear the case.

"The case is extraordinary," says Stephen Bright, president and former director of the Southern Center for Human Rights, based in Atlanta. Last year, the Georgia Supreme Court also stayed the execution to consider the innocence claim, he says, but then denied it by a single vote, 4-3.

Now the federal court—applying the federal law regarding claims of innocence—has granted another stay to decide whether to order a hearing on the innocence issues.

In 1991, Davis, a 39-year-old African-American man, was convicted and sentenced to death for the 1989 murder of Mark MacPhail, a white, off-duty police officer, at a Burger King parking lot in Savannah, Ga. Davis was convicted based solely on witness testimony that contained many inconsistencies, according to a 35-page Amnesty International report released in February 2007.

With the federal court's recent stay, Davis' attorneys have 15 days to make their case for an appeal. The Georgia state's attorney then has 10 days to respond. The outcome of these legal maneuvers was unresolved, as *In These Times* went to press.

Since the original 1991 trial, seven of the nine witnesses have recanted. Many of them have stated in sworn affidavits that police coerced them to testify against Davis. What's more, no physical evidence against Davis—such as the gun used in the crime—was ever found. Davis, who maintains his innocence, surrendered himself to the police in 1989 to clear his name.

He has received an outpouring of attention and international support, including from former South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu and former President Jimmy Carter. On Oct. 23, his support-

ers organized a Global Day of Action for Troy Davis. More than 35 cities around the world held marches, rallies and other actions opposing the Oct. 27 execution.

Martina Correa, Davis' sister, says it has been difficult for her brother and their family to say goodbye to him twice, and to prepare for the state to execute him.

"Yet Troy remains prayerful, faithful and humbled by all the show of human kindness," says Correa. "Our prayer is that the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals will rule in Troy's favor and that no matter what happens, activists from around the world will stay focused on the bigger picture and that is the abolition of the death penalty."

As of Oct. 31, Georgia was one of seven states to carry out executions in 2008. All but one of the 30 U.S. executions to date were in the South—14 in Texas, four in Virginia, three in Georgia, two in South Carolina, two in Mississippi, two in Oklahoma, two in Florida and one in Ohio. At the same time, this fall, courts have granted stays of execution in at least a dozen cases—including Davis'.

Between September 2007 and April 2008, a national de facto moratorium was in place while the Supreme Court considered whether Kentucky's lethal injection protocol violated the Eighth Amendment in *Baze v. Rees*. After the high court's April 2008 decision that it did not, executions have since resumed and have taken place at a rate of at least one per week.

Almost half of the prisoners executed were African-American or Latino (47 percent), and most victims in those murders were white (59 percent). Additionally, no white defendants were executed in 2008 for the murder of an African American, according to October statistics from the Death Penalty Information Center (DPIC), a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit.

In Texas, where the state carried out 14 executions since May, the DPIC anticipates more than 14 additional executions there by the end of the year. But Texas and the other Southern states carrying out executions are exceptions to a declining U.S. trend, as the death penalty faces increasing scrutiny.

As Correa says, "The road has been hard and uphill, and we still have a battle at hand."

—Alice Kim

Illinois Schools On Uneven Field

CHICAGO—WHEN THE CHICAGO Cubs hosted Game 1 of their opening round playoff series on Oct. 1, more than 40,000 fans packed Wrigley Field. Outside the ballpark, another group was also trying to make history. Roughly 1,500 parents, students, teachers and activists protested for state educational reforms.

Crowded around the foot of a flatbed



Protesters gather outside Wrigley Field during a Chicago Cubs playoff game.

truck, the rally was the latest in an educational reform movement, led by Democratic State Sen. James L. Meeks, a pastor at Salem Baptist Church on Chicago's South Side. For six years, Meeks has tried to pressure Illinois lawmakers to address the disparity between dollars spent per child in wealthy suburban Chicago and the dollars spent in the inner city and downstate.

"We do not want the City of Chicago to pay more attention to the Cubs and White Sox than to their kids," Meeks said at the demonstration.

Although Illinois has the fourth-highest GDP in the country—at \$741 billion—it ranks 49th in public-school funding, forcing local communities to foot the bill.

School districts in wealthy communities in Illinois provide more than 80 percent of school funding through property taxes. Low-income districts hover near 45 percent, resulting in an average of \$4,186 less spent per student, according

to the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability (CTBA), a nonprofit advocacy group.

At New Trier High School in the North Shore suburb of Winnetka, close to \$17,000 is spent per student. Meanwhile, some Chicago schools struggle to break \$10,000.

On Sept. 2, the first day of class for the Chicago Public Schools, Meeks led 1,000 inner city students to demonstrate at New Trier. The next day, he held a rally in downtown Chicago.

Eighty-one percent of Illinois students live in low-income districts, according to the CTBA. In the mostly white neighborhood of Wrigleyville—where the Cubs play—the protest was a predominantly African-American affair.

Beverly Williams took a bus from the far North Side to the rally with her 6-year-old granddaughter.

“I talked to a teacher who said they don’t have books for every subject,” Williams says. “This is so important because it’s our next generation, and if we don’t help them, what kind of generation are

we going to have?”

Brandon Saunders, who attends Morgan Park Academy on the South Side, says he hoped the Wrigley Field protest venue allowed them to reach a new demographic. “It is a huge step because people who came to see the game walked past and I heard them say this was awesome,” he says. “I think we did impact people even if we didn’t touch the politicians.”

Some New Trier students joined the protest after hearing Meeks explain the issue in September. Senior Matt McCambridge spoke to the crowd, announcing his plans to create the Illinois Council of Students, a student-run organization that will foster dialogue between the suburbs and the city.

Meeks’ state Senate proposal calls for an increase in the state’s income and corporate taxes to help lower property tax rates in poorer communities. The bill is pending.

The Cubs were quickly swept out of the playoffs, but Meeks says he has no plans to go so quietly: “We’ll protest at every public event until something is fixed.”

—Ben Strauss

Monsanto Beets Down Opposition

WILLAMETTE VALLEY, ORE.—THE sugar beets growing in farmer Tim Winn’s fields do not look menacing. But other farmers in Oregon’s fertile Willamette Valley fear the beets could devastate their crops.

Winn’s sugar beets have been genetically modified to allow them to survive application of Monsanto’s Roundup Ready herbicide. The modification allows Winn to kill weeds in his field with two sprayings of Roundup, rather than the multiple applications of various herbicides he used to use.

Winn and other sugar beet farmers across the country say Roundup Ready sugar beets—which are being grown on a commercial scale for the first time this year—make farmers’ work easier and more profitable. And, they claim, there will be environmental benefits because farmers will make fewer passes through

appall-o-meter

0.8 He Died With His Boots On

Like Nelson at Trafalgar and Wolfe on the Plains of Abraham, Don Doane made the ultimate sacrifice on the field of victory. Death came for him at Ravenna Bowl in Ravenna, Mich., only moments after he rolled a perfect game.

A perfect game is one in which every throw is a strike, and to achieve one is a milestone in any bowler’s life. Indeed, as one approaches the final frame, the pressure can become unbearable, Ravenna Bowl owner Jim Nutt explained to WZZM-TV in Grand Rapids.

Doane’s comrades on “The Nutt Farm”—his bowling team of many decades—described a scene in which jubilation turned suddenly to tragedy, as the 62-year-old bowler collapsed and expired in an apparent heart attack moments after the ultimate strike.

“He looked fine, reached across the table and gave me a high-five and he fell over,” teammate Todd Place told WZZM. “I think he died by the time he hit the floor.”

“It was like a book, a final chapter,” Place added, wistfully. “He threw his

300 game with all of his friends, gave each other high-fives and it’s like the story ended. He died with a smile on his face.”

5.1 Film School Will Wait

Michael Alfinez, 18, is by no means the first aspiring filmmaker to cast family in his fledgling effort. He is, however, probably the first to dress his mentally feeble grandmother in a ski mask, give her a chrome semiautomatic pistol to brandish, and coach her to curse like a thug. According to the *Palm Beach Post*, Marie Huertas, 85, is seen on her grandson’s video growling, “This is for all the pigs” and “I’ll shoot you.”

Police discovered the video in Alfinez’s car after they pulled him over in a traffic stop. According to the *Post*, the young man claimed his inspiration was a video from the “Gangstas & Thugs” series. He “knew [his] grandmother could be like



that, too, or better,” he told police.

Alfinez pleaded guilty to elder abuse and firearms charges, and was sentenced to 18 months in juvie.

6.3 Git ‘R Done

It’s tragic when bitter Red Staters cling to their guns ... as home improvement tools.

Ronald Long of Deepwater, Mo., was having trouble making the necessary holes in the exterior wall of his home to install a satellite dish, reports KCTV-5 News in Kansas City, Mo., when he decided to use a .22-caliber pistol to do the job in a jiffy. Unfortunately, before applying this bit of Ozark ingenuity, Long failed to ascertain the whereabouts of the missus. (She was standing on the other side of the wall.)

Long, now a widower, had not been charged at press time.

—Dave Mulcahey

fields with a tractor—a point that was made in a 2003 British study published in *New Scientist* magazine.

But Kevin Golden, staff attorney for the Center for Food Safety, says the unknown long-term environmental risks of genetically modified crops outweigh short-term benefits.

“We admit Roundup is a less toxic alternative than a lot of the herbicides, but weed resistance is developing really fast,” Golden says. “Eventually, Roundup becomes obsolete and farmers have to use these really nasty herbicides. It’s a self-defeating prophecy to use this as a silver bullet.”

And, he notes, the possible human health consequences of genetically modified organism (GMO) crops have not been adequately studied.

“GMOs are only 12 years old. It’s a human experiment we don’t know the answer to yet,” says Golden.

Frank Morton, who distributes organic seeds all over the world from his farm in Philomath, Ore., says Roundup herbicide alters the local soil ecology, including suppressing beneficial fungi that kill pathogens.

“The whole farm system can be affected,” Morton says.

Sugar beets supply about half the nation’s sugar, and represent a \$21 billion industry. Packaged sugar on grocery shelves contains sugar beet and sugar cane. Because sugar is produced in large factories, if Roundup Ready becomes the sugar beet industry standard, it is unlikely any sugar would be available to consumers that does not come partially from GMO beets.

Luther Markwart, executive vice president of the American Sugarbeet Growers Association, the industry trade group, claims that in most farming areas, contamination would not be an issue because sugar beets are harvested before they go to seed.

But in the Willamette Valley, where sugar beets are grown specifically for seed, it is a different story.

In January, several environmental and public health groups—including the Center for Food Safety, the Organic Seed Alliance, the Sierra Club and High

snapshot



KENYA—A supporter of President-elect Barack Obama in the village of Kogello—his ancestral hometown—sports a hat bearing a sticker of Obama on Nov. 4. Excitement gripped the remote and sleepy village in western Kenya after satellite broadcasts relayed the news that Obama was elected the 44th president of the United States. (Photo by Tony Karumba/AFP/Getty Images)

Mowing Organic Seeds—filed a lawsuit against the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in federal district court in northern California. They demanded a permanent injunction against planting GMO sugar beets until the agency studies closely their environmental and health impacts, and the risk of cross-pollination.

The ongoing suit was filed in the same court that in February 2007 issued a permanent injunction against the planting of Roundup Ready alfalfa, pending further study by the USDA.

Controversy continues over how far apart farmers’ crops must be to avoid the risk of cross-pollination.

In the Willamette Valley, the industry standard is one mile for beets. But many farmers say the windborne seeds can travel up to five miles.

Because many farmers are part of cooperatives that grow sugar beets on contract for companies that supply seed, Winn says individual farmers have little choice on whether to plant Roundup

Ready sugar beets.

If the court rules against Roundup Ready beets this season, Winn says his crop will be destroyed, though he will still get paid.

“As a businessman, it’s easier on my stomach if I can predict the outcomes,” he says. “I just want to harvest my crops. I get emotional about all the politics around this.”

But Morton and other growers of organic chard and table beets fear Roundup Ready beets will wipe out their industry, regardless of whether it is contaminated from nearby GMO sugar beets.

Chard is closely related to sugar beets, so genetically modified sugar beet seeds could contaminate the crop, thereby obliterating the chard’s organic certification and market.

“There’s a problem with perception,” Morton says. “If word gets out that we’re contaminated with GE [genetic engineering], we’re no better than any place else.”

—Kari Lydersen

BY SUSAN J. DOUGLAS

How Will the Media Cover Obama?



IT'S THE MORNING after Election Day and, like millions, I am filled with elation and hope. CNN let me feel that for about one hour. Then came its pundits.

They warned of all the problems facing President-elect Barack Obama—the economy, threats from Pakistan, the desperate need for universal healthcare, global warming, all the things Bush ignored or

denied for eight years. And they emphasized how Obama will have to—*have to*—govern “from the center” and not move “too far left” the way Bill Clinton did. Clinton! And where’s all that mandate talk that Bush got in 2004?

Now that Obama and his strategists David Axelrod and David Plouffe have presided over one of the most successful presidential campaigns in modern history, they face not only all of the national and geopolitical problems mentioned above, but also this: Our deeply contradictory, image-over-substance, verbal food-fight-oriented news media.

I say contradictory because much of the news media is still used to the same-old, same-old when it comes to political coverage: speculation about the future as actual news, a focus on verbal gaffes, sex scandals, celebrities and the like. But this is also a news media beaten up and beaten down by the Bush administration—which could mean, oddly, that they will be much more critical of Obama than they were of Bush.

If and when there is Bush “legacy” talk, one big topic should be his administration’s blatant use of PR, censorship, press intimidation and propaganda. No administration, not even Nixon’s, waged such a determined campaign to present lies as facts, to smear reporters, to withhold information, to leak bogus information to credulous reporters, and to hire hacks who pretended to be reporters.

Team Bush struck, of course, at an ideal time: news divisions had suffered cuts, especially in international news; the drive for profits meant a rise in sensationalism, a decline in investigative work and substantive reporting; and 9/11 and the war on terror cowed much of the news media—especially television—into submission.

Few of us will forget the exploitation of shows like NBC’s “Meet the Press,” on which Vice President Cheney and oth-

ers repeatedly appeared to reiterate the lies about WMDs.

Remember the mini-scandal over the “Office of Strategic Information,” set up to plant phony pro-U.S. news items with foreign news outlets? Or how all that false information about WMDs was “leaked” to an overly credulous Judith Miller at the *New York Times*?

Then there was National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice telling the networks not to air a tape of Osama bin Laden because she felt it contained coded messages that were secret instructions to sleeper Qaeda cells in the United States. And let’s not forget the planting of Jeff Gannon, a fake reporter with a fake name, in presidential press conferences to ask very friendly questions of Bush.

Remember Armstrong Williams, the neoconservative talk

show host who was paid with taxpayer dollars to appear on the news as a neutral source on the great wondrousness of No Child Left Behind? The White House made sure this practice of using fake journalists in

If and when there is Bush ‘legacy’ talk, one big topic should be his administration’s blatant use of PR, censorship and propoganda.

government-produced fake news stories to hype the Bush agenda was deployed by various government agencies, like Health and Human Services. It provided local stations with bogus news stories about the virtues of the administration’s prescription-drug benefit, which we now know is a fiasco. And, of course, there was the over-the-top stagecraft of “Mission Accomplished.” All out-and-out propaganda.

So, as elated as I am, we should pay close attention to how the news media covers the Obama administration. On the one hand, they will surely be relieved to no longer have an administration so bent on lying to, manipulating, and besmirching the press, and they may welcome what we imagine will be greater transparency from the White House.

On the other hand, such transparency can lead to more critical coverage. Plus, we still haven’t reinstated the Fairness Doctrine, which once required holders of broadcast licenses to present controversial issues of public importance and to do so in a manner that is honest, equitable and balanced. As a result, Limbaugh and all can rail on.

And we still have the 24-7 cable news maw addicted to scandals, gaffes and gasbag pundits.

Managing this, on top of everything else, will take great fortitude, and it is one of the most important things the Obama team will confront, because it will shape people’s perceptions of everything else. ■

BY SALIM MUWAKKIL

Proud of Obama ... For Now



BARACK HUSSEIN OBAMA was elected the 44th president of the United States on Nov. 4.

What was once a distant possibility—and an audacious hope—has become an extraordinary fact. The election of a black president was considered so unlikely that it seemed silly to even contemplate. I never thought it would happen in my lifetime.

When CNN announced Obama had won, tears unexpectedly welled in my eyes. The election of the nation's first black president struck some deep psychic chord.

But outside of my psyche, a President Obama has many meanings—some contradictory. I feel strong pride that such a talented black American has accomplished such a towering feat against such overwhelming odds.

I am proud Obama's team mounted an innovative 21st century campaign that left many of us scratching our heads in 20th century bemusement.

I feel pride that this nation is making bold steps to atone for its original sin. That theme also resonates with many black civil rights activists. Some have likened Obama's election to the period during the Emancipation Proclamation, and several civil rights groups organized so-called "Emancipation Watch" gatherings to monitor election results.

The notion that this election is a symbol of racial redemption is particularly striking. African Americans have been virtually lockstep in their support for Illinois' junior senator, after the Iowa primary proved that a black candidate could attract white votes.

Black elected officials who since opposed Obama faced intense public criticism. Constituent discontent even forced Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.)—a civil rights icon—to withdraw his support from primary candidate Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.) and throw his support to Obama.

This was a vivid example of how Obama's electoral aspirations have interrupted the civil rights narrative that for so long has defined black America's trajectory. Today, the African-American community seems to find more value in the racial symbolism of an Obama presidency than in adhering to previous allegiances.

Charles Johnson, author of the award-winning novel

Middle Passage and professor of English at Washington University, writes that black Americans need another narrative. In *The American Scholar* magazine, Johnson argues in a recent cover story that "a new century calls for new stories grounded in the present, leaving behind the painful history of slavery and its consequences."

That history is one of racial victimization that begins in slavery, continues through the Jim Crow and the Civil Rights eras, and persists into the 21st century. Johnson argues that this story no longer describes the lives of African Americans that increasingly are stories of success and accomplishment, perhaps best symbolized by Obama's ascent.

Johnson makes a more sophisticated argument that government efforts to redress the wounds of slavery and Jim

Crow are now antiquated. He writes, "It simply is no longer the case that the essence of black American life is racial victimization and disenfranchisement ... a destiny based on color in which the meaning

of one's life is thing-hood, created even before one is born."

Even as Obama reached new voters, anti-affirmative action referenda passed in Nebraska and barely lost in Colorado. Similar measures have passed in four other states.

That brings me to the contradictory feelings I have about Obama's election. For some, his triumph will stand in lieu of continuing efforts to narrow the widening gap between white and black Americans in virtually every index of social well being. To put it simply: black America is not doing well.

