



Manifesto for a

LEFT TURN

An Open Letter to U.S. Radicals



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Manifesto for a Left Turn

It is time for a Left turn. The forty year decline of an organized and socially influential Left must be reversed. The ascendancy of the political and ideological right keeps generating disasters – from endless wars, deepening exploitation and economic meltdown to widening social inequalities and widespread personal pain. The Democratic Party, trade unions, remaining leftist sects, and recent social movements all seem unwilling or unable to take the actions, separately or together, needed to end those disasters. A new Left turn is now necessary to rechart a political course toward genuine social equality, democracy, prosperity, personal renewal, ecological sustainability, and peace. Building such a Left is our project.

The ever widening cracks in the edifice of Capital create new possibilities for transformation. This manifesto calls for a new radical project at a critical juncture in history. We call upon progressives to forgo mobilizing exclusively around specific agendas, and to perceive and refocus their struggles as part of a larger movement for social transformation. Illusions about the Democratic Party as a potential vehicle for significant social change need to be discarded. A Left turn must build on the history of the American left in the twentieth century, embracing the militancy of the sit-down strikes of the 1930s and the commitment to participatory democracy of the black freedom movement and the New Left in the 1960s. Yet that Left turn must also be rooted in the analysis of the specific conditions of the current epoch.

This manifesto aims to contribute to that Left turn by:

1. Facing the crisis of the Left in the US today

For all practical purposes there is no Left opposition in the United States. Most organizations that proclaim the goal of socialist revolution are little more than shriveled sects; at best they are activist collectives that confine their interventions to organizing reform union caucuses, factions of the timid and rather ineffective anti-war movement, or engage in a few worthy but severely limited community organizing activities. We need to rethink positions and practices from the standpoint of everyday life and face the generalized malaise and hopelessness that the vast majority of the populace is undergoing.

2. Learning from the history of the Left's decline

Politically, even as liberals and leftists cling to the possibilities for incremental change, the reform era which emerged at the turn of the 20th century and dominated political struggles and political discourse for three quarters of the 20th century has come to an end. Its demise has proven to be that of the left as well.

3. Creating principles for a new Left turn

In order to reconstitute and build a stronger and more effective Left, we must revisit the unfulfilled emancipatory project of the enlightenment and its commitment to the radical imagination. The anti-capitalist project must rethink the system of production at its base and analyze new mechanisms of exploitation in the workplace and in the culture at large. We must experiment with new ideas of collective ownership, which could create new

cultural and social spaces that facilitate the power to implement a genuine radical democracy. A parallel principle would be to rethink the relationship between Nature and production in a more innovative and creative fashion that organizes the economic and social surplus which does not contradict the ecological demands facing us. Alongside this demand, we must rethink personal relationships within the framework of class and innovative and creative psychic economies.

4. Addressing problems of organization

As vital as questions of principle are those of organization. We do not propose to organize a new political formation out of whole cloth. We are mindful of two dangers: premature declarations of “parties” before the conditions for their emergence have matured; and starting an organization before many of the historical and contemporary issues outlined in this statement are discussed among a fairly wide range of activists and intellectuals.

***This is a working document. We invite an engagement with the basic project .
Welcome!***

Introduction

As we enter the 21st century, the United States Left faces a paradox. Never in the past quarter century has the level of activism on a host of issues—Iraq, globalization, the environment, health care, immigrant rights, gay rights—been stronger. Yet never has the Left as an organized, coherent political force been weaker. The

Socialist and Communist Left, never strong in electoral terms, but once powerful forces in the labor and social movements, have been reduced to small enclaves. The once promising Green Party has suffered multiple defections and splits and has become, in the main, an electoral party that wins some local elections but is unable to mount a national presence, even on ecological issues. And, save Pacifica and community radio, even at the ideological level, left intellectuals, who were for decades featured on television and radio talk shows, are largely absent from the airwaves. Public Radio and Television have shunned all but a tiny coterie of left commentators and then only on the occasion of book publication or when the network cannot find a more mainstream pundit to provide “expert” opinion. The once thriving social movements, with few exceptions, have been absorbed by mainstream centrist forces. Compelling critiques of family and personal life have disappeared from Left discourse and have been appropriated and distorted by the political right. Taken together the unprecedented marginalization of radical voices in the public square deprives the American people of alternative perspectives; what passes for the left in mainstream media is what we once termed “liberals” or moderates. As a result the very idea of social change, let alone socialist and socialist feminist futures has, except in vague presidential rhetoric, all but been excluded from public imagination. Where evoked as in the 2008 Democratic primary it was largely devoid of content. Yet even the vague slogan is capable of exciting millions, especially young people who flocked to the Democratic Party primary in the hopes of effecting something different and new. That such hopes are bound to be frustrated should not obscure the outpouring of young voices seeking change.

First and foremost, we must ask the bewildering question of radical will and desire: why have so many with “good intentions” become enslaved in a reformist logic that allows for no structural transformation? Why have they become embedded in a stasis that leads to voting the lesser evil in national and state elections, and congregating annually to celebrate the nostalgia of the lost radical past as if practice is a museum visit? Is this to be

explained by the dominance of market economy and the desire for a principle of security, economically and psychologically? Or are there deeper mechanisms at work? Has the radical political will become so weakened that it submits to the obstacles created by the current market forces and the corresponding repressive state apparatuses? Has consciousness become counter productive in that it desires change but its praxis limits itself to working within the dominant system? Would the Left rather have safe enslavement rather than take radical risks? Are the repressive state apparatuses so strong that many shun dissent, or has the radical imagination been driven so far underground that it is no longer visible?

It is the question of radical desire that must be rethought and engaged in order that substantial social transformation becomes a real possibility again. We need to initiate a New Radical Project that can help restore the Left to a position of influence on the national stage, but not on the old basis of compromise with the forces of capitalist hegemony. This Manifesto looks forward to the creation of a new political Left formation that can overcome fragmentation, and provide a solid basis for many-side interventions in the current economic, political and social crises that afflict people in all walks of life. The Left must once again offer to young people, people of color, women, workers, activists, intellectuals and newly- arrived immigrants places to learn how the capitalist system works in all of its forms of exploitation whether personal , political, or economic. We need to reconstruct a platform to oppose Capital. It must ask in this moment of US global hegemony what are the alternatives to its cruel power over our lives, and those of large portions of the world's peoples. And the Left formation is needed to offer proposals on how to rebuild a militant, democratic labor movement, strengthen and transform the social movements; and, more generally, provide the opportunity to obtain a broad education that is denied to them by official institutions. We need a political formation dedicated to the proposition that radical theory and practice are inextricably linked, that knowledge without action is impotent, but action without knowledge is blind.

Throughout this Manifesto we use the term ‘political formation’ to describe the organizational form that is needed now to advance the anti-capitalist project. To the American ear, this term easily translates into “party” of the electoral type. It usually signifies an electoral vehicle for a loose coalition or “umbrella” of groups and individuals who agree, but only in the broad sense, on an electoral platform and have mutual interest in taking or influencing power within a liberal democratic political system. Even third parties such as the Greens and Conservatives define themselves in terms of the two major parties. While they differ with the mainstream over “issues” their concept of politics as consisting primarily of contesting public office is identical. Now, when the Right is in power, as has been the rule since Nixon definitively ended Democratic dominance of the White House in 1968, and especially since Reagan’s narrow victory in 1980, the White House has been a site of ideological hegemony that effectively controls the political agenda. It is advised by neo-conservative and right-wing intellectuals organized into think tanks and within key government agencies, and a plethora of publications ranging from daily newspapers, journals of opinion and magazines. Under these circumstances even an ostensibly Democratic Congress is mostly powerless to impose its will. In search of compromises that can “get something done” historical experience demonstrates that absent a visible radical force liberal Democrats no less than Centrists drift to the right. It is no wonder that many radicals scorn party formations, even those of the Left such as the Green Party that have immersed themselves in the electoral process. Yet immersion in social movements cannot erase left fragmentation, the limits of single issue organizing, and the trap of identity politics that seem to have engulfed many activists.

We deliberately focus on the problems of historical understanding and on building a specific United States Left. These problems must, of course, entail discussion of the reality that, despite some erosion, the United States remains the only truly global superpower. Some economists, for example, speak of “decoupling” economies from the global reach of US-based

transnational capitalism. In this connection, China and the European Union are heralded as candidates for building new economic and political power centers. While at the economic, political and cultural plane the US -call it Empire or imperialism- is being challenged by emergent societies and movements of the Right as well as the Left, we cannot undertake, for the present an exhaustive analysis of these challenges, their impact and their futures. Our first task is to immerse ourselves in this country's historical moment for it is only by such immersion, particularly in our own history and political culture, that the Left can be rebuilt. There is reason to believe that despite huge barriers to the Radical Project, the Empire's wall of security has exhibited significant cracks that might make a new beginning possible.

We do not propose a new political formation that resembles a third electoral party dedicated exclusively to taking public office with the framework of representative democratic institutions, nor would it exclude electoral participation, particularly at the local level. Its main task would be to link struggles that have for decades been seen as discrete, with a broad anti-capitalist project whose objective is the radical transformation of economic, political, personal, and social relations.

1. Facing the Crisis

For all practical purposes there is no Left opposition in the United States. Despite the worthy presence of the anti-war movement, some independent media, grassroots organizing, and reform union caucuses, they have very little public effect. What is lacking among these groups is a truly national presence, a public press that regularly reports and comments on the economic, political, and cultural situations and a network of major educational institutions that constitute counter-hegemonies to the prevailing capitalist "common sense". Moreover, the social movements that once lit the gray sky of social and cultural domination are dormant,

if not dead. Few engage in new thinking that addresses the main features of late capitalism in this specific historic conjuncture, not only in relation to the perennial question of whether capitalism is in “crisis”, but in terms of the new forms of cultural and ideological hegemony, the effects of capital’s restructuring on the character and composition of the classes. Instead, discourse focuses on the best course is to support economic expansion, while giving lip service to the significance of the ecological crisis that threatens all forms of life across the planet.

Starting from Everyday Life

Parallel to the obvious deterioration of economic and political conditions in the United States, personal life has also sharply deteriorated as. As economic pressures increase and as women demands for social and economic equality intensify, many families and households have experienced extreme problems, physical dislocations, and emotional breakdowns. For the most part, women at work still perform their second shifts at home, seventy percent of household labor, and eighty-two percent of childcare. They cannot simultaneously hold jobs, still do such work, and continue to perform the psychological, emotional, and sexual procreative tasks that have been assigned to them to sustain families and households. Divorce, separation, and abandonment afflict a majority of married couples and adults in the U.S. consume a disproportionate share of the world’s output of antidepressants and other coping drugs. Three quarters of children return to empty homes after school and eighty-five percent of infants and toddlers are in substandard, unlicensed, and unregulated childcare. Already burdened with these stresses, extra working hours and accumulation of debt built up over decades families clearly cannot begin to think or act creatively. Additional to these concerns is the growing burden of the elderly whose pensions are not adequate to their basic needs such as housing, food, and healthcare.

For an increasing number of the new middle class youth, the concept of career has been demolished and there is an increasing sense of drifting . The sense of helplessness and insecurity has deepened considerably in the last generation, whether it be called “generation X”, “generation debt”, or “generation Kill”. Since World War II there has never been such a level of cultural, intellectual, and psychic impoverishment and the schools, communities, and what’s left of familial life do nothing to address this overarching lacuna through the society.

Much of this may be a symptom of the deep ideology of freedom that permeates everyday life in the United States. This ideology of freedom can be scrutinized from what may be called a common sense meaning of freedom and entails three basic definitions. In the U.S., freedom has been constructed and redefined by ordinary people as first, **mobility in space**, namely the use of the automobile and the interstate highway system. Secondly, freedom means **home ownership**, which means personal freedom in your life when finished with the daily grind of a job. For most, work is a place of unfreedom and the supposedly automatic conditions of the free market over which they feel no control. Fewer and fewer people understand the interests of the free market ideology and are virtually unaware of the intensification of economic, political and social inequality it generates. And the third definition of the common sense meaning of freedom is the notion of **consumer choice**, that is to say, shopping keeps the economy viable. This, of course, is pronounced in every neo-liberal handbook.

The Left, especially radical feminists, once a pioneer in proposing and campaigning for both structural supports and alternatives for the isolated nuclear family has largely ceded the issues of personal, intimate, and family life to the political Right. The Right provides no viable solutions and focuses on condemning alternative lifestyles. Millions of Americans then turn to the burgeoning self-help industry and to the twelve step programs, both studiously apolitical. A minority with good

insurance policies and /or financial resources turn to therapeutic help to address personal problems and often become mired in their own subjectivity without a relation to outside political and social forces. And a majority without the financial means to sustain professional therapeutic help turn to the ever burgeoning psychopharmacological industry for quick fixes.

These problems demand a response from the Left and a new Left turn must provide them. Families and households need genuine socialized medicine and mental health care. A new Left turn can learn from the earlier and innovative French Left's model of infant, toddler after school care. We will propose and support alternative household and family models in which household labor, child and elderly care are handled in different and more egalitarian ways. The Left can create and support real choice among household and family alternatives as solutions to the current institutions whose crises and pressures continue to produce acute psychic pain across the population.

Glimmers of Hope

Certainly, there are a few rays of hope that signify a left turn in struggle. Union organizing has flourished in the health care industries, especially among nurses, but also among some physicians. Today higher education is among the main fields of union growth, largely due to graduate assistants who, against the traditional assumption that they were professors-in-training, recognize that, in many schools they teach most of the curriculum and have become ready sources of cheap academic labor. But these sparks of hope also demonstrate how much work is to be done. The professors and administrative staff that form the heart of the new academic unions have thus far refused to examine the viability of the current system of collective bargaining in an era when most unions are content to engage in collective begging because they lack the solidarity to engage in strikes and other

job actions and rarely support the few groups, such as graduate teaching and research assistants, that take direct action to advance their demands. Instead of supporting militant action, sectors in which unions remain important are largely segregated by parochial interests and in the newer public and private sector unions among professionals who have finally recognized that, credentials aside, they remain salaried employees who are following in the failed path of unions of manual and service workers. In this situation leftists are among the dedicated organizers and often have achieved positions of leadership. Once in office, however, they find themselves stuck in the old ways and do not seem to have the means to think their way out of the framework of collective begging.

In many regions of the United States, immigrants, most of them lacking legal documentation, are the backbone of the retail, agricultural, and manufacturing sectors. Perhaps the most important development on the labor front is the appearance of new forms of workers' organization which depart from the conventions of unions whose objectives are usually confined to the bargaining table. The last several years has witnessed the rise of immigrant rights organizations, which defend immigrant workers against government efforts to deport them and thwart their employment in factories, try to procure green cards and work permits, and address their housing, education and workplace problems. Across the country there are more than one hundred sixty workers centers not affiliated to traditional unions. Many centers advocate for immigrants, fighting deportation orders, conducting brief strikes to redress workplace grievances such as winning wages when employers default on payment. At other times, especially in New York and California where the labor tradition remains relatively strong, immigrant workers have formed their own unions in and out of official trade union sponsorship. Among these the New York Taxi Workers Alliance (TWA) which began as a workers center and has enlisted 8500 members and the Domestic Workers Union (DWU) have displayed a level of militancy, and organizational and strategic prowess sadly missing in the

traditional unions. With no chance of winning collective bargaining since its members are considered “contractors” and therefore are not subject to the meager protections of the Labor Relations Act, TWA has staged a number of strikes directed against the New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission, a regulatory agency that has imposed surveillance devices in their cabs, and against the lessees of their cabs who charge exorbitant rental fees for the cars and medallions. DWU is engaged in the most difficult of tasks: organizing house cleaners and nannies, many of whom work for individual household-based employers. These non-traditional unions are a force in their respective industries and have achieved a measure of solidarity and recognition among sections of the traditional unions.

There are some notable gains among traditional unions as well. In 2007 the New York City teachers union won an election for more than 20,000 day care workers and several unions, mainly the large Municipal Employees district 37 and District 1707, a union of day care and settlement house workers, and especially 1199, the health and hospital union, have enrolled tens of thousands of home health care workers. Most of these workers labor at substandard wages, have few or no benefits and, since many of them are undocumented immigrants, have been reluctant to join unions and put up a fight lest they be deported or jailed. Yet the 2006 million- person immigrant rights march, conducted largely by forces outside the official labor movement and the Left, has created a somewhat different environment in the country, bringing the issue to the fore of the national political agenda. While the issue has revived nativism, a long-standing reactionary trend in American politics, it has also produced a major push for immigrant rights. Unfortunately, the demand for amnesty and subsequent citizenship for undocumented immigrants has evoked a powerful right-wing backlash that harks back to the know-nothing era of the 19th century. Although a few unions have joined the movement for immigrant rights, others, fearing retribution from their own rank and file who they believe are sympathetic to immigration restriction, remain silent.