Our peculiar political calculus prevented candidate Obama from candidly addressing issues of racial justice during the campaign. Any hint of racial grievance coming from a black candidate could have provoked a white electoral backlash, and the Obama team assiduously avoided that possibility.

But Obama is no longer just a symbol of black America's racial aspirations. The African-American candidate may not have been free to speak about the incarceration epidemic among black youth, or the enormous collateral damage of the war on drugs, but President Obama must be held accountable for policies that exacerbate those problems.

The sheer novelty of his status as the first black president probably will give him a long political honeymoon in the African-American community. However, when those first arguments inevitably begin, this period of tear-stained joy will gain a glow of nostalgia. ■

The election of a black president was considered so unlikely that it seemed silly to contemplate. I never thought it would happen in my lifetime.

BY STUART APPELBAUM

An Injury to Eid is an Injury to All



PHILOSOPHER MARTHA NUSSBAUM wrote in *The New Republic* in September that “religious difference drives otherwise sane people crazy.” In the wake of 9/11, few would disagree. However, Nussbaum wasn’t talking only about Muslim extremists. She was also describing the Puritan fanaticism of 17th century Massachusetts.

As Americans, we take pride that our country has been the world’s lodestar for religious pluralism. But our tolerance doesn’t mean we have purged ourselves of religious hatred. Anyone in doubt ought to talk to members of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union, who work at the Tyson poultry plant in Shelbyville, Tenn.

The Tyson plant relies on a workforce that includes many immigrants. In Shelbyville, 400 of its 1,200 employees are from Somalia—one of only two countries whose population is entirely Muslim.

Like other Muslim workers, the Somalis at Tyson faced obstacles to honoring their faith. For example, most Muslims celebrate Eid Al-Fitr—the religious holiday that marks the end of Ramadan, the Islamic holy month of fasting. To those at the plant who observe Eid, the holiday is as important to them as Christmas is to Christian co-workers. However, Tyson didn’t recognize Eid as a paid holiday. That’s why when talks for a new contract began, the workers’ eight-member negotiating committee—all but two of whom were Christian—proposed making Eid a paid holiday.

Though no U.S. union had ever made these issues a bargaining priority, Tyson’s response was positive and constructive. The outcome was an agreement guaranteeing that, in exchange for Labor Day, Eid would be a paid holiday. The union’s bargaining committee endorsed the compromise and 90 percent of the union’s members voted in favor of it.

“It allows me to work on the second shift and still pray when I need to,” said Abdillahi Jama, who came to the United States as a refugee four years ago. “It’s very important to us. Eid is one of our most sacred holidays.”

For Jama’s non-Muslim co-workers, trading Labor Day for the Eid wasn’t a significant loss. Many of them pointed out that it had been 23 years since Tyson closed the plant for Labor Day and that workers welcomed the chance to put aside

their holiday to work that day for premium wages.

“I know how I’d feel if someone said I couldn’t go to church,” said Waymon Walker, a 20-year Tyson employee. “It doesn’t matter what someone’s religion is. Being in a union means looking after each other. That’s all this contract does.”

Sadly, others disagreed. After learning of the agreement on Fox News, some right-wing websites referred to Shelbyville as a new battlefield in a clash of civilizations. One blogger wrote: “The problem is that the accommodation of Islamic holidays and practices abets, however unwittingly, an avowedly supremacist agenda that is directed toward supplanting American laws and mores and imposing Islamic law here.”

Within two days, more than 1,000 e-mails flooded our union’s website. Each had the same message: that the union,

and me in particular, were promoting the interests of radical Islam. (Apparently, the fact that I’m also the national president of the Jewish Labor Committee didn’t dissuade them.)

Tyson also faced scorn, including calls for a consumer boycott. It approached the union and proposed bringing back Labor Day in place of Eid, but Shelbyville’s workers didn’t give in. They countered that both Labor Day and the Eid should be holidays. Tyson agreed.

Calvin Ewing, a Tyson employee for 27 years, summed up the workers’ attitude best. “The only way working people ever win is if we stand together. It doesn’t matter whether it’s race or religion, it’s always the same for working people: United we stand, divided we fall.”

Union members like Ewing have something to teach America about what it will take to overcome bigotry. They remind us that by bringing workers together, unions help break down the isolation that fosters ignorance and prejudice. They also teach us that by demonstrating the practical value of tolerance, unions can do more to bridge cultural divides than simple appeals to our better nature.

Union members aren’t fundamentally better than other Americans. They just have the advantage of being part of an institution that stands up for fundamentally good values.

At the end of the day, the labor movement may be one of the best hopes America has of overcoming the religious differences that drive otherwise sane people crazy. ■

‘The only way working people ever win is if we stand together. It doesn’t matter whether it’s race or religion: United we stand, divided we fall.’

STUART APPELBAUM is president of the 100,000-member Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union, UFCW (www.rwdsu.org).

BY LAURA S. WASHINGTON

Obama Needs a Black Agenda



THE FIRST BLACK president of the United States cannot credibly govern without a national black agenda. But don't depend on him to front it.

For the last 22 months, Sen. Barack Obama had one priority: getting elected.

Black progressives have a different, urgent mission: to put meat on the bones of a black economic and social compact.

It's payback time.

Obama surged into the White House because he is one of the New Blacks—coalition-minded progressives who eschew tradition and piecemeal, narrow agendas. The New Blacks don't take their cues from the Jesse Jacksons, Al Sharptons and Tavis Smileys.

Obama knows that if black people allow parochial and self-interested operators to nibble away at his ankles, black America will be the biggest loser.

But the conversation is long overdue.

Obama's dodge around race was exquisitely choreographed. Practically the only black concerns he has addressed are his weak nod to affirmative action and his stump-speech admonishments to wayward black fathers and that trifling "Cousin Pookie"—a name he often referenced in his speeches to black audiences. In a March 2007 sermon at Brown Chapel in Selma, Ala., Obama declared: "If Cousin Pookie would vote, if Uncle Jethro would get off the couch and stop watching 'SportsCenter' and go register some folks and go to the polls, we might have a different kind of politics."

Since his landmark speech in 2004 in Boston, Obama dismissed the red-state, blue-state paradigm and argued that "there's not a liberal America and a conservative America; there's the United States of America. There's not a black America and a white America and a Latino America—there's the United States of America." It was lame, but it worked.

Still, that notion is an aspiration, not an accomplishment. Come Jan. 20, Inauguration Day, pressure groups will be tearing up the playing field to score points with the man. Black folks will be no different. Obama's shadow base produced a monumental turnout, and that gives us major dibs.

Black progressives need to now lay out an agenda. Start with equitable educational opportunities for African Ameri-

cans. Fifty-four years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, black schoolchildren are still relegated to the bottom of the educational opportunity barrel. Urban schools—which have a disproportionate number of black students—need more resources than their relatively meager tax bases can support.

Take another look at bugaboos like vouchers. Build more charter schools. It's time to jettison the fraudulent No Child Left Behind initiative and replace it with a no-nonsense plan.

There is one non-negotiable item: Black America must demand that Obama cease pandering to the People of the Gun and launch a crusade for solutions to urban violence. During his campaign, dozens of Chicago-area children have been slaughtered in the streets—in Obama's own backyard.

On the eve of the historical presidential vote, nearly

5,000 mourners filed into an Apostolic church on Chicago's South Side to mourn the murders of three members of Oscar-winning Jennifer Hudson's family. The youngest was 7. Hudson's glittering

talent made her famous, but it couldn't shield her from the insidious flow of guns that is decimating our cities.

The Obama epic offers a glimmer of hope to some. On TheRoot.com, an online commentary outlet from the African-American perspective, writer Melanie Eversley posits that Obama's victory will put beaucoup pep in the black man's step. In "The Obama Swagger," she wrote: "Maybe no group of Americans is more invested in the Obama phenomenon than black men who see in his success a transformation of their own public image."

Maybe so, but on Jan. 20, tens of thousands of young black males will still be jobless, homeless or incarcerated within the prison-industrial complex. They've got some bigger problems than rehabilitating their public images.

Obama prevailed in the election in part because he brought a multiracial identity and global perspective that undermined America's entrenched racial, ethnic and economic differences. He can—and must—govern beyond the base.

Still, he will step into the Oval Office courtesy of overwhelming turnouts dug out of the red hills of Georgia—and the gritty concrete of New Jersey.

Black folks are ecstatic about making history, but we can't afford to settle for history. In 21st century America, a national black agenda is urgent and overdue. There may be a New Black at the helm, but it's still the same old U.S. of A. ■

Black America must demand that Obama cease pandering to the People of the Gun and launch a crusade for practical solutions to urban violence.

Union-Made Lattes

The Industrial Workers of the World ramps up its campaign to organize Starbucks

BY SAM STOKER

ON AUG. 31, THE light-rail train from Minneapolis to the Mall of America was boisterous. During the ride, several dozen Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) members—known as Wobblies—belted out the radical workers’ anthem “Solidarity Forever” in unison. The reason for their elation was because Erik Forman, 23, was returning to work as a Starbucks barista.

Forman, an IWW organizer, had been fired on July 10, his boss told him, for discussing with co-workers the disciplinary action that was taken against him after showing up late to work. But Forman believes the real reason was because of his outspoken advocacy for the Starbucks Workers Union (SWU)—which is part of the IWW—and says that his termination was an attempt by Starbucks, the world’s largest coffee-shop chain, to bust a growing union movement among its employees.

Forman filed a complaint for illegal termination and anti-union malfeasance with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) a week later. In support, Starbucks’ baristas throughout the Twin Cities signed a petition demanding Forman’s reinstatement. After a series of work stoppages and protests, Starbucks settled the complaint on Aug. 31.

Under the terms of the settlement, the company did not admit guilt or that the IWW’s actions influenced its decision to rehire Forman. But it did agree to reinstate him with back pay for missed time and to post signs in the shop for 60 days, informing workers that management would not interfere with attempts to organize.

More than half of Forman’s shop is now in the IWW—and at the Mall of America the Wobblies were planning “to drink some union-made lattes” in a sign of solidarity.



‘We are the union’

A handful of baristas started the SWU in a single Starbucks shop in New York City in May 2004.

“The union was sparked because workers had become fed up with low wages, unsecured scheduling, a prohibitive healthcare system and a lack of respect from managers,” says founding member Daniel Gross.

The SWU soon spread to Starbucks across the city, all while embracing the tenets of the IWW—particularly solidarity unionism. Unlike the prominent union model that uses a hierarchical power structure and focuses on bargaining with employers, solidarity unionism embraces direct democracy with members supporting one another directly.

“We are not part of a union,” says Gross. “We are the union.”

Members of the SWU say Starbucks embarked on an anti-union campaign since the its inception. They allege management threatened employees who expressed interest in the union, and spied on and interrogated employees about union activity. SWU says the most outspoken union advocates were fired.

Starbucks denies these charges.

“Such allegations are baseless,” says Starbucks spokesperson Tara Darrow. “Starbucks strictly abides with laws and guidelines associated with labor law. We wouldn’t do that because it is against the law.”

Yet Starbucks’ settlement with the NLRB complaint on Forman’s behalf was the third such settlement in three years. During that time, Starbucks has reinstated four employees after they filed complaints with the NLRB, and two cases remain open.

In New York, Gross is still awaiting the decision of an August 2007 hearing in which the NLRB filed 30 complaints against Starbucks for anti-union malfeasance, in addition to a complaint that he, Gross, was fired illegally. More recently, in Grand Rapids, Mich., the NLRB filed a complaint against Starbucks, charging that the company illegally fired barista Cole Dorsey for union activity.

According to Dorsey, the SWU began organizing in Grand Rapids in 2006. But baristas who were interested in joining the union became concerned that repercussions might be taken against them for organizing publicly.

“We were attempting to organize a union election, a tactic we thought could be effective here in Michigan, but we believe management found out,” says Dorsey.

Those baristas collectively decided that Dorsey—at least initially—should be the union’s public face while others remained underground.

Dorsey was fired on June 6 during the union election campaign. Starbucks’ Darrow says Dorsey—who had worked at Starbucks for two years and had won employee awards—was fired for being tardy after receiving a final warning. As

in other cases, Starbucks denies allegations of union-busting activity.

“The backbone of my case is that I was fired for less than what other employees have done,” Dorsey says.

In a response to Dorsey’s NLRB complaint, Starbucks’ attorneys reiterated the official reason he was fired, and added that he was a “salt,” suggesting that Dorsey had no interest in working at Starbucks and was there only to organize.

“I guess it is true in a sense because I am organizing people, but what they fail to understand is that I also depend on the income from my job, and they took that away from me,” Dorsey says. “We never wanted this to be a contentious issue. We want a union so that we can improve workplace conditions. Starbucks has made the situation contentious.”

Improving working conditions

In the past year, the SWU has grown more than it had in its first three years combined. The group says it has around 250 members nationally, with most congregated in Chicago, Grand Rapids, New York City and the Twin Cities.

SWU members say that the Twin Cities have the fastest growth rate nationwide, attributing much of the growth to the controversy stirred up by Forman’s firing.

Forman says the union’s local growth is only a step in a larger campaign to chal-

lenge Starbucks to improve worker conditions. With stores in 60 countries, Starbucks employs 150,000 people worldwide.

“The union needs to become international and it eventually needs to spread into all of the service industry,” Forman says.

A global movement against the corporation appears to be underway. Dorsey’s termination coincided with the firing of Monica (who wouldn’t reveal her last name because she fears being blacklisted by other employers), a Starbucks barista in Seville, Spain. Monica is a member of the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT), the Spanish counterpart of the IWW.

Like Dorsey, Monica was also allegedly fired for union organizing. Their terminations sparked an international day of protest on July 5 at hundreds of Starbucks in cities across the world.

But, according to spokeswoman Darrow, Starbucks doesn’t fear such organizing.

“As far as we are concerned, our [employees] have free choice [to unionize] at all times,” she says. “We feel we have great communication back and forth with employees and we pride ourselves on providing a good workplace.”

Starbucks’ pride in its “good workplace” stems from the employee pay and benefit packages that the company often trumpets—benefits that include stock option programs and healthcare

benefits that the company claims cover 65 percent of eligible employees. But the bottom line for the SWU is that a person simply cannot live a decent life as a Starbucks worker. The wages, which generally hover slightly above each state’s minimum wage, are too low; the hours are unstable; and health insurance premiums and deductibles are prohibitive compared to earnings.

“There are many corporations like Starbucks that exploit workers, but few have succeeded like Starbucks in portraying itself as a socially conscious corporation,” Gross says.

While the most common response to such a situation is “Why don’t you quit?” Forman says, “The fact is there are not many industries a person can get into with no skills, and retail is one of them. The best thing people can do is organize.”

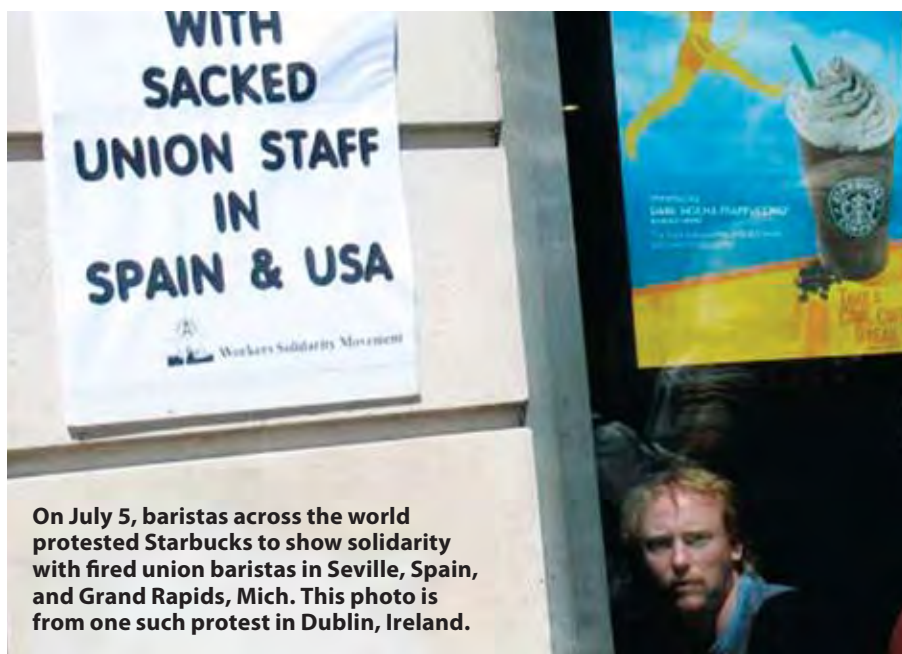
Back at the Mall of America

The Wobblies’ Aug. 31 party on the light-rail was cut short two train stops before the Mall of America, when police officers boarded the train and questioned the group. Police told them the Mall of America is private property and that no demonstrations or protests are allowed there.

The union members explained that they were simply joining their friend for his first day of work and assured the officers they were not there to demonstrate or disrupt shoppers. The officers let them pass.

But when the train arrived at the Mall of America, a line of police in riot gear blocked the doors to the platform. Among them were FBI agents. (Aug. 31 was also the day before the opening of the Republican National Convention in St. Paul, which may have explained the police presence.) A co-worker text-messaged Forman that management had been speaking with police in their shop. No one was allowed off the train and police threatened to arrest anyone who tried to exit.

“It’s ridiculous,” Forman later says. “Management, the police and the FBI are working together. They say they didn’t want us demonstrating, but we assured them that was not our intent. I think it is clear, what they really fear is us organizing.” ■



On July 5, baristas across the world protested Starbucks to show solidarity with fired union baristas in Seville, Spain, and Grand Rapids, Mich. This photo is from one such protest in Dublin, Ireland.



President-elect Barack Obama waves to his supporters after his victory speech in Chicago's Grant Park on Nov. 4.

MANDATE FOR CHANGE

Voters' message to Obama: Think big

BY DAVID SIROTA

WHAT DO WE DO now?" That's the question Bill McKay, (Robert Redford), ponders in *The Candidate* (1972). He won the presidency, promising "a better way." After Nov. 4, America is asking Democrats the same haunting question.

These are heady times for the party of Thomas Jefferson, Franklin D. Roosevelt and, now, President-elect Barack Obama. Only a few years ago, Democrats were almost relegated to permanent minority status by a "Mission Accomplished" sign and an ass in a flight suit.

But since President Bush's 2004 re-

election, Democrats have gained at least 50 House seats, 12 Senate seats, seven state houses and seven governorships.

Republicans used the threat of "socialism" to turn the 2008 campaign into a referendum on conservatism. The result? Democrats notched their highest percentage of the popular vote since 1964—when Lyndon B. Johnson won in one of the most lopsided elections in U.S. history.