Whether Left militants are in a socialist political formation, intellectuals ensconced in the academy, or independent activists in the labor and social movements most are stuck either in the ideological straitjackets of the second or third internationals or, having, in effect, renounced the social totality as a framework for thought and action, practice one or another version of postmodern politics in which, “all politics is local, all action is discrete.” Such an approach rarely transcends the single issue or the local level of struggle. Having brilliantly ignited the fires of social reform that still defines much of the debates of national politics (issues of racial equality and sexual freedom still provide the grist for the mills of conservative and right-wing politicians), the remnants of the “new” social movements have mostly settled for defending past gains or are engaged in a self-defeating version of identity politics. But without a left turn that reaches across identities and specific issues, they are unable to sustain, let alone expand their base or successfully defend these gains. Some even place their hopes in electing a Democratic president and a Democratic Congress, a course which has proven, time and again, to lead to frustration and disillusionment in the ranks. As a result the victories for civil and women’s rights won in the two decades before 1975 have disappeared or have been slowly eroded, but few among the movement activists draw any lessons from the record of defeat and fragmentation. Acknowledging the flaws in their strategy, even with respect to the disappointments that have followed in the wake of Democratic majorities in Congress, its continuation is now justified on a single commonplace: a Democratic president is sure to appoint a moderate rather than right-wing judiciary. While this eventuality cannot be denied, this argument is mainly a manifestation of the defensive posture adopted by Left and Left-liberal forces and a fig-leaf for an otherwise bankrupt politics that eschews genuine Opposition. For many, the idea that the Left needs its own voice and independent political formation is accepted intellectually, but rejected at the visceral level out of a sense of impotency and fear.

The Obama Phenomena: False Hope and More of the Same in Hard times

Much of the Left and Left-liberal forces, albeit ambiguously, have supported the presidential candidacy of Barack Obama. First we must analyze his appeal. Obama is a creature of the political spectacle, one who possesses the rhetorical and performative skills to relieve many people, particularly the young of their anxieties and sense of drift and hopelessness. His success to date has depended upon a relentless will to refuse to rise to the level of the concrete. Such a move would split his multiple constituencies, especially the considerable fraction in the financial and technology sectors hungering for a candidate who promises the restoration of their declining position in global political and economic life. Obama's mantra for change is objectless and this jingoist mantra seduces a de-historicized public. The demonization of Bush, which is also part of the political Spectacle, has led to an acceptance of any Democratic candidate regardless of their politics.

His identity as an African- American , to put it mildly, is not of the same stripe as the militants of the black freedom movement. Due to the persistence of identity politics and the historic nature of his candidacy, Obama has perhaps mesmerized the Left and coupled with the demonization of Bush and company wields a very powerful new image, one that promises change and hope.

Structurally, Obama is a centrist politician whose "liberal" voting record reflects the right turn in the United States. On crucial issues such as health care, serious economic platform issues, and most foreign policy matters (excepting his early opposition to the war in Iraq), Obama has voted and spoken consistently for the maintenance and strengthening of the American Empire; this also includes a recent yea vote for the FISA act, which greatly expands the government's power for surveillance of ordinary citizens and political opponents. His recent remarks

concerning further escalation of armed conflict in Afghanistan are a blatant example of this. He has surrounded himself with economic advisors who represent the neo-liberal policies of the last thirty years and foreign policy advisors beholden to the ideology of the Tri-lateral commission of the Carter era. He has failed to distinguish himself from the center/right Democratic National Council on pressing issues such as the housing crisis, unemployment, and trade deficits.

Since the Left has for the most part been bereft of **alternative ideas**, the promise of an Obama victory allows many to revel in the fantasy that a new, New Deal is on the horizon. We should dispel this fantasy on two basic fronts. In the first place, they forget that the gains won during the 1930's and 1960's were owed primarily to popular upsurges and in the second place, any promise of massive domestic spending to address the health care, jobless, housing, energy and urban crises would require sharp reductions in the military budget, reversal of ruling class aspirations for an expanded Empire under US hegemony and political will which sadly is absent within ruling circles. And another essential requirement would be a new progressive tax system, something that Obama has not dared touch except to promise "middle class" tax cuts which could possibly result in cuts in social spending unless the wealthy were required to pay more and the bloated military budget sharply reduced.

Finally, there is the appeal to the revival of social movements and a new era of ideological contestation that some on the Left sense will come with an Obama election. This is reminiscent of 1992 when many progressives supported Clinton on similar grounds. But they failed to see that absent a coherent and viable Opposition, the Clinton administration was able to co-opt a fragmented left- liberalism and that in 2008, the same hopes will be shattered by the inevitable collapse of an Obama administration unless an opposition is built upon radical, not progressive premises. This is the arduous task facing us ; we must move beyond critique and offer genuine hope and a substantial

program for change to those youth taken up in the Obama mania who will become gravely demoralized and worse even , depoliticized after there is the recognition that he is not against war but is for a choice of wars, is part of the executive committee of the ruling class, and serves at the pleasure of the centrist coalition needed by Capital at this historical conjuncture.

An Experiment in Reformism: U.S. health care

While we remain skeptical of a new deal reformism and left social democratic tendencies there are certain issues which we have strategically in common. Most pressing is that of health care. The betrayal of genuine socialized medicine by liberal and centrist leaders is not only egregious but is self-defeating for the constituencies these organizations represent. Once again, these leaders are poised to miss an opportunity to enact genuine health care reform and possibly will set back the cause of universal health care for another generation. Recently, the Obama campaign has demonstrated its indebtedness to the insurance companies and big pharma's lobbyists by refusing to seriously set an agenda for single payer health care. Now the leadership of the SEIU and AFL-CIO alongside the Democratic congressional leadership are supporting a "universal" health plan that keeps health care in the control of private profit motivated insurance companies. This plan represents no qualitative advance in access and care, and it may be as regressive as the HMO debacle of the previous attempt at "reform" over a decade ago.

The Left, progressive unions and health care advocates must dedicate themselves to conducting a determined battle for genuine change and refuse the unprincipled compromises of those who remain in the thrall of the established providers. It has become increasingly evident that leaving health care in a profit-centered system cannot serve the needs of the constituents. The battle for a genuine socialized health care system would take place over an already compromised congressional bill, HR 676, which calls for

medicare for all and public funding of a single payer system. At the least, this struggle would fight within the system for a guaranteed health care for all and will **test** the viability of social reform at this conjuncture of an obdurate capitalism that refuses to enter serious compromises with the basic needs of its citizens. We take hope in the fact that more than 500 unions and many civic and medical organizations have declared their support for HR677. What is needed now is a coordinated national campaign.

2. Lessons from History

The current era is marked by:

- (1) A global “war on terror” as the new umbrella for broad-based attack on wages and workers globally (including the trade unions) for an expansion of capitalist production, a sharp restriction on social and political rights, and a new wave of capitalist imperialism;
- (2) The collapse of the specifically anti-capitalist global left and its transition to anti-neo-liberal capitalism.

In this connection it is important to note that capitalism has always oscillated between social welfare and economically liberal forms. A left that limits itself to taking sides in this swing forsakes a) the altogether different critique of capitalism in both of its forms and b) a program for a non-capitalist social alternative. In contrast to the current tendencies remain the most militant defenders of welfare state capitalism, a Left Turn and the new political formation will restore the anti-capitalist content of a Left program and work to develop a non-capitalist social alternative.

This is the moment of triumphant Capital. Income equality in technologically advanced capitalist societies, but especially in the United States, has reached new peaks in proportion as the labor and social movements have entered their long period of decline,

not only in numbers and density, but also in power. For many unions, the mantra of “partnership” with employers has replaced the appearance of class independence which once prevailed. Even in sectors where unions in fact collaborated with capital they were reluctant to advocate class collaboration as *policy*. Today we are witness to the spectacle of leaders of major unions who shamelessly call for a new class compromise and a brand of workers organization that would deprive the workers of their autonomy.. Ideological weakness and submission to market logic on a broad scale has accompanied and accelerated the decline; even the old social unions and militant craft unions have, with some exceptions to be sure, lost their nerve and have capitulated to the once scorned policies of “partnership”. Meanwhile, even as the proportion of women and people of color rise within the unions, owing to the relative stability and low salaries of the public and service sectors and the steep employment bleeding of the goods producing sectors the strongholds of traditional Organized Labor’s power, including black trade union power—auto, steel, rubber and food packing—are severely reduced .The leading corporations, through technological change, outsourcing to other countries and to US non-union mainly Southern towns, and a systematic program of disinvestment in the domestic industries have shuttered plants. For example in the last two decades auto, steel, electrical and many other production corporations have laid off tens of thousands of workers, many of whom are young and African American. Dozens of steel and auto communities in Michigan, Ohio, upstate New York and New Jersey that were based on manufacturing have become depressed, depopulated and hopeless.