After two years and more than half a billion dollars worth of ads, the pulverizing election came down to a steel-cage match that pitted rivals against each other—and not Immigrants versus Natives, Americans versus Foreigners or Whites versus Blacks. Sens. John McCain and Ba-

rack Obama made the race's final weeks a proxy war between two presidential icons who still loom large: Ronald Reagan and Franklin Roosevelt.

McCain promised to follow Reagan, "in his tradition and in his footsteps." He vilified Obama as a 1930s-era "socialist" looking to "redistribute wealth."

Obama countered by invoking Roosevelt's speeches and depicting the financial meltdown as "the final verdict" on McCain's "failed philosophy" (that is, Reaganism).

Mind you, neither candidate fully personified these predecessors. Obama's moderate record is not FDR's quasi-socialism, and McCain renounced some of

his Reagan-inspired dogma.

And each had their inconsistencies. Obama criticized the “failed philosophy” of Reagan conservatism, while infusing some of his own tax prescriptions with such conservatism. McCain, for his part, attacked Obama’s “socialism” after voting for the bank bailout bill—the most aggressive market intervention by govern-

ular vote, has a huge mandate to implement his progressive vision.

That’s why conservatives are so worried.

They understand cause and effect: As McCain doubled down on the right’s economic catechism, Obama surged. Capturing traditional Gipper territories like Colorado, Indiana and Virginia, the

Wall Street Journal screeed by former Reagan speechwriter Peggy Noonan to a Politico.com diatribe by former Rudy Giuliani aide John Avlon, the “center-right nation” phrase was parroted with the discipline of Cuba’s Ministry of Information.

According to a Lexis-Nexis search of news articles and transcripts, “center-right nation” became the talking point du

As McCain doubled down on the right’s economic catechism, Obama surged. Capturing traditional Gipper territories like Colorado, Indiana and Virginia, the Rooseveltian Socialist beat out Reagan Reincarnate.

ment in contemporary American history.

But all that was less significant than how the duo framed the election. They both effectively said that a vote for McCain is a vote to continue Reagan’s trickle-down tax cuts and free-market fundamentalism, and a vote for Obama is a vote to resurrect Roosevelt’s regulations and redistributions. And because this choice was made so clear—because voters knew exactly what they were voting for—Obama, with his 6 percent margin of victory in the pop-

Rooseveltian Socialist beat out Reagan Reincarnate.

Yet to this, conservatives responded with a pre-emptive “nah, nah, can’t hear you!”

They contended that despite the Obama victory, this is still a center-right nation. Indeed, this poll-tested term—“center-right nation”—has become one of the Punditburo’s most ubiquitous Orwellian buzzwords.

From a *Newsweek* cover story by conservative dittohead Jon Meacham to a

jour in the lead up to Election Day.

But is there any proof that America is a center-right nation? Republicans cite polls that show more Americans call themselves conservative than liberal. While that data point certainly measures brand name, those same surveys undermine the right’s larger argument because they show majorities support progressive positions on most economic issues.

Because the Bush era finely tuned America’s BS detector, repetition and re-

★★★★ THE GOOD ★★★★★

★ Obama supports the Employee Free Choice Act, which would let unions organize under “card check.” In lieu of holding an election, card check allows employees to join unions when a majority of workers signs cards authorizing union representation. The legislation would also establish stronger penalties for violation of employee rights during organizing drives.

★ Obama has pledged to reduce U.S. greenhouse gas emissions by 80 percent by 2050 through a cap-and-trade system that would auction 100 percent of pollution permits. He wants to classify carbon dioxide as a dangerous pollutant and to authorize the Environmental Protection Agency to regulate CO₂ emissions under the

1990 Clean Air Act. He has also proposed investing \$150 billion over 10 years to develop clean technology.

★ When it comes to ending the war that he decried in 2002 as “dumb,” Obama has proposed withdrawing U.S. combat troops from Iraq within 16 months of taking office. (However, he has said that the speed of the withdrawal is “going to be determined by the facts on the ground.”) Obama’s plan might be derailed by the Bush administration’s negotiations with the Iraqi government over a renewed Status of Forces Agreement, an early draft of which delayed a U.S. withdrawal until the end of 2011. Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, however, has expressed support for Obama’s plan.

★ On taxes, Obama’s plans are staunchly progressive. The Tax Policy Center noted that the bottom 80 percent of the population—households earning \$118,000 or less—would receive \$700 more each year in savings under Obama’s plan than under McCain’s. Obama has pledged to raise taxes on the top 0.1 percent by \$800,000 a year, \$500,000 of which would come simply from wiping out the Bush reductions.

★ In a welcome change from both the GOP and hawkish Democrats, Obama has committed to direct presidential diplomacy with Iran “without preconditions,” such as demanding that Iran must halt its uranium enrichment program before such talks can be initiated.

visionism can no longer cloak reality.

Great responsibility

Prior to the election, *The Atlantic's* Marc Ambinder wrote that because the Republicans have “run against the very idea of progressive politics,” a McCain loss in such an ideologically polarized contest means that “Democrats can jus-

comes with “great responsibility”—a political euphemism for high expectations.

While the party gained in strength, it lost a GOP scapegoat that once justified Democratic hyper-caution (read: inaction). On the huge issues—whether re-regulating Wall Street, reforming trade, solving the healthcare emergency or ending the Iraq War—America demands suc-

That was always this election's unspoken theme. Despite lipsticked pigs, Joe the Plumber and Superbowl-sized candidate events, the 2008 campaign pivoted on a single, hope-flavored choice: America had to decide between continued conservative rule and a progressive agenda as far-reaching as the crises we face. McCain himself said, “The American people have spoken,

Obama has a mandate for the kind of 'direct, vigorous action' Roosevelt called for in his 1933 inaugural address. Should President Obama try to capitalize on it, he will have nothing to fear but fear itself.

tifiably claim that conservatism itself has been rejected.”

Obama talks of forming a bipartisan cabinet, but his election wasn't a public cry for milquetoast government-by-blue-ribbon-commission. It was, as community organizer Deepak Bhargava puts it, an ideological mandate that created “an opening for transformational, progressive change.”

This opening is predicated on Democrats possessing the kind of great power that Spider-Man creator Stan Lee warns

and Democrats in 2009 will have no one to blame for failure but themselves. After all, with 349 electoral votes (as *In These Times* went to press), a President Obama cannot credibly claim he lacks the political capital to legislatively steamroll a humiliated Republican Party and its remaining senators.

The same goes for Democrats at all governmental levels. Meeting expectations requires them to champion far-reaching—dare we say, radical—solutions.

and they have spoken clearly.”

To rise to that call, Democrats will have to abandon their worst habits.

They must, for instance, acknowledge the progressive mandate the voters demanded, rather than downplay expectations like Sen. Harry Reid (D-Nev.) did immediately after the election. “This is not a mandate for a political party or an ideology,” he fearfully told reporters.

They might also consider retiring the Innocent Bystander Fable—the dishon-

★★ THE AMBIGUOUS ★★

★ In addition to trying to lower costs through various wonky means, Obama's healthcare plan aims for universality through the creation of a purchasing pool, allowing the uncovered to choose between tightly regulated private insurance companies or a new government-run plan that will be similar to Medicare. That's far short of a single-payer system. However, in August, in response to a voter's question about why he doesn't support single-payer, Obama did express sympathy for it, suggesting that it could be a longer-term goal. [M]y attitude is let's build up the system we got, let's make it more efficient, [and] we maybe over time ... [will] decide that there are other ways to provide care more efficiently.”

★ On free-trade pacts, Obama has called for NAFTA (North America Free Trade Agreement) to be renegotiated and has insisted that all future agreements include environmental and labor protections.

However, since the Democratic primary ended, he has somewhat softened his opposition to NAFTA, calling his rhetoric “overheated and amplified.”

And in September, an anonymous union official told *The Hill* that he believed a free-trade agreement with Colombia would have “more difficulty” passing under a McCain administration than an Obama administration, because Congress would be much more likely to block it.



JEFF SWENSEN/GETTY IMAGES

est storyline that claims they cannot change anything. Democrats cited the fable as the reason the Iraq War continued following the 2006 election—expecting Americans to ignore Congress' authority to halt war funding.

In late October, Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) lamented: "There's not much we can do" to amend the failed bank bailout. Such continued mendacity will metastasize from boringly banal lies into scathing punch-lines on late-night comedy shows.

Most importantly, Democrats will need to ignore revisionists who say President Clinton's early foibles prove the failure of "governing in a way that is, or seems, skewed to the left," as the *Washington Post's* Ruth Marcus claims.

The true story is far different—and more foreboding.

Recounting the real history to Politico.com, a Republican lobbyist noted that Clinton tacked right, "co-opt[ing] a portion of the business community" and championing conservative policies like the North American Free Trade Agreement, and thereby demoralized his base, helping Republicans take Congress.

The success of Obama's two-year cam-



President-elect Barack Obama must take the mandate given to him by American voters, and go big.

STAN HONDA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

paign highlights America's disdain for precisely that kind of invertebracy and triangulation. This election first saw voters reject Clinton-style incrementalism, and then scorn McCain's Reaganism. That means the Democrats best answer to Bill McKay's question "what do we do now?" is a similarly simple answer: Go big.

That is not merely the better way—it is the only way.

Obama has a mandate for the kind of "direct, vigorous action" Roosevelt called for in his 1933 inaugural address. Should a President Obama try to capitalize on it, he will have nothing to fear but fear itself. ■

★ THE UGLY ★

★ Obama has stated that, if he has "actionable intelligence" on the location of high-level al Qaeda members in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in the country's northwest, he would order missile strikes to kill them, with or without the Pakistan government's permission. But such an action would be risky and dangerous.

Even a successful airstrike would likely unify Pakistani public opinion against the United States, fanning anti-Americanism. But the possibility of success is extremely remote, given that U.S. intelligence within FATA ranges between weak and non-existent. Far more likely would be a scenario in which innocent civilians are killed and the already limited U.S.-Pakistani cooperation against

al Qaeda within FATA is scaled back further. Meanwhile, Obama's bellicose rhetoric has already angered Pakistan's recent democratically elected government, which prefers negotiating with the militant tribes in the northwest over military assaults.

★ Obama's plan for Afghanistan centers around sending in two more combat divisions—about 7,000 troops—which would bring the total number of U.S. troops there to 40,000. More boots on the ground could, perhaps, lessen the military's reliance on air strikes, which have killed hundreds of Afghan civilians in each of the past three years. But how long these soldiers will remain there—and what, exactly, their mission will be—are two questions that Obama hasn't clearly answered.

Afghanistan—as the Russians learned in the '80s—provides an object lesson on the limits to military power, a lesson Obama has not yet learned.

★ Also worrisome is Obama's belief that Georgia should enter NATO. Far from protecting that nation—and the world—from Russian aggression, such a move would provoke Russia, continuing recent U.S. policy of surrounding Russia's borders with military bases.

In a 2006 article for *The Nation*, Stephen F. Cohen noted the double-standard at work in this policy: "When NATO expands to Russia's front and back doorsteps, gobbling up former Soviet-bloc members and republics, it is 'fighting terrorism' and 'protecting new states'; when Moscow protests, it is engaging in 'cold war thinking.'"

Beyond Casino Capitalism

Bush let the gamblers run wild. Here's how Obama can rein them in

BY DAVID MOBERG

TYPICALLY, FEW PEOPLE TURN to dead French poets for economic analysis, but Stéphane Mallarmé proved wiser than many a billionaire financial trader when he wrote, "A throw of the dice will never abolish chance." Translated into the prosaic language of the global economic crisis, his epigram might read, "Even the sale of more than \$60 trillion in credit default swaps will never abolish the risk of crummy loans."

Until recently, the wizards of Wall Street believed they had abolished—or at least "managed"—risk so well that they could turn the global economy into a casino. By playing the roles of both the gambler and the house, they were always guaranteed to come out the winner. In the process, they borrowed deeply and redoubled their bets, multiplying the risk inherent in a capitalist economy.

It worked for a while. In 2007, the financial sector reaped 40 percent of all U.S. corporate profits, as debt-driven speculation proliferated in a dizzying array of financial devices.

But now the financial edifice has crashed, spreading failure from subprime home loans to other mortgages, and endangering investment banks, commercial banks and insurers in the United States and Europe—and even whole countries, such as Iceland.

The contagion continues to spread to hedge funds, emerging markets, pension funds, state and local governments, credit card issuers, major corporations, and the rest of the more than \$600 trillion financial derivatives market. That amount is roughly 11 times the value of the world's annual production.

Former Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan now admits the fail-



ure of the ideology that governed the financial markets in recent decades. "I made a mistake in presuming that the self-interests of organizations, specifically banks and others, were such as that they were best capable of protecting their own shareholders and their equity in the system," Greenspan told the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee on Oct. 23.

But the crisis has roots in the real economy, especially with regard to wage stagnation and growing income inequality.

When President-elect Barack Obama takes office in January, he will have to transform the failed model of casino capitalism into a more democratic, egalitarian and stable system. To do so, he will need to strengthen the role of government in providing direction for the real economy. But he will also need to make government the servant of the majority

of working Americans, rather than an ally of corporations, or what University of Texas economist James K. Galbraith calls "the predator state."

Beyond tougher regulation and simplifying the financial system, government needs to raise incomes and reduce inequality—thereby spreading the wealth around not only for the sake of fairness, but also simply to make the economy work better. It also needs to guide the economy toward innovative investments that create high-wage jobs, especially in the fields of energy efficiency and alternative technologies.

A brief history of financial disaster

Finance has triumphed over industry since the beginning of the 20th century, according to economic historian Lawrence Mitchell. But New Deal reforms—

more financial system regulation, more government spending—tempered financial volatility for a quarter-century after World War II.

But University of Missouri economist Randall Wray argues in a paper for Bard College's Levy Institute that the success spawned two destructive consequences: financial players sought new ways to get around regulations, and they became accustomed to the government preventing a new Depression.

Under what the late economist Hyman Minsky called "money manager capitalism," new financial products and institutions undermined the role of traditional banking. Modern-day investors believed that the new economy would always head up, either through dot-com stocks, housing or some other vehicle.

In the early '70s, the post-war Bretton Woods system of global financial management crumbled. A vast global pool of unregulated "Eurodollars"—or profits that global investors and companies did not repatriate to the United States—eroded the power of governments to regulate currencies. This financial globalization accelerated broader economic globalization—the dismantling of government regulation in favor of a free hand for large corporations. It also triggered the birth of financial derivatives, which are products that derive value from some underlying, real commodity (like a futures contract in Swiss francs).

Financial globalization also eventually opened up a wider market for financial securities. Banks were turning pools of mortgages into securities, so they could profit from originating loans but not have to keep loans on their books.

Mortgage brokers soon joined the game. They offered financial incentives to sign up high-risk borrowers, who yielded bigger fees for originating loans. It became a race to get these loans securitized and sold as quickly as possible.

Eventually, banks, hedge funds and insurance companies—like the bailed-out AIG—would also profit by selling derivatives, such as credit default swaps that were used as insurance against the risky securitized loans.

Yet these swaps were not real insur-

ance. Issuers did not need to keep capital reserves, as insurance companies do, and many of the banks selling swaps also bought swaps, thus undercutting the rationale for getting the risk off their books.

Even worse, virtually nobody understood what the risks were, or how these investments should be valued. Rating agencies—such as Moody's and Standard and Poor's, whose AAA ratings justified

Over several decades, the financial industry has been increasingly parasitic. It has sucked wealth out of the rest of the economy, rather than facilitating investment in real growth.

buying the swaps—gave instructions to asset-backed securities issuers about how to package their most risky loans and still win top ratings. The issuers, in turn, paid the agencies handsomely.

What's more, any product that could be used as a hedge to protect against risk could also be used to speculate.

Writes Wray: "A huge part of credit default swaps were not hedges but huge bets that bonds would go bad, that countries would go bad. Just pure gambling."

Banks ended up carrying more risk than they had before securitization. The whole scam, Wray writes, "sucked away what little accumulated wealth low-income homebuyers had managed to put toward a down payment."

The long slowdown

Over several decades, the financial industry has been increasingly parasitic. It has sucked wealth out of the rest of the economy, rather than facilitating investment in real growth.

The underlying problem, economic historian Robert Brenner argued in his 2002 book, *The Boom and the Bubble*, is a long-term slowdown in U.S. growth rates and a squeeze on profitability. That's especially true in the manufacturing sector, where there is excess global capacity to produce goods in many industries.

As a result of that long slowdown, Brenner argues, the world economy increasingly relied on growing U.S. debt

and financial bubbles. It also prodded corporations to hold down wages and increase profits—by busting unions, by shipping jobs overseas, by shrinking the social safety net, and by shifting tax burdens away from corporations and the rich.

The result? Since 1976, the after-tax income of the bottom one-fifth of American households has grown only 6.3 percent, while income for the top 1 percent

has soared 228 percent. Nearly all the income gains in the most recent recovery went to the richest households. Over the past eight years, corporate profits grew at the expense of wages as a share of national income, and workers' incomes were flat as productivity grew.

From 1969 to 2004, short-term family income volatility doubled, recently rising to a new peak, according to research for the Economic Policy Institute by Yale political scientist Jacob Hacker.

The casino economy hit home for working families with a vengeance. But the rich sought out ever-increasing profits from hedge funds, private equity firms, leveraged buy-outs, commodity speculation, and much more. Meanwhile, most Americans went deeper in debt to try to maintain their standards of living, as jobs grew slowly and domestic manufacturing investment slowed.

Rutgers University historian James Livingston finds all-too-close parallels between now and the beginnings of the Great Depression. He says that the Great Depression resulted not only from mismanagement of a routine business downturn, but also from "a massive shift of income shares to profits, away from wages and thus consumption, at the very moment—the 1920s—that expanded production of consumer durables became the crucial condition of economic growth."

To avoid a new depression, Obama will need to stop any remaining financial

panic. Most analysts of varied ideologies argue that governments can often halt panics by acting quickly and making loans—liquidity—readily available.

Impaired by their ideology, the Federal Reserve and the Bush administration acted more slowly than they should have. When they finally took more drastic action, they focused mainly on the bailout of financial institutions, not the economy.

In late September, Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson initially proposed an ineffective \$700 billion plan to buy the banks' worst assets. That was followed by a half-hearted Oct. 13 decision to invest \$250 billion of the bailout directly in the nation's banks—making the federal government part owner of many of these banks, including the largest.

But even as the United States became an owner, it—unlike many European governments—surrendered all ownership control, leaving the bailed-out companies essentially free to do whatever they want with the money. The govern-

ment also overpaid for its share of the bailed-out institutions—paying double what investor Warren Buffet paid for his stake in Goldman Sachs, according to a steelworkers' union analysis.

If the government had followed President Franklin Roosevelt's example—or even the '90s Swedish model—it would have taken over the banks, replaced the executives, and made the institutions solvent. This way the banks could have been ready to do their proper business, namely channeling savings to investment, whether under public, private or mixed control.