Politically, even as liberals and leftists cling to the possibilities for incremental change, the reform era which emerged at the turn of the 20th century and dominated political struggles and political discourse for three quarters of the 20th century has come to an end. The eclipse of the revolutionary project in developed capitalist societies may be traced to the reformist trend that culminated in a great compromise between Labor, its unions and political parties and capital that occurred in the United States

between 1935 and 1937. This compromise followed World War Two in most European countries, but appeared earlier in the United States with the coming of the New Deal. In fact, contrary to historical myth according to which Franklin D. Roosevelt occupies the place of mythic hero in almost single-handedly raising Americans to economic citizenship and full employment, the New Deal never achieved full employment before embarking on the permanent war economy in 1938. After the defeat of the corporatist first New Deal which was struck down by the Supreme Court in 1935, Roosevelt turned his attention to building an interclass coalition around a new public welfare state. The New Deal's reform program was prompted by the most militant period in US labor history that began with the Left-led mass unemployed demonstrations of 1930, followed by the mass strikes of 1933 and 1934 in which communists and socialists played decisive roles and culminated in the sit-down strikes of 1934-1938 across broad sections of manufacturing and services. The New Deal was designed to head off the chance for more radical solutions to the economic crisis and, with the help of conservative labor leaders and the Communist Party who were persuaded to halt a strategy of direct action in favor of cooperation, largely succeeded. While the Socialist Party and the small Trotskyist movement stayed aloof from the Roosevelt coalition, arguing that its program was piecemeal and largely unresponsive to the depth of the economic crisis, except for its wholehearted support of capital's revival, the much larger Communist Party became a crucial component of the coalition's liberal wing. From the "second" New Deal that ushered in Old Age Insurance (social security) and a variety of programs aimed at providing jobs and some income support for the unemployed and the underemployed, unions and mainstream social movements of women, blacks and Latinos, gay rights organizations and environmentalists, remain to this day loyal to the Democrats (DP) for several reasons. Firstly, while many movement leaders recognize that following the war the New Deal program of social reform was effectively stymied by the onset of the Cold War which placed the permanent war economy and anti-communism at the center of global and domestic politics, and Democrats began a long

slide from their previous, if flawed, commitment to expanding the social wage, fear of being condemned to political marginality prevented them from challenging the war making economic and political establishment. But under pressure from resurgent mass anti-war and black freedom movements which began in the late 1950s, the Democratic party leadership shifted reluctantly to the left on social issues and on questions such as poverty and racial discrimination.

The second reason is that while a strong tendency emerged from the black freedom and youth movements that attempted to revive radical and revolutionary discourse, many Leftists and left-liberals ran the other way. They were convinced they could eventually push the DP to more progressive positions on economic and foreign policy issues, so they shunned third party and radical alternatives, refusing to raise anti-capitalist demands.. The Democratic leadership was split on the Vietnam and Iraq wars but there is no significant shift in the party's prevailing loyalty to market capitalism and its permutations. At the same time the main forces of the Left abandoned their own anti-capitalist mentality, even at the rhetorical level.

The third reason is that the mainstream organizations at the base of the DP lack the political will to organize their own political causes that might challenge the prevailing consensus. And the fourth and final reason is that many intellectuals and electoralists and some institutions such as Organized Labor, civil rights organizations and women's' groups have been integrated into the party machinery and hold berths at the Democratic party's ostensible governing bodies. After the ebb of the political upsurge of the 1960s many leaders of these organizations are indistinguishable from the political directorate. They have become actively complicit in the resumption of oligarchical control within the Democratic Party that threatens to undermine the flawed democratic intentions of the primary system.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and China's

integration of its economy with global capitalism, we have witnessed a virtual disappearance of revolutionary will and discourse in the developing world. But the aftermath of the revolutions did not fulfill Marx's vision of a revolutionary working class that controlled the economic surplus and social and political institutions. What happened in the Soviet Union, its client states and China was, among other things, a change in how the social surplus was appropriated and distributed. It was not a transfer of power from the workers because workers shared the condition of wage-labor of their brothers and sisters in capitalist societies. In the Soviet Union and its client states, the state and party oligarchies controlled the labor process and economic surplus. Now, after the collapse the surplus was transferred to the industrial managers who became private capitalists. With almost no exceptions, apart from some nations of Latin America, the states of the developing world have, like Russia, Eastern Europe and China settled for one or another version of market capitalism and have resumed their client status to Europe and to the United States. Colonialism lives but without the formal trappings of direct dependency. The "independent" states of Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe are closely tied to the global market and their political systems have, with few exceptions, remained fiercely authoritarian. From an economic point of view China and India are only partially independent; given their heavy commercial relations with the United States. When recession ails the States, China coughs. Terms such as 'socialism' and 'communism' which for decades hovered over a crisis-ridden global capitalism for which war and preparation for war was the main solution to economic stagnation and collapse, have been largely discredited, except to a handful of intellectuals, social movement activists, and labor militants. Others, including many erstwhile socialists and communists cling to their beliefs and values but, in everyday practice, have accepted the permanence of capitalism and confine their intervention to preserving the remnants of the welfare state, fighting to safeguard social freedoms, and join anti-war protests. There are still socialist and communist parties in the world but few are genuinely anti-capitalist. For them socialist transformation remains, but only as an ethical ideal. They have

socialism “in their hearts” but not anywhere else in their political practices and perhaps this is another manifestation of the sense of impotency and fear experienced today on the Left.

The crisis of the ‘actually existing’ Socialist states, which began to fester in the late 1950s, came to a head in the late 1980s. And capital was quick to fill the power vacuum left by their demise, alternately undertaking massive economic penetration of the resource-riches of these states (where the term ‘resources’ refers not only to raw materials but also to large quantities of cheap skilled and unskilled labor), especially Russia and China, but also the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia and East Germany. The newly “liberal” or authoritarian governments in the global West, East and South have, in somewhat different ways launched an unprecedented assault on the gains made, in the first place, by workers’ movements, by agricultural communes, and in the economically advanced countries by racial minorities and women. The collapse of the Soviet Union, the emergence of the Chinese model of state-generated capitalist development alongside a sharply reduced state-owned production sector, and the commercialization of the Cuban Revolution in the wake of embargo, but also the regime’s serious mistakes and suppression of dissent, have all but removed the traditional sources of radical imagination from the political landscape. To its critics Communist regimes were fatally flawed and the unswerving loyalty to them by Communist Parties throughout the world demonstrated their bankruptcy. But even if at its zenith, the Communist movement proved itself flawed both with respect to its flagrant distortion, both ideologically and practically, of the socialist tradition, for example, its de facto renunciation of world revolution and workers democracy since the early 1930s which elicited a Left as well as Right opposition. Despite all of its warts, the ideological anti-capitalism, anti-imperialism, the military power of the Soviet Union, and its promise of liberation filled the hearts of millions of oppressed people in the West as well as the global South with hope.

Perhaps the main, and the most controversial, decision

by the Communists in the Stalin era, was their suppression of workers democracy and suspension of the anti-capitalist project accompanied by the suppression and suspension of women's liberation initiatives in the wake of the rise of fascism. With the Nazi victory in Germany, Communists and Social Democrats alike announced that, except for the colonial world's movements towards national independence, revolution would be on hold for the foreseeable future, a period that turned into an era. The popular front went beyond a call for unity of working-class forces in the struggle against fascism: it announced a strategic alliance with "progressive" capital to fight fascism, the price of which was the suspension of the open class struggle at the ideological as well as the practical level and inside and outside the home. But fascism's downfall did not witness the resumption of the anti-capitalist project or the project of transforming personal life. The Social-Democrats had long been reconciled to the liberal democratic capitalist framework within which to conduct a praxis of reform. In France and Italy, after a brief period of participation in bourgeois governments the Communists went into Opposition, but mainly on questions of foreign affairs. In the main their parties had become reluctant participants in the machinery of the liberal state and only occasionally engaged in direct action. As a result, the socialist left in almost every country has become a Center-Left. It has replaced the fight against capital and all other forms of class exploitation with the fight against certain neo-liberal policies but no longer as resolute anti-capitalists. Its project is the defense of the social welfare state, the struggle against the authoritarian Right, and, in the wake of the danger of nuclear annihilation, the achievement of "world peace". In this connection, as the left has become increasingly national in character, it has too often given up the demand, prominent in the 1950s and 1960s, for broad nuclear disarmament, and has accepted nuclear power as a vital energy resource.