Many financial reforms are needed. First, a new administration must put all financial institutions under regulatory control and move all assets and liabilities on their balance sheets. Columbia University economist and Nobel winner Joseph Stiglitz argues that a financial products' safety commission should oversee all innovations, but regulators should simply ban many derivatives. Financial stability should become a key goal for regulators, along with full employment and price stability.

Second, given the mysteries surrounding most of the financial world, regulators must ensure investment information is clear and comprehensive. To do this, Stiglitz argues for reforming many perverse incentives, banning exploitative practices and curbing risky business with "speed limits" on bank expansion. Other reformers propose more efforts by the Fed to restrain speculative borrowing or to require banks to increase capital reserves when the economy heats up.

Third, to diminish speculation and fund new public investment for development, the government—ideally as part of a global agreement—should impose a small tax—within 0.25 percent—on all financial transactions, as Nobel-winning economist James Tobin proposed in the '70s.

In short, to reduce financial risk, the government will have to steer capital away from risky, exploitative ends and toward profitable but socially productive ends.

More than market fixes needed

But fixing the casino economy involves

more than better control over capital markets. There's also a need to rebalance the real economy.

Most important is the need to relieve immediate pain: Provide help for distressed homeowners to stay in their homes—either as renters or as buyers, but under less onerous terms—and expand unemployment insurance to cover more workers longer and with more support.

A massive stimulus plan is also needed. But to create new jobs, it should downplay tax breaks and instead invest in infrastructure repair and new construction, support hard-pressed state and local governments, provide more money for education aid and basic research, and lead an energy efficiency campaign, with public and private employers retrofitting homes and public buildings.

Any stimulus plan should also be a prelude to a longer-term strategy to solve the failed casino economy's core problem—the inequality and instability of most people's incomes. That requires three government actions:

First, rebuild wage-raising labor market institutions—including unions.

Second, expand the social safety net, most immediately by creating universal health insurance.

Finally, tap new sources of long-term growth. The most promising project would be a massive effort for energy efficiency, new technologies (such as high-speed trains) and sustainable, safe alternative energy production.

Resolving the crisis requires global coordination, both in stanching the spread of the crisis and eventually in creating a new Bretton Woods agreement. It should focus on human development first, viewing trade and foreign investment simply as one tool among many for improving people's lives.

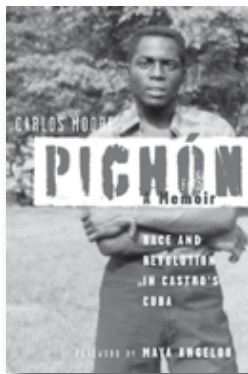
Globalization under current rules has encouraged the casino economy. The alternative to its corporate-friendly trade pacts is not to eliminate trade pacts altogether, but rather to implement fair-trade pacts that coordinate growth to raise global standards of living.

The casino economy had its chance, and it capped out. ■

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The War Dividend

Will the Pentagon lock the Obama administration into ever-escalating military budgets?

BY MARK ENGLER

AT THE END OF a long electoral season marked by bipartisan vows to bring “change,” America’s massive military budget remains a hulking and seemingly immutable fact of national life. Given the financial crisis and the promise of President Bush’s departure from office, many have hoped that overheated defense spending might give way to the need to addressing domestic problems.

Yet, countering these hopes, the Pentagon has already maneuvered to lock the Obama administration into greater military spending. On Oct. 9, *Congressional Quarterly* reported that a forthcoming spending estimate from defense officials would call for \$450 billion in additional funds over the next five years. The publication *Defense News* subsequently confirmed with Bradley Berkson, the Pentagon’s director of program analysis and evaluation, that the military would indeed be seeking additional funds—although Berkson cited

the figure of \$360 billion over six years.

In either case, these billions would be increases on top of already escalating military budgets. The Pentagon is currently set to receive \$515 billion for 2009, and \$527 billion for 2010. Each sum is roughly five times what the federal government will spend annually on education, housing assistance and environmental protection combined.

‘Playing chicken’

The last decade brought a momentous surge in defense appropriations. Even without the additional money called for in the October estimate, proposed military spending for 2010 almost doubles the already astronomical budget from fiscal year 2000, which was approximately \$280 billion.

This, however, is not the whole story. Adding to the Pentagon “base budget,” an extra \$16 billion goes each year to the Department of Energy to maintain nuclear weapons. And Congress funds wars in

Iraq and Afghanistan with supplemental authorizations, which came to \$180 billion in fiscal year 2008.

The country spends as much on the military in a single year as it did in the recent \$700 billion financial bailout. Yet the Pentagon is now calling for more.

Normally, the U.S. president submits a defense request to Congress early in the New Year as part of the regular budget process, and prior deliberations with military officials are not made available to the public. The purpose of leaking the new defense-spending estimate appears to be political. With Bush leaving office, and amid uncertainty about a new administration, the Pentagon presumably wants to set the bar high for military spending.

“The thinking behind [the document] is pretty straightforward,” Dov Zakheim, a top budget official at the Pentagon during Bush’s first term, told *Congressional Quarterly*. “They are setting a baseline for a new administration that then will have to defend cutting it.”



JAMES B. HOKE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

A U.S. Marine Humvee cruises through the desert near Al Asad, Iraq.

"It's sort of like trying to play chicken with the new administration," says William Hartung, director of the Arms and Security Initiative at the New America Foundation. "Armed Services puts it out there: 'This is what we need to meet our mission. Let's see if you have the guts to say otherwise.' They won't get all of it, but it will complicate matters. They may get more than they would have otherwise."

The Pentagon in times of crisis

On the heels of Washington's bailout for the financial sector, news reports have cited predictions from defense observers that military spending would plateau.

Philip Finnegan, a defense industry analyst at the Teal Group, told the *Washington Post* that the economic downturn "leaves the outlook for defense spending going from being strong to being dim."

In late October, Rep. Barney Frank (D-Mass.) went so far as to suggest that a 25 percent cut in defense spending would be appropriate under current circumstances. The mere suggestion of such cuts led Rep. Roscoe Bartlett (R-Md.) to invoke images

of a hostile foreign takeover. Talking with the Christian-oriented American Family News Network on Oct. 31, he decried the irresponsibility of such a move, "You know, if we don't make the right decisions about the military, nothing else will matter, will it? Because if we don't have a free country ... what do these other programs matter at all?"

Less alarmist voices contend that, with a recession looming, the time to curtail military spending in order to fund other priorities is ripe.

"War production doesn't create real economic health," Phyllis Bennis of the Institute for Policy Studies recently wrote in a commentary. "What do all those fancy missile systems, space weapons, battleships, even tanks and Humvees, produce other than a lot of dead Iraqis and dead Afghans?"

Instead, Bennis argued, government ought to "bail out our battered economy [by providing] real jobs to soldiers drafted by lack of opportunities, and [by redirecting] the hundreds of billions of war-spending into green jobs, rebuilding our crumbling infrastructure, training new teachers and building new schools."

In late September, during a question-and-answer session at the National Defense University, even Secretary of Defense Robert Gates acknowledged that economic conditions might cool enthusiasm for Pentagon spending: "I certainly would expect growth [in defense budgets] to level off, and my guess would be [that] we'll be fortunate in the years immediately ahead ... if we were able to stay flat with inflation."

Most scenarios presented by defense observers for a net decline in military spending do not see a reduced "base budget" for the Pentagon, but rather predict decreases in supplemental war funding.

Since 2001, Congress has appropriated \$859 billion for Afghanistan, Iraq and other military operations related to the war on terrorism.

Under an Obama administration, which promises a gradual withdrawal from Iraq, this funding stream is expected to dry up in coming years—a development that would lead to an overall decline in military allocations.

Even Sen. John McCain's (R-Ariz.) political platform called for reining in "emergency" supplemental allotments because military needs, as the national security statement on his campaign website explains, "must be funded by the regular appropriations process," and relying on "supplemental appropriation bills encourages pork barrel spending."

Amid widespread belt-tightening, some military analysts say that a new administration should prune defense funding for outdated Cold War weapons systems. The F-22 combat fighter—designed to tangle with a once-anticipated new generation of high-tech Soviet planes and priced at \$300 million per plane—could well be on the chopping block, as could a pricey new issue of attack submarines. Additionally, government could swiftly save \$10 billion per year by cutting ongoing funding for Star-Wars-style anti-missile programs.

Ghosts of transitions past

While the possibility of minor adjustments is real, the chances of any significant assault on the military budget are remote.

Travis Sharp, an analyst at the Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, puts it this way: "One of the biggest lessons during the Clinton years when it came to White House-Pentagon relations was, 'Don't do something at the beginning of your administration that's going to damage your working relationship with the military and disrupt the trust that the military has for you as commander-in-chief.'"

Sharp says President Clinton soured his relationship with the Pentagon and with senior military leaders because he got involved with the "don't ask, don't tell" policy soon after coming into office.

"No matter how good of a defense secretary President-elect Barack Obama chooses," says Sharp, "if he proposes a 25 percent defense-spending cut, the military will hate him. And he will put himself up to be absolutely crucified by Republicans when he runs for re-election in four years."

Not surprisingly, former U.S. Navy secretary Richard Danzig, an Obama adviser who is expected to be a candidate for secretary of defense, told the *Wall Street Jour-*





BRENDAN SMIALOWSKI/GETTY IMAGE

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates takes a question during an Oct. 17 press briefing at the Pentagon.

nal on Oct. 3 that he doesn't "see defense spending declining in the first years of an Obama administration." Even beyond the fear factor created by Clinton's awkward first months in office, it is not clear from recent history that Democrats would be more frugal with defense spending than their Republican counterparts.

"Clinton and [Vice President Al] Gore, as part of the Democratic Leadership Council, tried to position themselves as tough Democrats who were not afraid to use force," says Hartung of the New America Foundation. During the 2000 elections, "Gore actually was claiming that he would spend more than Bush on the military."

An Obama Doctrine?

For his part, Obama has been consistently hawkish on Afghanistan and has called for a U.S. troop surge in that country.

Changing trends in military strategy may also lead to costly new spending. When Bush came into office in 2000, the hottest fad in defense planning was to deemphasize the use of ground troops, focusing instead on high technology and air power. This became known as the "Rumsfeld Doctrine," after its leading proponent, then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld.

Subsequently, U.S. operations in Iraq and Afghanistan led to a backlash against this vision of reshaping the military. Officials such as Gates and Gen. David Petraeus, now head of the U.S. Central Command, have emphasized expanding the

number of ground troops available for deployment.

Both Obama and McCain endorsed the more-boots-on-the-ground theory. Obama supports the military's planned addition of 92,000 Army and Marine Corps personnel over the next five years, while McCain called for even more troops. According to defense officials, securing and equipping these forces will cost \$117.6 billion through 2013.

Pentagon official Berkson cites "operations and maintenance support and capital support" for these troops as a primary rationale for requesting \$60 billion a year above current budget levels.

On the one hand, abandoning the delusion that wars can be won on the cheap with high technology is a positive development. On the other hand, the ability of superpowers to succeed in counter-insurgency and reconstruction operations is itself highly suspect.

"So, you're preparing to fight a kind of war that you've proven yourself unable to win?" asks Sharp of the U.S. military brass. "I'm not sure that makes sense."

He adds: "If we have more troops, does that mean that we're going to be more willing to go into the next Iraq or Afghanistan? If it does, then I question the proposal."

A true alternative

America needs not simply a shift to a more fashionable way of thinking about how wars are fought. Rather, Congress and the Obama administration need to

consider preventative models of security and address the fact that out-of-control military spending leaves little money for pressing social needs.

In September, the Task Force on a Unified Security Budget for the United States—a group of progressive analysts and former military officials convened by the think tank Foreign Policy In Focus (for which I serve as a senior analyst)—released a proposal to realign the defense budget. The report recommends eliminating superfluous military spending and using the money saved—about \$61 billion—to fund neglected aspects of national security. These include stopping nuclear proliferation, improving transit security and building a foreign policy grounded in diplomacy rather than force.

"The big picture here is that the military-centered strategy of the declared global war on terror is the one that is not working," wrote co-editors, Miriam Pemberton of the Institute for Policy Studies and Lawrence Korb, a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress and senior adviser to the Center for Defense Information, in their fiscal year 2008 report. "And diplomacy, peacekeeping and international police work are the ones that are."

In the longer term, Hartung counsels a broader shift in thinking. "Instead of having 700-plus military bases, promising scores of countries that we're going to be shoulder-to-shoulder with them if they ever have a conflict, and being the world's largest arms merchant, I think there should be a scaling back of what defense means," he says. "The current approach is an aggressive posture, even if a lot of people in the United States don't think of it in those terms."

As U.S. economic difficulties worsen, the belief that the country can afford to maintain this posture may itself prove to be the most profound threat to our national security. ■

MARK ENGLER, a writer based in New York City, is a senior analyst with Foreign Policy In Focus and author of *How to Rule the World: The Coming Battle Over the Global Economy* (Nation Books, 2008). He can be reached via the website www.DemocracyUprising.com. Research assistance for this article provided by Sean Nortz.

The Body Count On Main Street

The financial crisis takes a human toll

BY NICK TURSE

ON OCT. 4, IN Los Angeles, Karthik Rajaram, 45, shot his wife, mother-in-law and three sons before turning the gun on himself. In a suicide note, Rajaram wrote that he was broke, having incurred massive financial losses in the economic meltdown. “I understand he was unemployed, his dealings in the stock market had taken a disastrous turn for the worse,” said Los Angeles Deputy Police Chief Michel R. Moore in a public statement

In recent weeks, the media has begun to address the burgeoning body count, at least anecdotally. Suicide is, however, just one type of extreme act that has resulted from the financial crisis, and the attendant rise in foreclosures. Stories of resistance to eviction, arson, self-inflicted injury and murder have also bubbled up into the local news. Nationally, the media has paid scant attention to the pattern of these events.

It’s impossible to know what personal factors contribute to such extreme acts, but it is a fact that during periods of economic turmoil, the rates of stress, depression and suicide climb.

In May, Kathleen Hall, founder of the Stress Institute in Atlanta, told *USA Today*’s Stephanie Armour, “Suicides are very much tied to the economy.”

Rich Paul, a vice president at ValueOptions Inc., which handles mental health referrals, recently told the *Los Angeles Times* that in the last year, stress-related calls arising from foreclosures or financial hardship had increased by 200 percent in California. Similarly, Dr. Mason Turner, chief of psychiatry at Kaiser Permanente’s San Francisco Medical Center,

reported “a fourfold increase in psychiatric admissions at his hospital during August, with roughly 60 percent of patients saying financial stress contributed to their problems.”

What follows are some of the causalities’ stories:

- In February, when a sheriff’s deputy went to serve an eviction notice on a homeowner in Greeley, Colo., he found the man had slashed his wrists and was lying in a pool of blood. The *Denver Post*, however, reported that the sheriff’s office “wasn’t linking the suicide attempt to the eviction because the man had known for a week that he was to be kicked out.”
- In March, in Ocala, Fla., Roland Gore killed his dog and his wife, set fire

to his home—which was in foreclosure—and then killed himself.

- On June 3, agents of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) informed New Orleans resident Eric Minsheu, 49, that he would be evicted from his Katrina trailer. Threats by Minsheu eventually led to a SWAT team being called, after which Minsheu opened fire with a pistol. When he refused to drop his weapon, officers gunned him down.
- In July, Sacramento County Sheriff’s Deputy Mark Habecker told the *Sacramento Bee* that twice this year, “homeowners about to be evicted have committed suicide as he approached to do a lockout.” In another case, Habecker said one of his fellow deputies discov-



ered a note in an evictee's home that told him where to find the homeowner's body. The *Bee* reported that such cases "received no publicity when they happened," which raises the question of just how many similar suicides have gone unreported nationwide.

- On July 23, about 90 minutes before her foreclosed Taunton, Mass., home was scheduled to be auctioned off, Carlene Balderrama, 52, faxed a letter to her mortgage company, letting them know that "by the time they foreclosed on the house today, she'd be dead." She continued, "I hope you're more compassionate with my husband and son than you were with me." In her suicide note, she instructed, "Take the [life] insurance money and pay for the house."
- Bay City, Mich., residents David and Sharron Hetzel, both 56, lost their home to foreclosure. On Aug. 1, David mailed a letter of apology to his family members. That night, according to police reports, he attacked his sleeping wife with a golf club and a kitchen knife. He then set fire throughout the house before crawling into bed beside his wife and killing himself.
- Roseville, Minn., resident Sylvia Siefertman, 60, was beset by financial difficulties. She worried about how she would care for her two 11-year-old daughters. On Aug. 21, according to police reports, Siefertman repeatedly stabbed the girls and herself. "She reached her limit," her friend Carrie Micko told the *Star Tribune*. "She couldn't cope anymore. ... She felt that her daughters were suffering because she was failing to provide for them."
- Two days earlier, in northern California, Cliff Kendall, 55, Petaluma's chief building official, shot himself with a rifle. A week earlier, Kendall had learned that he was being laid off. "He was afraid we'd lose our home, and we probably will because I can't afford to keep it," his wife Patricia, who is on disability with a back injury, told the *Press Democrat*.
- On Oct. 3, with sheriff's deputies at her door, Addie Polk, 90, tried to kill herself to avoid eviction from her Ak-

ron, Ohio, home. Her neighbor Robert Dillon, hearing loud noises from her home, used a ladder to enter the second floor window and found Polk lying on her bed. As he told CNN, "Then she kind of moved toward me a little and I saw that blood, and I said, 'Oh, no. Miss Polk musta done shot herself.'" As she recovered in the

"We've been destroyed by the bank," Ana Esquivel sobbed: "The bank is too big for us." Though the Esquivel blockade failed, Steven Meacham, a City Life organizer, told the *Globe* that "the protests have helped to stop about nine evictions. In the successful blockades, the homeowners were given additional time by their mortgage holders to negotiate alternatives to foreclosure."

Wall Street's financial meltdown is beginning to be measured not only in dollars and cents, but also in blood. Without debt- or mortgage-forgiveness, more casualties are sure to come.

hospital from two self-inflicted gunshot wounds, Fannie Mae forgave her debt.

- On Oct. 6, in Sevier County, Tenn., sheriff's deputies arrived to evict Jimmy and Pamela Ross from their home. They heard a shot and entered the home to find 57-year-old Pamela dead of a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the chest. Neighbor Ruth Blakey told WVLT-TV, "I know she really hated to leave that house."
- Wanda Dunn told neighbors she would rather die than leave her home. On Oct. 13, the day she was to be evicted, the 53-year-old Pasadena, Calif., native apparently set fire her home before shooting herself in the head. "We knew it was going to happen," neighbor Steve Brooks told the *Los Angeles Times*.