Most young would-be radicals are now properly skeptical of the remaining regimes and the parties that claim the mantle of socialism and have gravitated to social movements, especially to

anti-globalization and environmentalism, as well as to anarchism. In the late 1990s and first years of the new century the World Social Forum(WSF),-- not the traditional Left,-- seemed to embody the promise of the slogan “Another World is Possible”. Of course, the “other world” remains vague and embodies, at best, the hope shared by many for more equality, projects that address hunger and poverty, and an end to the violence that marks many political regimes. The WSF was and remains a *mélange* of indigenous social movements in developing countries, and among the technologically advanced capitalist societies intellectuals, radical activists, peace advocates and feminists. After years when anarchism was kept alive, literally, by a few outstanding intellectuals, the anti-globalization movement brought to the surface a small but scrappy anarchism that is anti-statist and anti-capitalist movement which, however, is capable of offering only limited resistance. Otherwise we are in the midst of a one-sided class struggle in the United States and, punctuated by periodic demonstrations to preserve the welfare state, in Europe as well. But even the anarchists have few ideas beyond protest and resistance. Concerning what new social relations might look like, anarchists have not been able to go beyond the traditional left- libertarian appeal to horizontal forms of organization, general statements against hierarchy, and the proposal that the movement and its institutions be “prefigurative” of the new society. Beyond resistance in anarchist literature there is almost no discussion of strategy. And so many of recent self-described anarchists follow the general left predisposition to moralism. But even as the Left as well has reduced itself to moral outrage, it is even more bereft of vision. Already weakened by the restructuration of world capitalism signaled by global monetary crisis of the early 1970s that accelerated transnationalism on the other hand, a more open commitment by the United States and its allies to empire-building, the “practical Left”(as opposed to the ideological and intellectual Left)—consisting of labor and social movements in the United States and much of Western Europe--, have sustained years of defeats, punctuated only by sporadic acts of resistance which optimists have often heralded as a new beginning.

That some countries of Europe were able to offer significant resistance that slowed the pace of welfare state decline by going to the streets, especially when hard-won social benefits are threatened, is a sign of the persistence of the ethos of collective, direct action and the occasional ability of the people to recognize their self interests. These events have elicited frequent expectations that the anti-capitalist Left is on the brink of revival. Of course, these predictions have inevitably been refuted by events: almost everywhere the Left remains on the defensive, fragmented and disoriented. Perhaps more important, as it seeks to hold the line, it has in rhetoric and propaganda renounced the anti-capitalist project and its focus on production . When center-left coalition governments form in Western Europe, they are inevitably beset by crisis because they are committed to not fighting against market-based global capitalism or exploitative personal relationships. The disconnect between the moderate governments of the Center-Left and the still militant base is astonishing. For example, the Italians and French seem able to stage day or week-long general strikes to forestall the most draconian proposals for rolling back various social welfare amenities, but are unable, perhaps unwilling, to mount an offensive struggle against capital . More to the point the European left seems woefully stuck in the past. Perhaps the main partial exception is Germany where left social-democrats have joined with the former Communists, now organized as the Party of Democratic Socialism in a Links (Left) Partei in a single electoral bloc which has succeeded in filling the vacuum produced by the lurch of the Social Democratic party to the Center/Right.

With the outstanding exception of social security the same cannot be said of most Americans. Even as nearly a third of Americans in any one year lack health insurance, and nearly fifty million have none at all; that millions have flawed private health plans through workplaces that require major deductibles and steep co-pays for doctor visits and prescriptions, and private plans that limit pension-vesting to long-time employees the private welfare state, in which the unions play a significant role has, nevertheless,

dampened the movements for a universal health care system and significant improvement in social security. The natural leadership of such an effort, the unions, are compromised by their complicity in sustaining the private welfare state through employer-based benefit plans because they are often managed by the unions. In an era of vanishing labor militancy union leaders have clientized their members and used union-administered welfare programs to build their political base. Socialized medicine, therefore, might remove the foundation of their political power.

In the main, the mentality of the European no less than the US Left remains that of the modest idea that the welfare state is the farthest reach of the political imagination. Thus its program is to restore the humpty dumpty of social reform based on the regulative state. But this program has proven, time and again, chimerical due, largely, to the unwillingness of capital to renew the former social contract which was negotiated at the zenith of labor's strength in the United States and of the broad Left in Europe. In its era of transnationalism where national states, although important for some ideological and fiduciary purposes, have lost considerable autonomy Capital has few incentives to renew or restore what it is in the process of taking away. The capitalist globalization of industrial production has decimated national labor movements whose social and political base remained, even during the restructuration, the industrial working class. Despite this new development, the level of international workers' solidarity remains extremely low. Unions, their constituents and small business seem to be the last clients of the nation-state and, in time of war, are often a reliable source of popular patriotism.

At the end of the 1960's witnessed an unprecedented upsurge of popular protest and resistance, including on the industrial shop floor, and as the Democrats courted the social movements, Capital responded to workers' power by removing the industrial sites of that power, especially the dispersal of the auto, steel and electrical manufacturing industries, and reduced, through technological innovation, the part played by material

labor in production. Today Capital faces a sharply diminished labor movement which, in the United States is, in addition to its adoption of a new era of suicidal collaboration with capital, is clearly unwilling to address the new occupations and industries that rose on the heels of rapid technological transformation and globalization. The failure of the unions to expand their base is not due to scant resources. Whatever Organized Labor lacks, it is not money. What it lacks is a broad understanding of the new features of capitalism and the character of emerging intellectual labor that increasingly dominates both industrial production and the services. In the main the unions view professional and technical labor as either captives of management or beings of an entirely different economic and social reality. Since they have accepted the bourgeois conception that class is defined in terms of consumption levels (in which case society is divided between rich, middle class and poor), the specific problems faced by all levels of technically-qualified labor seem beyond comprehension. Of course, in Europe the labor movement, of which the Left is an important detachment, has done a better job organizing elements of the professional/managerial class and holding the line on the welfare state, even as the line itself has become increasingly thread bare. Yet, unions of groups such as engineers, artists, writers and health professionals resemble the old model; they are not interested, beyond salaries and benefits, in asking what are the specific needs of their constituents, let alone are they prone to concern themselves with larger social and political questions of how the economic and social surplus is produced and what is the character of the new labor process.

The defeats suffered by the traditional Left are, of course, manifestations of a new capitalist “post-fordist” epoch, that is, where capital and its political minions have effectively repealed both business regulation and sections of the social wage, leaving only the shards of state-financed benefits. In this epoch the concept of radical social transformation has been relegated to the purgatory of unrealized utopia. But it would be an error to attribute the decline exclusively to a new self-regulating capitalism whose

laws of motion are virtually autonomous of the social relations that, in fact, constitute it. Such a view, which characterizes much of what passes for Marxist analysis ignores, even denies, the reality that economic, and much personal power is the outcome of class struggle, of the dialectic between labor, taken in its widest connotation to embrace all fractions of the subordinate classes—workers, women, people of color, youth-- and the various fractions of Capital. That, following the great uprisings of 1968 and 1969 when, from Mexico City, the United States to France and Italy workers, students and women mounted genuine challenges to Capital's economic power and social hegemony, capitalism has become entrenched throughout most of the world is an historical, rather than natural phenomenon. It is able to weather its frequent economic and political crises by transferring the burdens of bad investments and their own market excesses to the working class, salaried technical intellectuals (coded as professionals), and to small business. For example, although the huge war debt incurred by the Iraq invasion and occupation, the decline of the dollar and the mortgage meltdown have combined to put a crimp in global capital's gleaming façade, the level of protest against home foreclosures, layoffs and wage stagnation remains microscopic. Without a counter movement from below, with the help of a compliant state capital is likely to find a way out without profound disruption, except to employment and to the fiction of "home ownership" that was fraudulently conferred on wide sections of the underlying population. None of these questions seem to have detained either the Left, the movements, or the unions.