Defend and resist

In Boston, members of City Life, a nonprofit that seeks to halt foreclosures, are putting their bodies on the line to stop evictions. On Sept. 25, as politicians in Washington, D.C., tried to hash out a bailout for financial institutions, six Boston police officers confronted 40 City Life activists in front of the home of Ana Esquivel, a public school employee, and her husband Raul, a construction worker, both in their 50s. The *Boston Globe* reported that four protesters were arrested as police shoved their way through in order to allow a locksmith into the house to bar the Esquivels from their home.

Outsourcing suicide

In September, readers of Slate's "Explainer" column asked the following question: "How come we aren't hearing about executives jumping out of windows?" Writer Nina Shen Rastogi answered:

Because the current situation hasn't had nearly as devastating an effect on people's personal finances. The Great Crash of 1929—and, to a lesser extent, the crash of 1987—did lead some people to commit suicide. But in nearly all of those cases, the deceased had suffered a major loss when the market collapsed. Now, due in large part to those earlier experiences, investors tend to keep their portfolios far more diversified, so as to avoid having their entire fortunes wiped out when stocks take a downturn.

So far, at least, Wall Street's suicides seem to have been outsourced to places that its executives have probably never heard of. There, on the main streets of America, Wall Street's financial meltdown is beginning to be measured not only in dollars and cents, but in blood.

With no end in sight for either the foreclosures or the economic turmoil, Americans will have to brace themselves for many more casualties on the home front. Unless measures, like mortgage- and debt-forgiveness, are implemented, the final body count may reach levels no one wants to contemplate. ■

A longer version of this article is available at TomDispatch.com.



Supporters of Bolivian President Evo Morales demonstrate at Murillo square in front of the presidential palace in La Paz on Oct. 20.

AIZAR RAJDES/ATF/GETTY IMAGES

Morales Remakes Bolivia

A new constitution grants indigenous people unprecedented rights

BY ALEX VAN SCHAICK

LA PAZ, BOLIVIA—ON OCT. 21, Bolivian President Evo Morales approved a law convoking a national vote on a new constitution in front of thousands of supporters in the capital La Paz. Seconds later, Morales seemed close to tears as he addressed the crowd and celebrated the passage of the document designed to empower Bolivia's indigenous majority.

The proposed constitution, which analysts expect to be ratified by a wide margin on Jan. 25, 2009, will be one of Morales' most important achievements since he became president in 2005. After 10 months of political wrangling—that culminated in 18 hours of nonstop congressional negotiations—the four major parties in Bolivia's Congress finally agreed on the proposed constitution that morning.

Vice President Alvaro García Linera,

who was present as Morales signed the bill into law in the Plaza Murillo in front of Bolivia's Congress, emphasized the historical nature of Bolivia's new magna carta.

"This constitution, for the first time in Bolivia's history, was constructed from below, from the unions, the trade guilds, the rural communities and the universities," Linera told the crowd.

Eugenio Rojas, mayor of Achacachi, an ethnically Aymara Indian highland town located two hours outside of La Paz on the banks of Lake Titicaca, believes that the draft charter will end centuries of oppression against Bolivia's indigenous peoples. Clad in a red poncho and *chicote* whip—symbolizing his status as a community authority—Rojas explains that "for us, the indigenous, the new constitution signifies a re-foundation of the country and a major landmark in the history of Bolivia."

A march, then a celebration

A week before the bill's passage, the National Coordinator for the Change, an umbrella organization of pro-government popular organizations, began five different marches around Bolivia, all heading toward La Paz. The aim: to pressure Congress to put the new constitution to a vote.

Before dawn on Oct. 20, the marches converged in El Alto—the large, Aymara satellite city on the rim of the La Paz valley, 13,000 feet above sea level. As members of Bolivia's Congress worked that morning to reach an accord, Morales personally led tens of thousands of indigenous people, small farmers and workers from El Alto down into the main avenue of La Paz. Local residents and other on-lookers cheered as traditionally dressed indigenous groups entered the city.

By midday, Morales had led the group through police cordons into the Plaza

Murillo. They occupied the plaza for 24 hours until Linera emerged from Congress to hand-deliver to Morales the law summoning the constitutional referendum.

The crowd erupted in jubilation. Miners waved their helmets and many participants broke into tears.

In the last decade, Bolivia's social and populist movements have won significant power over their government. The road to the recent constitutional referendum is but one example.

In the early 2000s, Bolivia underwent a period of upheaval known in local political discourse as "the process of change." Many social movements emerged to help roll back 20 years of neoliberal policies that privatized public resources and instituted other pro-market principles that most Bolivians found disastrous.

This popular resistance forced two presidents to resign, discredited Bolivia's traditional political parties, and created the conditions for Morales—with his Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) party—to become the country's first indigenous president.

But the changes faced opposition from civic organizations and departmental prefects (governors) from Bolivia's whiter and wealthier lowland departments of Beni, Pando and Santa Cruz. They support departmental autonomy, which demands that many of the central government's powers be turned over to departmental governments. And while departmental autonomy would help end the country's overly centralized bureaucracy and lead to regional development in the lowlands, it would also allow elites to effectively opt-out of Morales' plans to redistribute land and wealth.

The indigenous constitution

MAS Congressman Jorge Silva explains that, the new constitution represents "a conquest for Bolivia's indigenous people who, since colonial times, have felt enslaved, marginalized, excluded and have been the object of a virulent racism that has only multiplied in recent years."

The new constitution strongly reflects the pro-indigenous current in the Morales government. For example, it labels the Bolivian state "pluri-national"—out

of respect for Bolivia's pre-Columbian indigenous nations and the Afro-Bolivian population—and it recognizes each of the country's 36 indigenous languages as "official languages" of the state. After ratification, national and departmental governments will be required to use at least one indigenous language alongside Spanish to ensure that all people will be able

ing to traditional communal practices.

Anthropologist Daniel Goldstein, director of the Center for Latin American Studies at Rutgers University, explains that community justice—as practiced in Andean communities—stresses "reconciliation over punishment" and seeks to "re-educate the offender who violates the rules or norms of the community, so that

Bolivia's proposed constitution would give indigenous people the right to create their governing statutes, elect their authorities and manage their renewable resources.

to communicate accurately with the state during a trial or bureaucratic process.

The main success for Bolivia's native peoples is *indigenous* autonomy. For them, autonomy means the right to self-determination and self-government in their ancestral territories. These principles are stipulated in the 2007 U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, to which Bolivia is the first signatory.

Article Four of the declaration states, "Indigenous peoples, in exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions."

The proposed constitution effectively cements this right in Bolivia's legal system. Specifically, it gives indigenous people the right to form their own autonomous indigenous areas, although such areas would still be subject to some state oversight. Within these autonomous zones, indigenous people will be able to draw up their governing statutes, elect their authorities according to their customary practices, define plans for their economic development, and manage their renewable resources, among other rights.

Another key gain is the inclusion of indigenous community justice into the judicial system, which Bolivians widely perceive as being incapable of guaranteeing justice to the majority of citizens, particularly those in rural areas. Bolivia's indigenous communities argue that they can administer justice themselves, accord-

he or she can be reincorporated as a community member."

The new constitution incorporates indigenous justice as a special jurisdiction that will apply only within indigenous communities, not outsiders, and it must not contradict the rights established in the constitution.

How the deal got done

The impending arrival of the marchers in La Paz increased tensions in Congress. MAS negotiators finally broke through with moderates in the main opposition party, Social and Democratic Power, or PODEMOS.

In order to get PODEMOS on board, MAS made several key concessions. One was to allow Morales to seek only one more five-year term, instead of the two terms the original proposed constitution would have permitted. In a gesture to placate the lowlands' departmental autonomy movement, MAS also agreed to hand over more power to departmental governments.

The initial draft also made substantial changes to the legislative branch, such as eliminating the Senate in favor of a unicameral system, changes that would have favored MAS in the upcoming elections. Opposition lawmakers rolled back most of those proposals, keeping the overall structure of the legislature intact.

Despite the modifications, the fact that MAS reached a consensus with a majority of the congressional opposition—without gutting the constitution—represents a major victory for the party.



An indigenous Quechua plays the *pututo*, a wind instrument used to call for rebellion, during the Oct. 20 march into La Paz.

AIZAR RALEDES/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Constitutional conflict

For most of the year, the possibility of a deal on the constitution seemed bleak. Jorge Quiroga, the head of PODEMOS, stated repeatedly that his party's first priority was to stop the new constitution from going to vote. By early October, negotiations between MAS and the opposition had broken down on seven occasions.

But two events dramatically changed the scenario. On Aug. 10, Morales won an approval rating of 67 percent in a recall referendum called for by both MAS and PODEMOS, a substantial increase over the 53 percent he received in the 2005 elections. The victory reaffirmed his mandate and revealed the regional isolation of the opposition's political support.

The second event was the departmental autonomy movement waging violent protests against the government.

On Aug. 28, Morales issued an executive decree mandating a referendum on the draft constitution, bypassing congressional approval, and giving his opposition grounds to cry foul. In the lowlands, the opposition called for civil disobedience to protest the move.

Bolivia's National Electoral Court struck down Morales' decree, reaffirming that only Congress has the power to convoke a referendum. Morales agreed to respect the decision, but events soon spiraled out of control. In the lowlands, more radical

opposition members used the incident to launch a wave of violence to destabilize the national government.

During the first two weeks of September, right-wing political and civic leaders of the departmental autonomy movement turned up their rhetoric. According to Bolivia's state news agency and other press reports, Jorge Melgar Quete, a TV-show host and civic leader in the lowland city of Riberalta, told viewers, "We have to liquidate President Morales." He also called highland indigenous people a "damned race, poorer than rats because of their laziness" and gave any highland migrants "24 hours to leave Riberalta."

Next, youth groups affiliated with the departmental autonomy movement looted dozens of public facilities, including several airports and the national telecom company's building in Santa Cruz. They destroyed the offices of several indigenous organizations and pro-indigenous NGOs.

The national government took no police action until mid-September, when an armed group of departmental autonomy supporters—allegedly acting under orders from Leopoldo Fernandez, then-prefect of the lowland department of Pando—opened fire on MAS supporters traveling with their families to a union rally. Sixteen indigenous farmers and two autonomy supporters were killed.

Following the incident, the Morales gov-

ernment declared a state of siege in Pando, arrested Fernandez on murder and terrorism charges, and appointed an admiral to serve as Pando's interim prefect.

The right wing's use of violence caused a political reversal of fortune for the constitution. According to PODEMOS Sen. Carlos Böhr, the lowland attacks and the specter of civil war were the determining factors in the negotiations' success.

"The violence and threat to national unity not only strengthened the group of [those interested in dialogue], but also gave pause to radicals on both sides, creating the subjective and objective conditions that made an agreement possible," Böhr says.

Political hegemony at last?

Given the weakness of the Bolivian state and its lack of a functioning judicial system, many of the rights enshrined in the constitution may take years to enforce. Political leaders have said that the new legal and administrative system will take between five to 10 years to implement fully.

However, in terms of power, both MAS and PODEMOS members agree that the pact indicates MAS' strength.

"The political scenario is marked by MAS' almost hegemonic position and dispersed opposition," says PODEMOS' Böhr. "PODEMOS, which was the strongest party in the opposition, is debilitated—we are debilitated. We ourselves doubt the future of PODEMOS."

Indeed, MAS' power might increase over the years, given the party's support among key popular sectors and its successful campaign apparatus. If the constitution is approved, it will be followed by presidential and congressional elections in December 2009 and local elections in April 2010. MAS could take a sizable majority in Congress and claim power in several municipalities currently controlled by the opposition.

Most important, according to MAS' Silva, the opposition lacks a coherent, positive vision for the country to mobilize support. Instead, he says, it has offered only criticism of the government's agenda.

Asked what the opposition can do to contest MAS' growing political dominance, Silva simply responds, "Nothing," and breaks into a broad smile. ■

El Salvador's New Left

Once a guerrilla movement, the FMLN has swapped revolutionary rhetoric for pragmatic politics

BY JACOB WHEELER



JACOB WHEELER

FMLN party faithful celebrate the late Jorge Schafik Handal's 78th birthday in Parque Cuscatlán on Oct. 12.

SAN SALVADOR—RED BANNERS, OLIVE fatigues and Soviet-style marching music filled Parque Cuscatlán on Oct. 12, as hundreds of loyal members of El Salvador's Faribundo Martí National Liberation (FMLN) party celebrated in the nation's capital.

They were there on what would have been the 78th birthday of Jorge Schafik Handal, one of their movement's founding fathers and the 2004 FMLN presidential candidate, who died two years ago.

Speakers drew applause upon mentioning the names of Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, Bolivian President Evo Morales and late Cuban revolutionary Che Guevara. Teenage children of former rebels performed a play about the dangers of forgetting the massacres that the Salvadoran military perpetrated during the country's bloody, 12-year civil war, which ended in 1992. A speech by Schafik Handal's wife, Tanya, brought tears of nostalgia to many in the crowd. She concluded by placing a red rose at the base of the park's Memory and Truth wall, which is inscribed with the names of roughly 35,000 civilians killed during the war.

Perhaps the showstopper was Alberto Lima, 14, who took the stage and, in a squeaky adolescent voice, threatened the demise of capitalists everywhere. He later picked a stick off the ground and cradled it like a machine gun.

Based on these scenes, one could be forgiven for thinking that Latin America's Cold War-era conflicts were about to rage again. But a curious change is blowing through the FMLN party, dusting off the old guard or, perhaps, sweeping them into the dustbin of history.

A pragmatic approach

El Salvador will hold parliamentary elections in January and presidential elections in March, and *el frente* (or "the front")—as the FMLN party is commonly called here—is poised to win the presidency for the first time since five rebel groups founded the party in 1980.

FMLN presidential candidate, Mauricio Funes, 49, only recently joined the party. He is well known in El Salvador as a political journalist and television host. Funes' long-running morning show was one of the few national programs that consistently criticized the right-wing

government of the Nationalist Republican Alliance party (ARENA), which has held power in El Salvador since 1988.

Key military players formed ARENA during the civil war, led by Maj. Roberto D'Aubuisson, a death-squad leader accused of masterminding the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero in 1980.

As of mid-October, Rodrigo Avila, ARENA's presidential candidate and the director of the National Civilian Police, trailed Funes by 15 percentage points, according to a national poll by the San Salvador-based University of Central America.

Unlike the FMLN's old guard and Schafik Handal, who lost the 2004 election in a landslide to current president, Antonio Saca, Funes doesn't preach the rhetoric of communist revolution.

At official events in the capital, Funes wears a suit and tie. On the campaign trail, he typically sports a white *guayabera* shirt—instead of clothing with the red banner and white star that adorns the FMLN flag, as previous party candidates have done.

Funes' rhetoric and policies are far more social democratic than socialist. He often emphasizes his friendships with left-of-center heads of state, such as Brazil's Luiz



JACOB WHEELER

Throughout El Salvador, campaign posters and propaganda still liken the FMLN to Latin American revolutionaries.

Inácio Lula de Silva, Argentina's Cristina Kirchner and Spain's José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. He has made several trips to the United States to meet with Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemispheric Affairs Thomas Shannon, Rep. James McGovern (D-Mass.), and others.

Most importantly for his image as a pragmatist, Funes never fought in the civil war.

Neoliberal catastrophe

If *el frente* wins the presidency in March, it will inherit a desperate country.

In the 20 years of ARENA rule, El Salvador has suffered from neoliberal economic reforms that privatized social services and destroyed jobs, primarily in the agriculture sector. Paul D. Almeida, a professor of business at Georgetown Uni-

versity, writes in his 2006 book, *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925-2005*, that the post-war generation of Salvadoran dissidents has fought not for land or to overthrow the government, but to oppose the privatization of key human needs like healthcare, education and water access. In return for the hundreds of millions of dollars the United States sent to the Salvadoran government during the war, Washington insisted on planting the seeds to liberalize the post-war economy.

The repression has continued. In July 2007, the Salvadoran police arrested 14 rural activists in the town of Suchitoto, who were protesting water privatization. They were tried under the government's "Special Law Against Acts of Terrorism," which was modeled after the U.S. Patriot Act.

Julia Evelyn Martinez, a progressive economist at the University of Central America, says that the privatization of social services, El Salvador's adoption of the U.S. dollar in 2001, and free-trade agreements—such as the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA)—have placed the country at the mercy of foreign corporations and made it too dependent on imports.

Remittances from Salvadorans living in the United States—which represent an astounding 20 percent of the country's gross domestic product—are keeping the economy afloat, and as many as one-third of all Salvadorans live abroad.

Meanwhile, food and fuel prices have skyrocketed in El Salvador. A can of beans that cost 30 cents a couple years ago now sells for over \$1. Gasoline prices topped \$5 a gallon in mid-October. Those staple products cost more in El Salvador than they do in parts of the United States. An estimated 100,000 Salvadorans—approximately one out of every 60—fell below the poverty line between September 2007 and June 2008, according to the World Food Program.

Martinez says the first thing the new government must do is to tear down all the neoliberal policies that were implemented in El Salvador since 1989. She suggests the new president and parliament put their focus on developing markets within the country: "That would stimulate businesses to produce for internal markets, and not just for certain groups of the population," Martinez says. "Instead, all the opportunities for development are directed outside of the country, in the form of remittances, *maquiladoras* [that export cheap clothing] or the need for foreign investments."

The U.N. Development Program report-

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ed recently that 62.4 percent of Salvadoran youth are underemployed—lacking work sufficient to sustain a dignified life—compared to half of the general population.

The lack of sustainable markets within El Salvador leaves many youth with two options: Scrounge up \$9,000—reportedly the going rate for a coyote to traffic a person into the United States—or join a gang.

Modern capitalism or road to socialism?

The incumbent ARENA party has filled the airwaves, the daily newspapers and the sympathetic ears within the Bush administration with rhetoric that an FMLN presidential victory would be akin to a communist takeover of El Salvador—or worse.

On Sept. 18, at the American Enterprise Institute—a conservative think tank in D.C.—Salvadoran Minister of Foreign Affairs Marisol Argueta appealed to the U.S. government to not let “dangerous populists” win the upcoming election.

El Salvador’s two nationally distributed newspapers, *El Diario de Hoy* and *La Prensa Grafica*, have run almost daily reports trying to link the FMLN to Chávez’s Venezuelan oil money, the Colombian FARC rebels’ arms- and drug-running activities, Cuban dictator Fidel Castro’s worldview, or Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega’s suppression of democracy.

ARENA’s Saca has all but called Funes a puppet of the FMLN, telling CNN’s Spanish-language network in February, “If it flies like a duck, swims like a duck and eats like a duck, it’s a duck ... The FMLN is a communist party. Its ideas haven’t changed.”