3. Age of Financialization

The current economic situation is the gravest economic crisis of the post-World War II era. The real estate bubble that burst into a housing crisis (millions of foreclosures amidst steeply falling home prices) has spread-via the market system- to become a global financial crisis driven by the mounting reductions ("deleveraging")

of wildly excessive household and enterprise debt levels. Banks and hedge funds now deliver sequential economic disasters punctuated by names like Bear Stearns, Lehman Brothers, Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, and AIG. Their reputations as paragons of capitalist efficiency now collapse just like their balance sheets. The resulting “global slowdown” remains unconstrained despite the increasing state interventions in the U.S. economy by the Federal Reserve Bank and the U.S. Treasury that expose the scandalous underside of neoliberalism. The “ownership society” increasingly dissolves into the sinking “foreclosure society.”

Financialization and, through the fast growing credit system, *fictitious capital*, had become ever-more important supports of modern globalized capitalism. Yet credit expansion always enlarges the risks besetting an always unstable capitalism. Capitalism always over-expands in good times in ways that provoke and worsen the downswings. Credit enables growth but also, in capitalist systems, over expansion. When the flood of extended credit eventually hits the wall of borrowers’ inability to pay interest and repay loans, the credit-based upturn reverses and becomes today’s terrifying downturn driven by contracting credit.

As early as 1966, Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy argued that, twenty years after the end of World War Two, global capitalism had entered a prolonged period of real stagnation in productive investment, that is, investment that enlarged economic value and surplus value. In their view much of what had been calculated as economic growth was due chiefly to the permanent war economy. State expenditures rather than private investment accounted for increasing proportion of economic activity. In their perspective much of the arms budget was part of the larger phenomenon that capitalism relied, more and more, on the production of waste to sustain the reproduction of capital. Other major manifestations of waste production were: planned obsolescence of big ticket items such as autos, appliances, entertainment electronics such as television, and suburban housing. To this we must add computers and their software components. Another manifestation was the use

of plastics to replace metals and wood as components of many products. And it goes without saying that a component crucial to rampant consumerism was added, that is, the enormous consumer debt that has continued and accelerated unabated to this day. This analysis was considered marginal among mainstream economists and business analysts. Today, their allegation that the economy rests on sinking sand has its champions among some in the mainstream, but remains scorned by the cockeyed optimists who dominate the economics profession.

The mortgage meltdown has called attention to the huge consumer debt that finances much of housing, commercial development and global production, both of capital goods (raw materials and machinery) and consumer goods. While it is true that mammoth societies such as China and India constitute new markets for middle class consumption, their growth is also largely sustained by credit. If the markets in the more economically developed societies, especially the United States, dry up their phenomenal growth rates may grind to a screeching halt. It is not yet a commonplace to recognize that what we call capital and capital investment is fictitious: wildly volatile prices on Wall Street and the commodities markets are indications of the tremendous speculative effort in hedge funds, derivatives, commodity futures, indeed the financialization of practically all economic activities. The entwined processes of credit expansion and financialization have produced a current global capitalism with huge balance of payments and trade deficits and extreme currency movements as mobile capital rushes around the globe to seize opportunities and escape financial tsunamis. Everywhere the anxiety is concerned with the depth of the economic downturn, how long will it last, and who will suffer the most. As the costs of maintaining the capitalist system rise, so do the voices of its critics. Some desire minimal reforms and hope those will enable capitalism to survive and a new phase of prosperity to emerge. Others, more skeptical and often more hurt by the downturn, want massive state intervention to fix a broken private capitalism and to additionally establish controls that will prevent yet another crisis from repeating. A new Left

turn should affirm the all too often denied, ignored, or silenced “other” perspective: that capitalism itself is the problem and a new and radically different economic system is the beginning of the solution.

No major US politician has offered any reasonable program that honestly addresses the scope and social costs of capitalism’s current meltdown. Generally the Democrats have joined the reactionary Bush administration’s proposals to focus chiefly on providing massive tax –funded new credit to the largest U.S. financial corporations as parts of the increasing enormity of the corporate welfare state. They address mass economic pain through modest tax rebates and limiting or postponing foreclosures for a small fraction of the millions facing that personal crisis. Moreover, the Democrats continue to support the Bush administration ‘s steps despite the fact that each of these steps over the last year proved to be too little, too late to stop the economic decline.

The Democrats and their coalition allies cannot even mount a serious campaign for extending unemployment benefits and increasing food stamp allowances, let alone advocating a dramatic increase in income and job programs for young people, especially black youth who, even before the official recession, suffer chronic double digit joblessness, and the poor whose wages and income are below subsistence levels. For this reason the conversation has been conducted almost exclusively within the ranks of capital and its professional servants—economists, investment counselors, business reporters. In the main the unions, whose members are among the victims of the great mortgage swindle and burgeoning inflation, are silent. They have all but renounced direct action, especially the strike weapon, except when in dire straits or when the leadership needs to cool off a potentially rebellious rank and file. And no longer rooted in neighborhoods the social movements, in general, seem uninterested in mounting popular mobilizations against foreclosures and other evictions, repossessions and rent gouging, and lack a language with which to discuss the relation of rising food prices with the zooming prices of oil and speculation in

commodities markets. So, the immediate prospect of disruption of business as usual is quite dim.

Rather than finding new ways to exercise popular power, especially ways to carry the class struggle beyond the workplace into communities and onto the streets, labor and social movements have chosen to enter the electoral arena in a big way, a path strewn with thorns and improbability of gains, even if their endorsed candidates are elected. It is no exaggeration to claim that elections have become a new kind of spectacle; since there are few burning issues separating the candidates, we have sunk into a touchy feely, “me” style of politics punctuated by revelations about past scandals in the candidate’s portfolio, and personal invective that tries to carve a distinction without a difference. Moreover electability is equated by the media almost exclusively with how well the campaign can raise enough money to invest in the institutions of the spectacle. Tragically, much of the Left has bought into this mode of political behavior, which makes it virtually indistinguishable from the Center and the Right.

4. The Postmodern Political and the Collaborationist Tendency

The Left is caught in the net of postmodern politics. In the first place, Postmodern politics are conducted on single issues, mostly at the local level. Secondly postmodernism renounces the politics of substance for the politics of image and identities. Finally, it refuses the totality, that is, to link the inevitable struggles around single issues with the anti-capitalist project.

Looking back to the May insurgency of 1968 the very existence of the French state was threatened, and the effects of May’68 became a powerful force on the Italian scene, and under pressure of the mass anti-Vietnam war protests, caused a US president to choose not to run for reelection. The insurgency’s

demise was a measure of the final failure of the collaborationist policies of the most powerful unions in the industrially developed countries, including those under social progressive and Communist leadership, the abject retreat of social democracy which, in power, typically faithfully manages the neo-liberal policies of the state even as it and softens the more or less rapid erosion of social welfare. In the United States, the considerable political weight of the civil rights, feminist and anti- Vietnam war movements did not result in the formation of a unified political opposition and alternative. Instead the New Left no less than their progressive allies steadfastly refused this road and succumbed to the lure of a Democratic Party which, after it enacted voting rights and civil rights legislation, conceded the South to reaction in 1966, simultaneously sought to tame and to ally with the more moderate wing of the movements. Or they fetishized the “new social movements” as an alternative and, in the process, abandoned their critical edge.

Perhaps the machine’s most adroit stroke was to wrap itself in the symbols of racial justice, feminism and environmentalism, and to win over once resolute ecologists to the belief that the ecological crisis could be solved by piecemeal reform through legislation and negotiation with the main centers of capital. Otherwise, in power, in many respects the European Social Democrats and the US Democrats resemble conservatism at home and neo-colonialism abroad. Most leading Democrats even those who wear the mask of left-liberalism openly declare that US foreign policy must be configured in terms of the requirements of Empire. For them “our interests” may require withdrawal from Iraq, but they do not renounce the principle of intervention, military or otherwise.

The most recent examples are the collapse of the Democrats in the wake of opposition to the Iraq war by its own base and its almost consensual support of fund reauthorization to pursue the sinkhole of a US military intervention that has resulted in the deaths and dismemberment of nearly a million

Iraqis and more than thirty thousand US troops and civilians. The disgraceful participation of the UK's Labor government in the US-led Iraq invasion and the de facto approbation of other "socialist" governments of Western Europe to the invasion, some of which sent troops to Iraq under the cover of "humanitarianism" are evidence of bad political faith by the Center-Left. This collective performance was a throwback to World War One when most socialist parties, on nationalist grounds, voted the funds to carry out the war to their own governments. However, while the aftermath of that war ushered in a period of revolution and radicalism, these conditions are no longer present at a time when the ruling circles have effectively circumscribed the effects of war to a relatively small fighting force and to the indigenous population caught in the crossfire. Wars in Kosovo, Bosnia, Rwanda, Iraq, Chad, the Sudan, and threatened civil war in Kenya and Pakistan are the stuff of the news, but seem distant from the everyday lives of most of us, even as their costs escalate and foreclose the possibilities for social reform.