A foreign nongovernmental organiza-

A frightened, elderly peasant woman recently asked a foreign nongovernmental organization worker if it was true that if the FMLN won, the elderly would be ‘turned into soap.’

tion worker told *In These Times* that a frightened, elderly peasant woman had recently asked her if it was true that if *el frente* won, the elderly would be “turned into soap.”

But is today’s FMLN truly a Cold War-era throwback? Would it overturn capitalism, kick out foreign corporations, cancel free-trade deals and expropriate land?

Hardly, says economist Martinez.

“If you read their government plan, you’ll see that it’s a plan to modernize capitalism in El Salvador,” she says. “It’s an economic plan with better opportunities to distribute wealth and social services among the population, and [it] insists on combating poverty and guaranteeing food security for sectors that have traditionally been ex-

cluded from the political process. ... What we’re seeing is a return to pragmatism.”

The 96-page FMLN plan features a smiling young woman in a white dress on its cover. She is about to breastfeed her healthy baby. Behind her is the blue and white Salvadoran flag. The red text on the cover, above the party logo, reads: “*Nace*

la Esperanza, Viene el Cambio” (“The Hope is Born, the Change Arrives”).

In it, *el frente* proposes to stimulate the economy on local levels, such as by offering micro-loans and credit and investments for small- and medium-sized businesses, though it stops short of explaining which corporations or members of the land-owning elite will pay more taxes to foot the bill.

Included in the manual are a two-page letter from Funes and a one-page letter from vice presidential candidate Salvador Sánchez Cerén, a member of the party’s old guard. Herein lies doubt as to whether the party has modernized, after all.

Cerén, 65, was known as Comandante Leonel González during the war, and took the party’s reins after Handal died. He was

Ex-combatant communities: the FMLN’s *voto duro*

One voting bloc that doesn’t want El Salvador’s FMLN party to become political pragmatists is the ex-combatant community that spent much of the war in exile.

This group—the party’s base—is known as the “*voto duro*” (or hard vote), and they received appropriated land from the government after the 1992 peace accords. For its members, a victory by the FMLN would help heal wounds inflicted by government repression, burned villages, and murdered family members. It would also mandate a path toward socialism.

The community of Ciudad Romero—in the Bajo Lempa region of Usulután province, where the Rio Lempa empties into the Pacific Ocean—was born from the

war’s ashes. It was named after El Salvador’s martyred Archbishop Oscar Romero, who was murdered by a military assassin on March 24, 1980, for condemning the government’s repression of the peasantry.

“Romero denounced everything we wanted to denounce but couldn’t,” says José Nohé Reyes Granados, 30, who is writing a book about his community’s journey. “He was the voice for those without a voice. ... When they killed him, we realized that talking was futile. They killed the archbishop ... who could speak now? The only path was armed resistance.”

Two months later, the military attacked the village where Reyes and his family lived in La Unión—a province in eastern El



Salvador—because many in the community were suspected of being active in the guerrilla movement. Some 600 villagers fled across the Lempa River to neighboring Honduras—under the cover of night because an equally repressive Honduran military was guarding the border.

FMLN presidential candidate Mauricio Funes speaks to reporters in October.



a founding father of the Popular Liberation Front, one of five opposition groups that merged to form the FMLN in 1980.

To former FMLN member Julio Hernandez, Cerén is proof that the party is still living in the past.

“This is a rare combination in which you have Funes, a fresh, modern figure, but [the influence on the party of] Hugo Chávez is very visible, especially his money,” Hernandez says. “The FMLN [must] open up the party, but they’re not doing so.”

Hernandez served in the guerrilla and reached the party’s upper echelons in 1992. He says he felt confident that *el frente* was growing more moderate—even as some of the rebels’ heroes, such as Joaquin Villalobos, refused to participate in the post-war

FMLN. Hernandez resigned in 2005 after the old guard insisted on running Schafik Handal as its candidate—instead of a more pragmatic choice, like Funes. FMLN was subsequently trounced by ARENA.

Hernandez has since formed a new, left-of-center political party called the Revolutionary Democratic Front. He applauds FMLN’s decision to run Funes this time around, but he says the party is feeding the Salvadoran people a mixed message.

“The FMLN ... gives Funes the title of presidential candidate, but that’s it,” Hernandez says. “All of the [congressional] candidates are from the hard line, the *linea dura*. The candidate frequently says one thing, but the party base says another. These aren’t mistakes, but ways to

The Organization of American States learned of the refugees’ plight and gave them food and shelter for six months in Honduras, until the Panamanian government agreed to shelter them—under the condition that the Salvadorans would help clear roads through the thick jungle, from Panama City to the Atlantic Ocean.

But when Panama’s leftist President Omar Torrijos was assassinated a year later, the Salvadorans found themselves politically isolated. They built a village deep in the jungle that they named Ciudad Romero, or Romero City. There, community members built homes and a church, in which they painted a mural of their beloved archbishop. They were able to pick up a radio signal from the FMLN rebels,

which allowed them to follow events back home, as they lived in exile for a decade.

In November 1989, the FMLN launched a successful offensive in both San Salvador and in the countryside, proving to the military regime that it had the popular support to continue its resistance indefinitely. The offensive, coupled with the military’s massacre of six Jesuit priests at the University of Central America, forced the government to negotiate with the FMLN.

The refugees took down the church wall, piece-by-piece, and returned to El Salvador with the mural in tow. The government granted land in Bajo Lempa to the approximately 220 families that represented Ciudad Romero, and there they arrived in March 1991 to build another

show Funes who’s in charge.”

Change, *poco a poco*

The ubiquitous photos of Guevara, and of Schafik Handal palling around with the three *maestros* of Latin American socialism—Castro, Chávez and Morales—still adorn the lobby of the FMLN’s unpretentious headquarters in San Salvador. The ceiling fan clanks more than it whirs, and the coffee inside the dispenser has long since gone cold. The little money *el frente* does have for the campaign is certainly not spent on office amenities.

When Sigfrido Reyes enters the room dressed in a partly unbuttoned, checkered shirt, it isn’t immediately obvious that he is the party’s chief of communications and one of its most influential members.

Called Joaquin during the war, Reyes, 48, has since earned a master’s degree in economic policy at Columbia University in New York. He attended the Democratic National Convention in Denver in August and met with President-elect Obama’s foreign policy advisers to help forge a relationship between the FMLN and Democrats.

“All political movements, all social bodies, change,” Reyes says. “For us, change isn’t bad. It’s a natural state of adapting. We don’t believe that the FMLN is a party that represents just the left in this society, but that it’s obligated to represent other sectors. We don’t just represent the workers, but also the national businesses that take

community from scratch.

Approximately 1,000 people live today in Ciudad Romero, which operates under the umbrella of the Asociación Mangle, a nonprofit rural development organization that works with 70 communities to facilitate public projects, such as building homes or protecting the nearby endangered mangrove forests. The association also operates Radio Mangle, a radio station in nearby San Nicolas that broadcasts music, news and cultural programming.

Other communities in the Asociación Mangle share similarly dramatic war stories. The residents of San Hilario and Amanda López were originally from Morazán and La Union, provinces in eastern El Salvador where the guerrilla

the risk of investing in our country.” The FMLN, he says, is not “a monolithic body.”

CAFTA is an example of a topic that some FMLN officials have condemned outright on the campaign trail, yet Funes says he wouldn’t withdraw from the trade agreement as president.

Reyes concedes that, “El Salvador was told that CAFTA would create thousands of businesses, that it would create an inundation of foreign investment, a transfer of technology, and that the institutions of justice and labor would work better,” he says. “The reality is that hasn’t happened.”

Hato Hasbun, one of Funes’ closest personal advisers and his onetime sociology professor, refuses to suggest that the FMLN party would make any radical changes upon winning power.

“We need to respect the international agreements that have been signed,” Hasbun says, “but nothing is written in stone, and we’re not going to ideologize the discussion. We’ll make decisions based on the current reality. We want to be a responsible government, not a reactionary one.”

Unlike the late Schafik Handal and other hardliners within *el frente*, Funes enjoys some support within the Salvadoran business community. This support includes a wealthy fraternity of supporters with no ties to the FMLN, many of whom call themselves “*amigos de Mauricio*.”

“One interesting thing about Funes is that there are clearly business sectors that

are willing to live with him,” says Geoff Thale of the Washington Office on Latin America, a coalition that promotes human rights, democracy, and social and economic justice in the region. “Though they may not be enthusiastic, they’re unhappy with the last 20 years of ARENA rule.”

Thale says he didn’t realize how much

nounce their effort to build a socialist society, they would lose a big chunk of what they consider their solidarity vote, their *voto duro*.”

On a Sunday morning in mid-October, the *voto duro* was not hard to find. They often travel in a sea of red, singing songs and reciting poems about their fallen co-

‘El frente is a social democratic party now, but claims it’s developing toward a socialist revolution in order to please the base. Otherwise it would lose the solidarity vote, the *voto duro*.’

things had changed since the war until he recently ran into a former guerrilla commander, whom he knew, at a hotel in San Salvador. When asked what he was up to, the former commander replied that he was off to a business meeting at the chamber of commerce.

Appealing to the base

Where critics see mixed messages between Funes and the party’s hardliners, Martínez sees merely a difference in political approach.

“*El frente* is a social democratic party now, but a party that claims it’s developing toward a socialist revolution. They’re doing that for their base ... people in rural areas who were combatants or families of ex-combatants. If *el frente* were to re-

mandantes. Back in Parque Cuscatlán, a familiar song carried through the warm Central American air. At the opposite end of the park, a well-dressed crowd was seated under a white tent, listening to loudspeakers that crooned Frank Sinatra’s voice, and his ode to the city of world capitalism, “New York, New York.”

El Salvador remains a country living in the past and present—divided by ideological lines, between left and right, and with many of the same faces from the civil war, shouting toward anyone who will listen.

Whether Mauricio Funes will bridge that divide—or disappear into it—remains an open question. ■

This reporting was made possible by a grant from Communitas.

was based, because of their remoteness and access to the Honduran and Nicaraguan borders. Most joined the rebels or were active in the resistance. Like Ciudad Romero, many had to leave the country when the military arrived in their villages.

San Hilario resident Arnoldo Ortíz, who joined the guerrilla at age 14 in 1980, never thought he’d survive the war—and see the other side. “The transition from armed conflict to peace has been difficult because I grew up with the war,” he says. “We arrived from a process where we didn’t know much about civilian life. We had no idea about houses, land or economics.

“What we learned during the war was to live together like brothers. As combatants, we shared everything to survive ... wheth-

er it was a tortilla, a cookie or a cigar.”

Mariela Luciña Hernandez, 45, of Amancio López—a community named after one of the Jesuit priests the military murdered in 1989—was a doctor with the rebels. The military captured and tortured her in 1981, and she later escaped to Nicaragua.

Today, Hernandez directs an association of community women and works with war veterans. She says the most important thing she and her *compañeros* learned during that time is how to organize and work together.

“We work to organize on a local level for the party, to advance the cause through the community, through Radio Mangle,” she says. “If we can plant corn, and harvest all the seeds we plant, the

FMLN can buy them and feed the people. The country has to change, bit by bit.”

In a striking turn of the political tide, Ciudad Romero’s neighbors in Nuevo Amanecer now join them in wearing the red shirts of the FMLN. The military granted land to ex-soldiers, who named their community Nuevo Amanecer (“a new dawn”), and they have remained faithful to the ARENA-government, until little by little, Reyes says, they realized that ARENA was doing little to help their community. For 20 years, they’ve struggled with limited water access and agricultural projects.

Enemies during the war, Ciudad Romero and Nuevo Amanecer are now allies, and they represent the base of the FMLN.

—Jacob Wheeler

BY JARRETT DAPIER AND JEREMY GANTZ

The Margin Walker

Ian MacKaye hasn't compromised a bit. Known for his '80s bands, Minor Threat, Embrace and Fugazi, the 46-year-old singer and guitarist gave voice to a generation of kids and punks who were raised amid Reagan-era consumerism. Dischord Records, the Washington, D.C.-based

independent label he co-founded in 1980, fostered a thriving local music community that still survives. To date, the label has released more than 150 albums and singles.

Whether with Minor Threat or Fugazi, MacKaye offers listeners a lyrical antidote to mainstream politics and greed. ("You are not what you own," he sang in Fugazi's 1990 anthem "Merchandise.")

Over the years, he has committed himself to performing in all-ages noncommercial venues and to making albums and concert tickets affordable. As a result, the D.C.-native has given a generation of musicians a model for living out a similar anti-corporate philosophy.

In recent years MacKaye has discovered that the mainstream was co-opting his bands' identity: In 2005 Nike appropriated a Minor Threat album cover image on a promotional poster. The shoe company later withdrew and apologized for its unauthorized use.

Since Fugazi's official hiatus in 2003, MacKaye has released two albums and toured with his partner, Amy Farina, in a group called The Evens. But with the birth of their first child earlier this year, the guitar-drum duo isn't sure when—or if—they will continue to tour.

In a year when many voters have repudiated the excesses of Reagan-era policies, *In These Times* called MacKaye at Dischord House in Arlington, Va., where he has worked for 27 years, (the rest of

the label's tiny staff works off-site). He discussed the nature of political change, the importance of community and what it means to be a punk rocker—and a dad.

Do you believe real political change can occur through the two major parties?

Since I can't imagine that the structure of this country's government is going to change in our lifetime, I'm just going to have to believe that change can come through that. If I didn't believe change was possible, then we wouldn't have much to talk about.

I have definitely seen this culture change in a way that is not good. But if it could change in one direction, it could certainly change in the other direction, too.

I believe that human beings are wise, and I believe that people at some point will say: 'Wait a minute. Stop.'

It just takes a certain kind of moment.

What has shocked you most in the last eight years?

In the last decade, there has been a central story regarding protests that has been almost totally ignored by the media. I am talking specifically about the behavior of the police who have been given the power by the government to rein in protesters with violence.

My experience in protests is that the police are always in the center of it. They are not the focus of the violence—they are the cause of it.

The fact that there are situations like

what happened to protesters at the RNC [Republican National Convention] in St. Paul, and that this country of 300 million people cannot step up and say, 'This is wrong. This is not what we signed on for. This is not what you're supposed to be doing to people,' that is shocking.

How do you choose whom to vote for?

In almost every election, I have had a basic approach: My vote goes to the most electable person who I think is least likely to take the country to war. That's the bottom line. Because war is the most direct impact that this country has on the rest of the world.

Do you have high hopes for Obama?

I'm hopeful. I think the basic tenor of the U.S. government has been so ugly, calculating and trivial, that [people] think, 'That's not a company I want to work for.' I think the shift of the tenor to humility, graciousness and inclusiveness could re-energize people, make them feel like the government is an environment in which they might actually want to participate. This is a shift in American consciousness.

Has it become more difficult for you to control your music and the politics it stands for?

No, in fact, it's given me an incredible opportunity to remind people of my politics and ideas. You can't control music, anyway. Once it's out there, it's out there. I can't tell you what my songs mean. You decide what they mean to you. I'm responsible for the transmission, but the reception is entirely up to you.

In terms of our image or our name, I try to be a good steward. I don't want people to appropriate my work to forward their own products.

I see music as something sacred. And I use that word very directly. 'Sacred,' not



Fugazi frontman Ian MacKaye at his office in Arlington, Va.

PHOTO COURTESY OF AMY FARINA

in a Christian sense or even a religious sense, but in that it is something that is above the fray.

Music is a form of communication that pre-dates language. Music plays with us and we play with music. It's a very personal, intimate exchange that evokes ideas and visualization. This is serious for me.

And at some point, music got perverted. It became entertainment. It became a way for businesspeople to get an audience in. It became the bait instead of the actual reward. I find that disturbing.

How are you affected by performance spaces containing advertising, and how has that change influenced musicians?

Right now, the conventional thinking has it that the only way to have a music career is to do it with advertisements. That is total bullshit. The way to have a music career is to make good music and then people will listen to that.

The people who sell things have an attitude that goes like this: 'Let's take the music and place it with our ad. That way, people will associate the deep relationship they have with music with our product.'

This is not where music was supposed to end up. It's a tragedy that musicians

have come to this sort of thinking.

What do you think about punk bands on major record labels?

I think of punk as a free space—it is *the* free space. It's a place in music where new ideas are presented. That's what it means. So, I can't acknowledge or accept that a punk band can be on a major label. To my mind, by definition, that's antithetical.

That doesn't mean the people in the bands aren't punks—they may very well be. But the decisions they've made have been made on a profit motive. Their band has turned into just a conventional job.

But who the fuck am I? I'm just some guy. And people in some of those bands are my friends. I don't hold it against them. I'm not angry with them. I just find it impossible to accept. If they're on a major label, they aren't a punk band.

Are you anxious about being a parent?

No, there was a period when I continually ran into other fathers, people I didn't know, and they would say things to me like: 'Welcome to the club, dude!' And I started to wonder, 'What kind of weird cult have I been assigned to here? Am I going to become these people?'

But then I realized: of course not. I'm a fucking punk rocker. These people are not punk rockers. We don't share the same views. I've always been on the outside, I've always been a margin walker.

I am, of course, disgusted by mass marketing to children. You can imagine my horror when I discovered that it's virtually impossible to buy a diaper—which is essentially a shit bag—without a goddamn corporate cartoon figure on it. It's deeply disturbing.

At some point the branding of childhood must affect a child's imagination.

Right. In my life, being read stories and reading was important to me, and so much of it was connected to what was happening in my brain, as opposed to what was happening *to* my brain.

It's the same with music. That's the environment that my son now lives—he lives in a house of music. We'll see what happens.

So your son is growing up in a community?

I'm very attracted to communal living. I don't mean necessarily living in a commune, but rather, I believe in the value of proximity to other people and having an open-door policy. The open-door policy being, an unlocked door may result in the occasional devil, but a locked door insists on a thousand angels walking past.

I find that much more interesting, and much more constructive and healthy for children—and adults, for that matter.

Can you talk about a significant turning point in your career?

Right before Embrace [the short-lived band MacKaye formed in 1985], I thought about all the singing I was doing and the anger and protest of my work, and I thought, 'What is the actual thrust of this work? What is it that I am trying to achieve?' And I said, 'Well, I'm trying to achieve happiness for people in the world.'

But I was spending an enormous amount of time agonizing over how to do this. I was screaming and singing about all these different subjects in an attempt to bring happiness about, but I wasn't personally happy, and I wasn't making the people around me happy, either. I decided that I must actually learn to live happily, and to learn to live in peace. ■



Bill and Sookie visit Fangtasia, the vampire bar in HBO's frothy new series, 'True Blood.'

COURTESY OF HBO

BY LAINE BERGESON

Our Vampires, Ourselves

Welcome to Bon Temps, La., where all the women are innocent, all the men have secret obsessions and all the vampires—save for a few—try to recapture their lost humanity. A small, swampy, fictional town set deep in (ahem) “real America,” Bon

Temps is the central locale in HBO's frothy new vampire series, “True Blood.”