Of course, the United States exhibits these features in bold strokes. Since Richard Nixon abolished the draft it has a volunteer, rather than a citizen army, has accumulated a huge war debt and has put this country on a permanent war footing, one that cripples our collective ability to address the urgent questions of ecological crisis, spreading unemployment, especially among youth and blacks, and long term wage stagnation that belies the claims of a unique "American" standard of living. In fact, the United States is rapidly devolving into a favored site for foreign capital investment precisely because of its comparatively low wages, sparse benefit structure and low union density. The official labor movement has registered symbolic opposition to the Iraq war that produced barely a ripple in the public debate because, in the main, almost none of the major unions have joined the anti-war effort, refusing to exercise their still considerable weight at industrial workplaces to disrupt materiel production and transportation. Committed to the straitjacket which prescribes a no-strike pledge for the life of the contract and stuck in the premises of Cold War thinking even

after the main antagonist of the US state diasappeared, its labor movement which, in the '70s and '80s responded to the beginnings of deindustrialization not by challenging capital's right to flee but by offering concessions to employers in the vain hope they could save jobs and preserve the terms of the New Deal compromise that established legal collective bargaining in wide sectors of the economy. Today many unions have evolved into a virtual arm of capital, taking responsibility for disciplining the working class by opposing nearly every effort by the rank and file to fight back, subservient to the Democratic party, in some quarters renouncing class struggle and openly declaring hope that it can forge a new social contract with capital to replace the one the system itself shredded. In turn the environmentalists, the black freedom, feminist and student movements integrated themselves into the prevailing power relations and, significantly, became crucial components of the short-lived left wing of the Democratic Party which dwindled after its standard bearer George McGovern went down to crushing defeat in 1972. Sadly the movements drew few lessons from this debacle except to continue on the same path, a road which has led them to a series of dead ends. Most egregiously the some of the main organizations of the anti-war movement have remained strangely silent as the war drags on; we suspect that they, too, have been integrated into the liberal wing of the DP and have suspended protest until after the 2008 elections on the false premise that disruption would hurt their centrist candidates.

One of the most disturbing dead ends of the road taken by the left wing of the Democratic Party are the frequent pronouncements of the "declining significance" of the race question. Mass unemployment, residential displacement, falling living standards, and an educational system which has systematically deprived black youth of their birthright serve to highlight the bare fact that the tiering of America which began in the aftermath of Black Reconstruction persists. We cannot underestimate the importance of Capital's reserve army of labor that helps depress wages for the entire working class, nor can we forgot the three million Americans behind prison

bars or under the supervision of the criminal justice system and the horrendously high proportion of Black and Latino prisoners relative to the general population. The Left political formation will address the many dimensions of race in the United States, and increasingly throughout the world. We must discuss the relation of race to conventionalized conceptions of class and citizenship in a society where huge numbers of people of color are excluded, often by design from participation in even those minimal forms of democracy and where the historical gains made by Blacks in the workplace, and in housing and education have been reversed by new structures of capitalist exploitation. And following the scandalous official response to hurricanes Katrina and Rita, we must investigate and confront the new apartheid afflicting that regions' African- American population.

Leading civil rights and feminist organizations today function, in effect, as lobbies within the centrist-dominated Democratic Party. Their leaders, and the bureaucracies they manage, are junior members of the team of Washington insiders that hover around Congress, government agencies and, when the Democrats are in power, the White House. Most have lost contact with their own grass roots who, with few exceptions, play no active role in the fights around gentrification and for halting the deterioration of schools, health care institutions and other public facilities at the local level. Moreover, like the unions, they are clustered in the Northeast, a few large Midwest states and the West Coast and, like the labor movement, have all but given up on the South, leaving that region to the most retrograde forces. In this context, the DP national chair, Howard Dean, has waged an uphill struggle to implement a "fifty state" electoral strategy still resisted by many of the DP leaders. Similarly, in the face of growing popular sentiment for decisive action to stem global warming, the main environmental organizations have adopted the view that influence-peddling among scientists as much as politicians rather than mass action is the sole appropriate strategy. Consequently there was almost no serious response to the effects of Hurricane Katrina; the Sierra Club and other groups made no attempt to bring millions

into the streets to protest administration neglect. While for the most part silent on the Katrina disaster national environmental organizations were content to sponsor full page ads in the New York Times and Washington Post by scientific authorities that assured the public that abrupt climate change and global warming was scientifically proven and that action was needed. Needless to say, these initiatives, although worthy, were not equal to the emergency that we now face.

5. Principles for a New Left Turn

The left turn we propose entails an anti-capitalist project that includes the following:

- (1) Reorganizing the system of production democratically at its base: repositioning the workers who produce the surplus (profits) as likewise the group that appropriates and distributes that surplus;
- (2) advocating and experimenting with new forms of collective ownership and control over the natural and productive resources;
- (3) engaging in the struggle against capital by fostering ideas and actions that produce new social and cultural spaces, particularly reviving a struggle over agricultural and urban land and of non-material spaces such as communications;
- (4) the founding of radical democratic institutions at the workplace, in communities, and everyday social interactions, including the home;
- (5) helping to conduct aggressive reform struggles that decommodify essential services.
such as the fights for socialized medicine and for the expansion of mass public transportation.

Points (1) and (2) take as their example the actions of Argentine and Brazilian workers who have re-opened plants shuttered by employers and contested Capital's private property prerogatives. They also derive their inspiration from the example of workers, consumers and farmers cooperatives during the populist and progressive eras of American history. Thus, rather than be content to cede to Capital its control of production and consumption, a new left formation would explore ways, within the framework of capitalism, to undermine its hegemony over production, especially its right to close facilities at will and reestablish them elsewhere.

To clarify these points, we need to explain what principles we hold and which we reject.

Among its central characteristics, capitalism is an organization of the surplus produced by wage labor—a class structure in which the majority produces a surplus that is appropriated by a small minority (e.g. 2/3 of the surplus is appropriated by the boards of directors of the Fortune 500 largest Corporations). Reformism entails limiting, regulating and otherwise softening but not altering this surplus organization. Beyond demands that address the slide of real wages, the egregious extension of the working day, and in the virtual disappearance of democracy on the shop floor, we need to advocate the reorganization of production at its base in each enterprise. For example a demand that no social democrat, let alone liberal Democrat or trade union official dare utter is also one that responds to the realities that capital has hoarded the produced surplus: that the workers in every industry must have real participation to which they are entitled as appropriators and distributors of the surplus their labor produces. In this way they can prevent the use of those surpluses to undo social welfare regulations, programs and limits imposed on enterprises. If workers – the majority in every enterprise - appropriated and distributed the surpluses they produced, they would possess the resources and the power to implement their democratically arrived-at decisions. They

would then engage in genuine self-government, debating their work conditions, their communities, the environment, their self-management and inter-group relations, and so on because they could and would execute their decisions, rather than having a minority of capitalists able to use surpluses in ways that contradict and undermine the democratically arrived at commitments of the majority.

In the United States there is no resolute political formation capable of contesting Capital, either in its cultural and ideological hegemony or in its relentless attack against the historical gains won by the working class, the racially oppressed, and women. Although most acknowledge the extraordinary challenges of the ecological disaster that has befallen us, neither the Left nor the environmental movement has been able to offer more than palliatives to address the burning questions posed by sudden climate change. Here as on other issues solutions that are tied to sweetening corporate observance of ecological imperatives by offering financial incentives prevail over public mandates. The normal assumption is that Capital will not cooperate unless it can see an advantage in terms of the bottom line. Save a few intellectuals there is no movement, for example, that demands major changes in the composition of production and consumption corresponding to the alarming rise of greenhouse gases emanating not only from power plants, but also from cars, rampant suburbanization and from industries such as chemicals, plastics and others dependent upon hydrocarbons as their primary raw material. There is virtually no public discourse concerning the role of capitalist privatization of our major resources such as housing, food and energy in accelerating global climate change. Responding to the deadlock in efforts to impose mandatory regulation the Center, no less than the Right, has promoted “voluntary” restraints to curb the alarming increase of carbon dioxide in the air and extensive water pollution, fomented a virtual cancer epidemic, and increased highway and urban gridlock. The results have been meager, a consequence that does not contain the voluntarists who are ideologically committed to pandering to business. The slogan that all economic decisions,

including state policy, must observe the vicissitudes of “the market” almost completely dominates the political conversation. Moreover questions of health and education, culture and politics have become versions of market calculation. While there is an intellectual critical discourse against neo-liberalism, there is almost no discourse about capitalism and its alternatives. When some intellectuals go beyond critique and offer alternatives, since their interventions are individual and do not reflect a collective project they are rarely discussed, let alone become the basis of political strategy. On the one hand, neither the conventional liberals nor the minions of centrist “Clintonism”, dare challenge the mantra that in the interest of economic growth, banks and other financial institutions must be free to soak the wage and salaried classes with exorbitant interest rates on credit cards, mortgages and other transactions, hoodwink the poor to “buy” homes under false pretenses; and thereby reap exorbitant profits, configure health and health care as a commodity and an opportunity for capital investment; and subject education to the same criteria. In fact, in the 1970s centrists and liberals were among the authors of bank, transport and media deregulation and have only recently awakened to its consequences.