The series centers on Sookie Stackhouse (played by Anna Paquin), a wide-eyed waitress and reluctant telepath who hears other people's thoughts on a constant loop. Despite suffering the ritual abuse of growing up “different”—that is, a mind reader—in a small town, Sookie has managed to maintain her natural sweetness and charm. She's also learned to be emotionally resilient and incredibly open-minded.

These, it turns out, are handy qualities to possess when the undead move into town.

Thanks to the creation of a synthetic blood beverage, Tru Blood (available in flavors A, B, AB and O),

which meets all the nutritional needs of the undead and frees them from their dependence on human blood, vampires have “come out of the coffin” and have started mainstreaming into society.

Two years and the advent of a broad vampire-rights movement later, the first vampire, 173-year-old Bill Compton (played by Stephen Moyer), arrives in Bon Temps.

Most residents greet him with wariness and mistrust. Some are openly hostile. But not Sookie. She's more than tolerant—she's ecstatic to have company as the resident outcast. As far as she's concerned, Bill's arrival is something to celebrate. *Laissez les bon temps roulez!*

From this main premise—Exotic Other meets

Fellow Outsider and together navigate a repression-filled backwater—show creator Alan Ball has spun both detailed fantasy and thoughtful commentary on nearly every pressing issue in modern cultural discourse.

These issues include, but are not limited to, gay rights, civil rights, racism, sexism, tokenism, regionalism, mysticism, cultural exploitation, drug culture and AIDS issues—and whether or not alcoholism can be cured by drowning a demon-addled possum.

In lesser hands, a show this dense might crumble under the weight of its own dogma. But Ball, an Emmy-Award-winner for his groundbreaking series “Six Feet Under,” never forces issues down the viewer’s throat. He lets meta-messages surface, has a bit of fanged fun with them, and then kicks them back to the sidelines so he can focus on the show’s more serious concerns—fantasy, suspense and good old-fashioned vampire sex. (In one episode, a patron at the local watering hole where our protagonist is a waitress remarks, “I read in *Glamour* that everyone should have sex with a vampire at least once before they die!”)

Yet something about this airy snack of a show sticks to the bones and satisfies the viewer’s hunger for deeper meaning. The secret is perhaps in the blood—human, vampire and synthetic.

Never mind being free from feeding on humans, “True Blood” vampires still crave the real thing, because it’s better, more satisfying and more connected to the humanity they need in order to become mainstream.

Other vampires have gone rogue, rejecting humanity and celebrating their monster qualities. They kill humans not to gain access to more humanity, but to vanquish it.

Similarly, the show’s humans have discovered that, depending on dose and origin, vampire blood has manifold affects on the human body. Called “V” for short, vampire blood drunk in excess—and from the right vampire—can heal fatal wounds. Taken as a single drop, V

mimics the psychotropic affects of Ecstasy. Taken in a midsize amount, say a vial-full, V acts like a black-market Viagra, causing a day’s-long erection and other embarrassing medical emergencies.

Whichever way the blood is flow-

In lesser hands, a show as dense as ‘True Blood’ might crumble under the weight of its own dogma. But creator Alan Ball always leavens its serious issues with a bit of fanged fun.

ing, a great deal of dependence—some might even say co-dependence—exists between human and vampire. And the dependence isn’t just physiological. The way each group approaches the other—with mistrust, skepticism and no small degree of fetishism—belies a prurient and all-consuming fascination with who and what each group thinks it is—and is not. (“I’m human, and *not* like you!” “I’m the undead, and *nothing* like you).

So determined is each group to cast difference and doubt in the direction of The Other, that each fails to notice the time and energy devoted to the very group it scourges.

Jason Stackhouse (played by Ryan Kwanten), Sookie’s mortal, horndog brother, most personifies this dependence on The Other. When we meet Jason, we learn he has a rapidly burgeoning fetish for vampire sex. He doesn’t want to have sex with a vampire—not yet, anyway—but he has sex with fang-bangers—people who have sex with vampires (and, incidentally, my new favorite word).

Jason watches homemade vampire porn, and starts dressing as a vampire during sex. Before long, his friend and drug dealer, Lafayette, introduces him to V, and a whole new dependence is born. For Jason, V is highly addictive. So much so that he can no longer live without it.

His connection with vampires isn’t

healthy (which is the case with most long-repressed, socially frowned-on secret obsessions) but it is vital and, increasingly, necessary.

The larger point is not only the degree to which we depend on Otherness to shore up and shape our own lives, but

also the degree to which Otherness isn’t so “other” after all. For most of the characters in “True Blood,” the scariest part of coming face-to-face with a vampire is that it’s like looking in a mirror. I am vampire, and she is me.

Early on, Bill asks Sookie if she is afraid to be alone with a hungry vampire. She says no. He responds, “Vampires often turn on those who trust them, you know. We don’t have human values like you.”

To which Sookie replies, “A lot of humans turn on those who trust them, too.”

Later, after a brush with death, Sookie wonders aloud if she should be spending time with someone so different. Bill explains that humans and vampires are not so dissimilar: “How we work is magic, Sookie, and my magic just happens to be a little bit different than yours. But it is magic all the same.”

In a year when a person who personifies many Americans’ definition of Otherness has ascended to the highest office in the land, and in a political race where racial fears and sexism and ageism and many other “-isms” bubbled to the surface, the meta-message of “True Blood” seems more apropos than supernatural, more banal than farfetched.

Our call as viewers, it seems, is to welcome the vampire who returns our gaze, to embrace and celebrate the otherness we embody but often repress.

Well, that and have sex with at least one vampire before we die. ■

BOOKS

Inside the Shadow Factory

By Brian Beutler

MOST AMERICANS PROBABLY do not know what the NSA is. Among those who do, a great percentage likely have only a vague sense of what the National Security Agency actually does, with little knowledge of its domestic activities and history of law-breaking. Anyone who falls into either of these two categories should begin by reading journalist James Bamford's 1983 book, *The Puzzle Palace*.

But those paying closer attention to the agency will know that before the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, the NSA, with support from the Bush White House, had been fighting its own obsolescence. The agency was figuring out ways to access communications that travel via fiber-optic cables along the ocean floor—now a common infrastructure for communications systems. They will know that after Sept. 11, the NSA, along with major telecommunications companies like AT&T and Verizon, participated in a secret program to wiretap American citizens and mine domestic communication data for clues in the war on terror—in contravention of U.S. law.

They will know that once American journalists exposed this program, the Bush administration campaigned to legalize many of its crimes and—with the help of Congress—immunize from prosecution the very people who abetted those crimes.

And they might also know that only three months after the administration won that campaign, ABC News reported that NSA analysts had knowingly eavesdropped on the personal conversations of hundreds of American citizens and soldiers.

People who already know much of this can forgo *The Puzzle Palace* and move straight to Bamford's new book, *The Shadow Factory: The Ultra-Secret NSA from 9/11 to the Eavesdropping on America* (Doubleday, October).

It is against this backdrop that Bamford recounts how the NSA transformed itself from an agency beset by budgetary prob-

STOCKXCHNG



James Bamford's new book focuses on the National Security Agency post-9/11.

lems, a Cold War mindset and bureaucratic snafus, into an espionage behemoth—and how it quickly became too large to effectively police communications' networks, and too power-hungry to follow the law.

In January 2000, two Saudi men—Yemeni-born Khalid al-Mihdhar and his boyhood friend Nawaf al-Hazmi—flew from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, to Los Angeles to begin an operation that would culminate in the destruction of the World Trade Center and one of the five sides of the Pentagon. The duo had begun their journey from the Middle East only a few weeks prior, after they received orders from al Qaeda to travel east. The NSA intercepted that call.

In a functioning intelligence community, this information might have passed smoothly from the techno-spooks who first discovered it, to the State Department bureaucrats who could have prevented the men from entering the country. Or, perhaps, to the FBI anti-terror agents who might have intercepted them upon their arrival.

But territorial rivalries and antiquated protocols got in the way. The NSA sat on the information for months, and by the time anyone understood the significance of what had been recorded, it was too late.

At the time of the attacks, Air Force Gen. Michael Hayden headed the NSA. In Bamford's telling, Hayden had spent his two-and-a-half year tenure assiduously avoiding the sorts of legally questionable—or downright illegal—activities that had brought the agency to its knees in the aftermath of the Nixon era.

After the 2001 attacks, things changed. Armed with a ballooning budget, Hayden did an about-face, shifting the agency's focus to wired communications and inserting its tendrils all over the world, even, famously, where they didn't belong.

"Had this [warrantless wiretapping program] been in place prior to the attacks," Hayden told the Senate Intelligence Committee after the illegal operation had been revealed, "the two hijackers [al-Mihdhar and al-Hazmi] almost certainly would have been identified as who they were, what they were, and most importantly, where they were."

That was the post hoc justification. But it was a weak one. As Bamford writes, "If Hayden had simply done as his job allowed and traced the calls and e-mail back from the Yemen ops center and obtained a FISA warrant for the California phone numbers and e-mail address, he would have discovered who, what and where they were back in the spring of 2000."

The warrantless wiretapping program may have been the single biggest affront to the Constitution in the post-Sept. 11 era. But as Bamford notes in detail, it was in some senses less dangerous for what it was, and more dangerous for what it represented: a surveillance state run amok.

In the weeks and months after the attack, the intelligence community found itself in control of a huge amount of money, contracting with domestic and foreign companies to build and proliferate tools needed to spy on the world—creating, in effect, a

surveillance-industrial complex.

In such a milieu, it's hardly surprising that the government bugged the conversations of officials from countries that serve on the U.N. Security Council in the run up to the Iraq War—the idea being, in the words of an agency official, that the “gamut of information ... could give U.S. policymakers an edge in obtaining results favorable to U.S. goals or to head off surprises.”

It's similarly unsurprising that the NSA has disseminated its technology to some of the worst human rights violators in the world. As part of these arrangements, Bamford notes, “the U.S. [gets] full access to the data,” and gives the partner country serious tools of oppression.

As a Justice Department attorney told the House Judiciary Committee after the wiretapping program was revealed, “I think the president has made it clear that there is no other program that involves domestic electronic surveillance of domestic communications,” leaving open the possibility that foreign electronic

surveillance of both foreign and domestic communications is still ongoing.

The Shadow Factory isn't perfect. Bamford has a tendency to describe, in omniscient detail, events—a meeting at an al Qaeda safe house, or an afternoon meeting at the NSA—that he couldn't possibly have witnessed. And he at times seems credulous about Hayden's legal diligence before Sept. 11, suggesting a man transformed by the shock of the attacks into a soldier with an unfortunate but understandable willingness to flout the law.

While this interpretation is possible, it doesn't explain why, as Bamford writes, “Despite the law ... Hayden decided to ignore the court and secretly begin seeking the cooperation of the country's telecoms ... even before 9/11.”

Still, *The Shadow Factory* is a triumphant mix of research and reportage, and it deserves to be read widely. It is a wake-up call to anybody who thinks the threats posed by the surveillance state will disappear with George W. Bush. ■

FILM

Milk Does the Man Proud

By Gary Barlow

IN DEATH, AS in life, Harvey Milk defied expectations.

Milk, the first openly gay man to be elected to public office in a major U.S. city, was a member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. But because of fear, he didn't come out of the closet until he was in his 40s. His public life as a gay leader lasted only five years, when he and Mayor George Moscone were gunned down inside City Hall on Nov. 27, 1978.

Now, 30 years after his death, Milk's life is on the big screen. In the first time a major Hollywood film has portrayed a gay historic figure as the central hero, *Milk*, starring Sean Penn in the title role, hits theaters nationwide on Dec. 5.

Milk gained fame as an unusually

[art space]



They Hate Us For Our Freedom

Artist Claire Fontaine uses sculptures, videos and light-boxes to critique contemporary capitalism in her exhibit “They Hate Us For Our Freedom.”

Inspired by one of President Bush's post-9/11 speeches, Fontaine's collection questions the meaning of freedom in democratic societies.

Included in the show is a backpack covered in antifascist patches, studs, pins and key chains. Another element is a poster of Vice President Dick Cheney's two dogs, Jackson and Dave, in what curator Laura Fried describes as “a representation of absurdity and stupidity that underlies the tyrannical wielding of power by our political leaders.”

The exhibit runs from Dec. 9 to Dec. 21 at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis.

—Sara Suleiman

skillful politician, despite winning only one out of his four attempts at public office. He served less than a year as a San Francisco supervisor before being killed, yet he left a legacy that influences that city three decades later.

Milk grew up spending Saturdays at the opera, where he also found men who shared other interests with him. Ever the quick study, Milk learned how and where to cruise for sex, always keeping an eye out for cops. Burned in his mind, though, were images of police arresting men simply for being gay.

In *Milk*, director Gus Van Sant uses grainy, '50s black-and-white newsreels to depict police barging into gay bars and lining up patrons. Many of those arrested tried to hide their faces from the leering news cameras—to no avail. Their names and addresses ended up in the morning newspapers.

Such raids were common well into the '60s, just before Milk and his lover, Scott Smith, moved to San Francisco from New York. Screenwriter Dustin Lance Black's script picks up Milk's story from there.

As soon as Milk and Smith opened a camera store on Castro Street—which was morphing into San Francisco's gay business district—it became clear that business took a back seat to politics. Milk wasted no time getting involved, striking an alliance with Teamsters' drivers, who had been trying to organize a boycott against Coors to protest the beer company's anti-union policies. Milk won the Teamsters' undying support in his election campaigns by getting gay bars to stop serving Coors. The union also agreed to provide jobs for gay men on Teamsters' beer trucks.

Soon after the alliance, Milk became known as the "Mayor of Castro Street," a moniker he admitted he "may have come up with myself." Within months, he jumped into his first race for the city's board of supervisors. He lost that 1973 contest but won 17,000 votes, enough to demonstrate that the "gay vote" was real.

Two more unsuccessful campaigns followed—one in 1975, the other in 1976. Each time he lost to machine candidates but moved closer to victory. And when San Franciscans voted in 1977 to elect



Sean Penn (center) and Diego Luna (center right) star as real-life gay rights icon Harvey Milk and his lover Jack Lira, respectively in director Gus Van Sant's *Milk*.

supervisors by district, rather than at-large, Milk won in a landslide.

Also winning a supervisor's seat in that election was a young Irish Catholic cop named Dan White. Milk tried to make an ally out of White, but it was an effort largely sabotaged by White's erratic personality. Eleven months after Milk was sworn into office, White—who had resigned from the board, then tried unsuccessfully to persuade Moscone to reappoint him—snuck a gun into City Hall and coldly assassinated Milk and the mayor, the two people he blamed for not allowing him to reclaim his seat.

Milk's death was not just a tragedy for gays in San Francisco. In his rise to power, he also became a champion for the city's Chinese-Americans, union workers, the elderly and people being squeezed out of their neighborhoods by developers, speculators and downtown corporate interests. With much to say in a two-hour film, Black's script manages only to hint broadly at these aspects of Milk's career.

In the movie, Penn's dead-on portrayal brings to life Milk's ability to channel people's desires. Penn embodies Milk's charisma, drive, power and empathy. At the end of the film, when an image of the real Milk supersedes a similar photo of Penn as Milk, one can scarcely tell the difference.

The other performances are nearly as good. Josh Brolin as White, Emile

Hirsch as gay activist Cleve Jones and Diego Luna as Milk's doomed lover, Jack Lira, are particularly notable. There should be no shortage of Oscar nominations for this film, with Van Sant and Penn leading the list.

Many of the battles Milk fought remain un-won today. People still get fired for being gay in this country. People still get beaten up and killed for being gay. Parents still send their gay kids to quacks who try to scare them, condition them and coerce them into being straight. Gay couples can be married in only a few states.

And while Milk fought for gay rights at large, he also waged battles within the gay community. The film portrays how he railed against elitist gays who provided cover for liberal politicians with weak commitments to gay rights. Were he alive today, Milk likely would have shared in the outrage of many gay activists in 2007, when House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and other Democrats, with cover from elite gay backers, dumped protections for transgender people from the proposed federal Employment Non-Discrimination Act. The difference is that Milk would have made Pelosi pay at the ballot box.

At a time of deep national uncertainty for many who feel marginalized in America, *Milk* reminds us of the singular vision of a man who wanted to fix things for everyone who felt left out of society.

Milk cajoles and pushes gays to come out and fight for equal rights.

"It's not my election I want, it's yours," Milk once said. "It will mean that a green light is lit that says to all who feel lost and disenfranchised that you can now go forward. It means hope and we—no—you and you and you and, yes, you, you've got to give them hope."

He did, and the film not only reminds us of that hope, it also rekindles a bit of it for a new generation. There could be no better tribute to Harvey Milk than that. ■

BOOKS

Operation Infinite Imperialism

By Robert S. Eshelman

IN OCTOBER, AN avalanche of events crashed down on the Bush administration's unbelievable statements about stability in Afghanistan.

Stories emerged, documenting the connections of Afghan President Hamid Karzai's brother to the opium trade. Then, the U.S. military released a report stating that 30 civilians had been killed in an August airstrike—not the five to seven deaths it had previously claimed. The new figures were still well below 90 deaths the U.N. and Afghan government estimated. This was followed by a leaked version of a National Intelligence Estimate that stated Afghanistan was in a "downward spiral," and warned of increasing Taliban attacks from within Pakistan.

Even the administration's most tepid critics wondered how seven years after the invasion of Afghanistan, the situation there has deteriorated so drastically. For several months, military casualties in Afghanistan have outnumbered those in Iraq, while the Taliban has begun to focus its attacks within the territory of America's ally Pakistan.

Two recent books examine America's military and diplomatic forays into South and Central Asia over the past several decades. Together, these books—Pakistani journalist Ahmed Rashid's *Decent Into Chaos* (Viking, June) and British-

Pakistani journalist Tariq Ali's *The Duel* (Simon and Schuster, September)—survey the mangled wreckage of failed states, warlords and dictators, refugees, and nascent social justice movements crushed by brute force.

With Obama elected on promises of increased military deployments to Afghanistan and action against the Taliban within Pakistan, these books appear at a critical time.

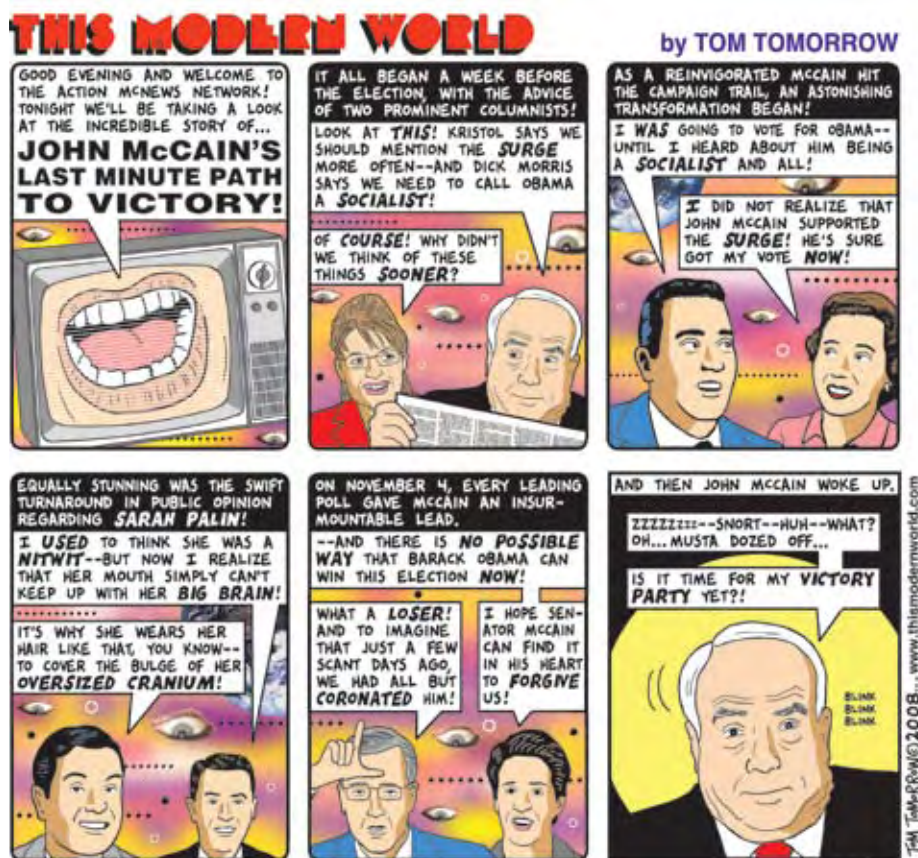
Couched in the most generous terms, Rashid and Ali depict America as an incompetent and ill-informed actor, woefully ignorant of the region's history and politics. Frequently, though, the authors show us a vicious nation that showers bombs upon Afghan villages or gives a nod and a wink to Pakistani repression of students, lawyers and the lower classes. And they describe the haunting world of America's historic support for Islamic extremists—the very ones who are supposedly at the heart of the war on terror, but are reaping the rewards from it.

Rashid's decades of reporting experience in the region are on display in

Descent. His gloss of the region is thick with intrigue and overflowing with detailed accounts of Afghanistan, Pakistan and the five independent states of Central Asia. No regional conflict is left untreated—be it Kashmir, Baluchistan or the Uighurs in China.

Rashid opens with a twined story of Karzai's return to Afghanistan and a history of that nation, then moves through an encyclopedic account of the push and shove between Pakistan and its neighbors—India and Afghanistan—the rise of the Taliban, and the U.S. role in the region. He moves methodically through the region's post-9/11 shocks and the many failed international attempts to prop up a nascent Afghan state and to snuff out the Taliban.

Rashid also traces the influence of Pakistan's military intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate, or ISI. What emerges is a fascinating story of this secretive agency's tremendous power over Pakistan's internal politics. A consistent subplot to American failure is the awesome ability of the ISI



to play all sides, extracting much and giving away little, all the while spawning new extremist cadres.

Rashid writes, “The U.S. failure to secure this region may well lead to global terrorism, nuclear proliferation and a drug epidemic on a scale that we have not yet experienced and I can only hope we never will.”

But Rashid’s sources—ranging from anonymous U.S. government officials to Karzai—also cloud his analysis, particularly of Afghanistan. Rashid views the failures there as technocratic ones. In other words, replace a few dim-witted bureaucrats and elevate Afghanistan’s priority within international diplomatic circles, and the nation could be pulled from the jaws of failure.

But is this really the case? It’s a mantra Rashid’s political elite sources repeat over and over. He seems never to consider the contradictory imperatives of a military dispatched to extend U.S. power abroad, on one hand, and the acute humanitarian needs of the Afghan people—or the democratic needs of those in Pakistan and other Central Asian states—on the other.

What Rashid interprets as an incoherency of international planning is actually a naked view of American power at work. It mobilizes support in Europe, Central Asia and Pakistan in order to further its own interests, not those of Afghans or Pakistanis pining for democracy.

Providing a needed corrective, in *The Duel*, Ali focuses on the conflicting interests of state power and democracy, which is what Rashid is most silent on. In Ali’s account, Pakistan stands in opposition to generations of Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Baluchis seeking democratic reforms and, sometimes, revolutionary change.

Ali’s account tempers the sensationalist American spin around Pakistani politics. He writes: “The West prefers to view Pakistan through a single optic. [The media gives] the impression that the main, if not the only, problem confronting Pakistan is the power of the bearded fanatics ... who ... are on the verge of taking over the county.”

Paranoid about nuclear-armed mul-

excerpt



Sch(Lahde)nfreude

Below is an excerpt from an Oct. 17 letter that Andrew Lahde, of Lahde Capital Management (LCM), wrote to his investors, announcing that he was closing down his hedge fund. LCM made bets against the subprime housing market, and when the market collapsed, Lahde and his investors made out like bandits.

Today I write not to gloat. Given the pain that nearly everyone is experiencing, that would be entirely inappropriate. Nor am I writing to make further predictions, as most of my forecasts in previous letters have unfolded or are in the process of unfolding. Instead, I am writing to say goodbye. ...

I was in [the hedge fund] game for the money. The low hanging fruit, i.e. idiots whose parents paid for prep school, Yale, and then the Harvard MBA, was there for the taking. These people who were (often) truly not worthy of the education they received (or supposedly received) rose to the top of companies such as AIG, Bear Stearns and Lehman Brothers and all levels of our government. All of this behavior supporting the Aristocracy only ended up making it easier for me to find people stupid enough to take the other side of my trades. God bless America.

There are far too many people for me to sincerely thank for my success. However, I do not want to sound like a Hollywood actor accepting an award. The money was reward enough. Furthermore, the endless list of those deserving thanks know who they are.

I will no longer manage money for other people or institutions. I have enough of my own wealth to manage.

Some people who think they have arrived at a reasonable estimate of my net worth might be surprised that I would call it quits with such a small war chest. That is fine; I am content with my rewards. ... Meanwhile, their lives suck. ... They will all be forgotten in 50 years, anyway. ...

I truly do not have a strong opinion about any market right now, other than to say that things will continue to get worse for some time, probably years. I am content sitting on the sidelines and waiting. After all, sitting and waiting is how we made money from the subprime debacle. ...

Capitalism worked for two hundred years, but times change, and systems become corrupt. ... [G]oodbye, and good luck.

All the best,
Andrew Lahde



lahs, the U.S. government heaps cash and arms upon the military regime. It’s a narrative that successive Pakistani leaders play to the hilt. But instead of using U.S. aid to fight jihadis in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, the Pakistani government deploys it against those seeking a democratic change or a voice in Pakistani affairs.

The Duel serves as an excellent corollary—albeit taking a much more critical view of political elites and international

relations—to Rashid’s *Descent*. But stark differences between the two exist—particularly on the efficacy of military intervention in achieving humanitarian ends. Yet together the books illuminate the histories of Central and South Asia and the perilous path that America has undertaken by hitching itself to Pakistan’s military leadership.

The question now is: How close will President Obama hew to this disastrous path? ■

BY TERRY J. ALLEN

Regulating Good Government



THE WORLD IS sighing with relief. The Bush era is dying, but the toxic legacy of America's worst president will linger like DDT unless the Obama administration acts quickly to

restore constitutional and regulatory protections its predecessor eviscerated.

From signing statements to spying on U.S. citizens, Bush implemented an under-the-radar pattern of abuses that also included a quiet conspiracy to pre-empt, or bar, the public's right to sue corporations for damages.

From March 2002 to September 2008, the Bush administration inserted pre-emption language or proposed rule changes more than 56 times, across seven federal agencies. The American Association for Justice argues that the agencies' usurpation of states' rights is unconstitutional, and that their failure to give public notice and allow comment was illegal.

The fate of Bush's pre-emption push now lies with the Supreme Court.

The day before Barack Obama's victory, the high court heard arguments in *Wyeth v. Levine*. A decision in that case—which is expected this spring—may cripple the century-old right of consumers, or their survivors, to sue corporations in state court over injury or death from dangerous products.

After her arm developed gangrene and had to be amputated because of a known complication from Wyeth's anti-nausea drug Phenergan, Diana Levine sued the drug company for compensatory damages. Vermont courts awarded Levine, a musician, \$6.8 million. Wyeth appealed all the

way to the Supreme Court.

Wyeth v. Levine is a test case for the Bush doctrine that federal approval of a drug (or any product) immunizes the manufacturer from legal responsibility.

The list of new pre-emptions is both broad and specific. The Bush administration gave the automotive industry such custom-made boons as language barring suits over the safety of air bags, safety belts, roof crush strength, motorcycle and car brakes and hoses, side impact protection, school bus passenger seating and crash protection, and child restraint systems. New language also pre-empts states from setting average fuel economy standards for light trucks.

Bureaucratic fiat now immunizes railroads against suits over crashworthiness of tank cars carrying hazardous materials, and the integrity of the rails.

Consumer products get a liability pass for some nicotine products; mattress flammability standards; dietary supplements; claims of "lean"; and raw fruits, vegetables and fish.

More pre-emptive language immunizes drug and cosmetics companies against damages caused by over-the-counter contraceptives, dandruff and skin bleaching products, nasal congestion medication, laxatives and sunscreen, as well as approved drugs, biologics and medical devices. It protects corporations from lawsuits over requirements for pregnancy and lactation labeling for drugs, suicide while taking SSRI antidepressants, including Zoloft, manufacturer's claim that Paxil is non-habit forming, and requirements for drug companies to warn the public of potential side-effects.

The list even adds lawsuit protection for chemical facilities and the anti-terrorism regulations they are

supposed to apply.

In a potent symbol of the failure of conservative Republicanism, ex-Federal Reserve Chair Alan Greenspan testified before Congress on Oct. 23 that: "I made a mistake in presuming that the self-interests of organizations ... were best capable of protecting their own shareholders and their equity in the firms," he said, omitting mention of protecting taxpayers and consumers. "I have found a flaw."

"In other words," said committee chair Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.), "you found that your view of the world, your ideology, was not right."

"Absolutely," Greenspan responded. "That's precisely the reason I was shocked, because I have been going for 40 years with considerable evidence that it was working exceptionally well."

Greenspan got even his mea culpa wrong. A far more significant flaw is his failure, and that of the Bush administration, to differentiate between policies that work "exceptionally well" for corporations and the market, and those that serve the public good.

Some hope comes from the agencies themselves, where lack of funding and support has left bureaucrats frustrated. Freedom of Information Act documents reveal that some Food and Drug Administration scientists and career employees strongly support consumers' right to sue, and that they stand firmly with Levine against Wyeth.

Whether the Bush administration's legacy of pro-corporate, anti-consumer pre-emptions will stand, lies not only on the Supreme Court. It also rests on the new Obama administration, which must make good on its promise to use government to protect the public. ■

CONTACT Terry J. Allen at tallen@igc.org

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Bill Ayers

Continued from back page

Sen. Hillary Clinton's (D-N.Y.) campaign provided the script, which included guilt by association, demonization of people Obama knew (or might have known), creepy questions about his background and dark hints about hidden secrets yet to be uncovered.

On March 13, Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), apparently in an attempt to reassure the "base," sat down for an interview with Sean Hannity of Fox News. McCain was not yet aware of the narrative Hannity had been spinning for months, and so Hannity filled him in: Ayers is an unrepentant "terrorist," he explained, "On 9/11, of all days, he had an article where he bragged about

bombing our Pentagon, bombing the Capitol and bombing New York City police headquarters. ... He said, 'I regret not doing more.'"

McCain couldn't believe it.

Neither could I.

On the campaign trail, McCain immediately got on message. I became a prop, a cartoon character created to be pummeled.

When Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin got hold of it, the attack went viral. At a now-famous Oct. 4 rally, she said Obama was "pallin' around with terrorists." (I pictured us sharing a milkshake with two straws.)

The crowd began chanting, "Kill him!" "Kill him!" It was downhill from there.

My voicemail filled up with hate messages. They were mostly from men, all venting and sweating and breathing

heavily. A few threats: "Watch out!" and "You deserve to be shot." And some e-mails, like this one I got from satan@hell.com: "I'm coming to get you and when I do, I'll water-board you."

The police lieutenant who came to copy down those threats deadpanned that he hoped the guy who was going to shoot me got there before the guy who was going to water-board me, since it would be most foul to be tortured and then shot. (We have been pals ever since he was first assigned to investigate threats made against me in 1987, after I was hired as an assistant professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago.)

The good news was that every time McCain or Palin mentioned my name, they lost a point or two in the polls. The cartoon invented to hurt Obama was

now poking holes in the rapidly sinking McCain-Palin ship.

That '60s show

On Aug. 28, Stephen Colbert, the faux right-wing commentator from Comedy Central who channels Bill O'Reilly on steroids, observed:

To this day, when our country holds a presidential election, we judge the candidates through the lens of the 1960s. ... We all know Obama is cozy with William Ayers a '60s radical who planted a bomb in the capital building and then later went on to even more heinous crimes by becoming a college professor. ... Let us keep fighting the culture wars of our grandparents. The '60s are a political gift that keeps on giving.

It was inevitable. McCain would bet the house on a dishonest and largely discredited vision of the '60s, which was the defining decade for him. He built his political career on being a prisoner of war in Vietnam.

The '60s—as myth and symbol—is much abused: the downfall of civilization in one account, a time of defeat and humiliation in a second, and a perfect moment of righteous opposition, peace, and love in a third.

The idea that the 2008 election may be the last time in American political life that the '60s plays any role whatsoever is a mixed blessing. On the one hand, let's get over the nostalgia and move on. On the other, the lessons we might have learned from the black freedom movement and from the resistance against the Vietnam War have never been learned. To achieve this would require that we face history fully and honestly, something this nation has never done.

The war in Vietnam was an illegal invasion and occupation, much of it conducted as a war of terror against the civilian population. The U.S. military killed millions of Vietnamese in air raids—like the one conducted by McCain—and entire areas of the country were designated free-fire zones, where American pilots indiscriminately dropped surplus ordinance—an immoral enterprise by any measure.

What is really important

McCain and Palin—or as our late friend Studs Terkel put it, “Joe McCarthy

in drag”—would like to bury the '60s. The '60s, after all, was a time of rejecting obedience and conformity in favor of initiative and courage. The '60s pushed us to a deeper appreciation of the humanity of every human being. And that is the threat it poses to the right wing, hence the attacks and all the guilt by association.

McCain and Palin demanded to “know

I became a prop in the McCain campaign. At an Oct. 4 rally, Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin said Obama was ‘pallin’ around with terrorists.’ (I pictured us sharing a milkshake with two straws.)

the full extent” of the Obama-Ayers “relationship” so that they can know if Obama, as Palin put it, “is telling the truth to the American people or not.”

This is just plain stupid.

Obama has continually been asked to defend something that ought to be at democracy's heart: the importance of talking to as many people as possible in this complicated and wildly diverse society, of listening with the possibility of learning something new, and of speaking with the possibility of persuading or influencing others.

The McCain-Palin attacks not only involved guilt by association, they also assumed that one must apply a political litmus test to begin a conversation.

On Oct. 4, Palin described her supporters as those who “see America as the greatest force for good in this world” and as a “beacon of light and hope for others who seek freedom and democracy.” But Obama, she said, “is not a man who sees America as you see it and how I see America.” In other words, there are “real” Americans—and then there are the rest of us.

In a robust and sophisticated democracy, political leaders—and all of us—ought to seek ways to talk with many people who hold dissenting, or even radical, ideas. Lacking that simple and yet essential capacity to question authority, we might still be burning witches and enslaving our fellow human beings today.

Maybe we could welcome our current situation—torn by another illegal war, as it was in the '60s—as an opportunity to search for the new.

Perhaps we might think of ourselves not as passive consumers of politics but as fully mobilized political actors. Perhaps we might think of our various efforts now, as we did then, as more than a single campaign, but rather as our movement-in-the-making.

We might find hope in the growth of opposition to war and occupation

worldwide. Or we might be inspired by the growing movements for reparations and prison abolition, or the rising immigrant rights movement and the stirrings of working people everywhere, or by gay and lesbian and transgender people courageously pressing for full recognition.

Yet hope—my hope, our hope—resides in a simple self-evident truth: the future is unknown, and it is also entirely unknowable.

History is always in the making. It's up to us. It is up to me and to you. Nothing is predetermined. That makes our moment on this earth both hopeful and all the more urgent—we must find ways to become real actors, to become authentic subjects in our own history.

We may not be able to will a movement into being, but neither can we sit idly for a movement to spring full-grown, as from the head of Zeus.

We have to agitate for democracy and egalitarianism, press harder for human rights, learn to build a new society through our self-transformations and our limited everyday struggles.

At the turn of the last century, Eugene Debs, the great Socialist Party leader from Terre Haute, Ind., told a group of workers in Chicago, “If I could lead you into the Promised Land, I would not do it, because someone else would come along and lead you out.”

In this time of new beginnings and rising expectations, it is even more urgent that we figure out how to become the people we have been waiting to be. ■

WHAT A LONG, STRANGE TRIP IT'S BEEN



BY BILL AYERS

WHEW! WHAT WAS ALL that mess? I'm still in a daze, sorting it all out, decompressing.

Pass the Vitamin C.

For the past few years, I have gone about my business, hanging out with my kids and, now, my grandchildren, taking care of our elders (they moved in as the kids moved out), going to work, teaching and writing. And every day, I participate in the never-ending effort to build a powerful and irresistible movement for peace and social justice.

In years past, I would now and then—often unpredictably—appear in the newspapers or on TV, sometimes with a reference to *Fugitive Days*, my 2001 memoir of the exhilarating and difficult years of resistance against the American war in Vietnam. It was a time when the world was in flames, revolution was in the air, and the serial assassinations of black lead-

ers disrupted our utopian dreams.

These media episodes of fleeting notoriety always led to some extravagant and fantastic assertions about what I did, what I might have said and what I probably believe now.

It was always a bit surreal. Then came this political season.

During the primary, the blogosphere was full of chatter about my relationship with President-elect Barack Obama. We had served together on the board of the Woods Foundation and knew one another as neighbors in Chicago's Hyde Park. In 1996, at a coffee gathering that my wife, Bernardine Dohrn, and I held for him, I made a donation to his campaign for the Illinois State Senate.

Obama's political rivals and enemies thought they saw an opportunity to deepen a dishonest perception that he is somehow un-American, alien, linked to radical ideas, a closet terrorist who sympathizes with extremism—and they pounced.

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