On the other hand, critics of the untrammelled market rarely offer more than the alternative of the New Deal with its regulatory agencies and welfare state subsidies for the most traumatized by the permutations of hoary market forces. And even as hundreds of local unions and municipal and state labor councils advocate a single payer health care system, some, like the current national union leadership, have actively opposed the decommodification of health care and its removal from an employer base because many of their affiliates operate their own health plans that provide jobs for close friends, family and allies, and a political base at a time when collective bargaining has been severely reduced to protecting what already exists. The Left has no effective voice on questions of everyday life. Its attention is focused on the War and the arms race and, to the extent that it has a voice, it is almost entirely in the area of foreign policy. This means that its constituency remains

tied to the campus, to professional organizations and a few districts where professionals live.

But even when its gaze is directed to issues such as war, the preponderant perspective is pacifist. The main Left forces have opposed all forms of great power military interventions without addressing the crucial questions of what their nature and motivation is constitutive. Consequently, mainly on moral grounds or on the basic argument of the right of nations to self-determination anti-war forces have called for withdrawal of US troops from Iraq as they did during the Vietnam war era. As we are well aware Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, the principle objects of US intervention after 1954, have followed the path of China, embracing the market, and encouraging private domestic and foreign investment to develop its economy. The political system remains authoritarian, a tension that has already yielded serious fissures in the social fabric. For example, the large number of strikes in the private sector of the Chinese economy remains unreported in the mainstream and liberal press, although journalists will occasionally note a “riot” in some part of the country. But the regime still comes down hard on public sector strikes, jailing workers’ leaders for refusing to observe the fiction that the public sector belongs to the people rather than to the party hierarchy.

We have learned from this history that revolutionary nationalism is not usually a good fit with socialist transformation but, given the global relationship of forces, is more likely to find a better bedfellow in market capitalism. The Left has not drawn lessons from its own historical experiences nor directly engaged in analysis and discussion of the nature of the wars, civil strife and turmoil that has afflicted the developing countries and those of the metropolises as well. In fact there is little debate within the anti-war movements about the nature of its adversary. The demand “out now” mobilizes some pacifists, skeptics of the administration’s claim that it can win this war, but has no significant educational or ideological content. For example, with the collapse of the Soviet Union’s empire are we now faced, as some have argued, with

a new imperialism or is it the case as Alexandre Kojève argued in the 1950s that the global economic and political situation is marked by the existence of only competing Empires, not nation-states? The implication of this thesis would be that the major external impediment, the Soviet Empire, to US penetration of the Middle East and Southeast Asia has been removed; thus there is only one Empire. If this view is correct “independent” nation-states in Europe, the Arab world and Iran, as well as countries such as India and China will inevitably be drawn into the US--based transnational orbit, if only for reason of global economic dependency. This thesis has recently been restated, albeit in modified form, by Hardt and Negri who note that Empire is now a multinational affair dominated by a single superpower, the United States. In their lights, the new face of Empire is not colonial in the old model of the British but postcolonial, yet no less marked by relations of domination, but seeking to “stabilize” global relations through the rule of law. Others, notably David Harvey and Alex Callinicos have, in somewhat different ways, flatly restated an updated version of the Bukharin-Lenin thesis: US-based global economic and political domination constitutes a “new imperialism” which, however, is transnational both in leadership and constituency. Neither version of capitalist globalization doubts the future possibility of the emergence of a second imperialism that will challenge the current one, the most likely candidate being China, but certainly not in the near future. In both versions of the new shape of capitalist globalization there is little chance that recalcitrant regimes such as that of Sadaam Hussein, Iran and Syria can survive. Nor is it likely that a Pakistan, for example, can resolve its deep internal and regional conflicts without the patronage of the United States. As for India and China, can we expect the emergence of a new power center even if, for the present, they seemed tied to the US-dominated Atlantic powers? Thus the debate about US foreign policy which occupies much of what passes as national politics concerns the best strategies for achieving US imperial or Empire interests. No leading Democratic contender in the 2008 presidential elections dare challenge the given of foreign policy: under the guise of National Security, the

question is how to preserve and expand US imperial interests on a global scale. The Left opposes this formulation but has not proposed a new configuration. Will nation-states reassert their autonomy, or are new political arrangements needed to insure a world of growing equality and democracy? If so what would they look like, within the current system of global power? If not what are the arguments, under present conditions, for the possibility of state autonomy. The last question is especially pertinent to contemporary efforts in Latin America, some of whose states are inching toward creating a regional banking system and common market.

6. Political Character of the Left – The Last Thirty Years

For much of the 20th century the Soviet Union, China and other countries that claimed the mantle of revolutionary socialism became the symbolic representation of authority that many radicals needed to authorize their politics. Even, if, in practice, they were engaged in reform politics, the existence of these societies and their political representatives in the form of Left parties, provided both guidance and comfort which would not be available if they were left to their own devices. For the faithful, the party was a family, and if they were stuck in the provinces far from party organizations, it remained the center of cultural and educational activity and emotional security; their children wore “red diapers”, which meant that they imbibed certain values, sang revolutionary and populist songs and attended private schools and summer camps that embodied socialist values. And, inevitably with the disappearance of the Soviet Empire and the incorporation of China into capitalist globalization, the home parties, which had not forged an independent existence and had almost no radical practice, disintegrated, splintered or disappeared. Adrift, most of their militants clung to the familiar raft of reform politics, returned to professional graduate schools in order to making a better living,

subscribed to *The Nation* and other respectable left-liberal weeklies or monthlies, or quit politics altogether.

Equally important is that much of what passes for an American Left is infused with a heavy dose of moralism, a sentiment that is consistent with religious thinking, even if it is displayed in secular guise. Whereas the ruling class, consisting of capital and a section of the political directorate at the national level, operates according to the principle that class struggle is a question of power and interest, the dissenting response is to attribute such actions to “greed”, moral turpitude, or cruelty. Thus, the report that at least 35 million Americans go to bed hungry every night, that homelessness remains a serious urban issue, that 50% of young black men in New York City are jobless and the black unemployment rate is generally double that of whites are interpreted as signs of heartlessness. Filmmaker and social commentator Michael Moore returns to his hometown of Flint, Michigan where the level of devastation has reached dry hurricane proportions and discovers that GM executive Roger Smith is indifferent to the mass layoffs his company has imposed that have left the city destitute. The widening gap between rich and poor and the shrinking of the “middle class”(which in liberal lexicon includes unionized workers, especially in key production industries) that has become a veritable chasm is a symptom, not of the character flaws of the very rich, but of the significant changes of the past thirty years in the way business works.

We are in the midst of an historic transformation: wage growth, which was more or less continuous since 1870 has stopped and is reversed for the last 35 years. Since the 1970s real wages stopped rising and the US working class has been struggling to cope with that phenomenon ever since. Living standards are falling, not only in periods of economic downturn, but in periods of expansion as well. And the reversal of more than a century of wage growth has been a central economic fact of the current economic malaise. To be more specific, much of the Left has turned away from the problems of economic stagnation and the fall in wages.

We have virtually no left discourse on the many dimensions of joblessness and hunger: the technological revolution, capitalist globalization which, among other changes such as financialization, has placed international labor in competition with itself, changes in the nature of the industrial reserve army in the era of the end of real jobs, and the consequent growing precariousness of labor. These are no longer occasional features of the employment system, but have become central to its reproduction. Any business in the same structural position would likely take the same course, notwithstanding the personal compassion that any owner might possess. For capital, in any of its manifestations is governed by a logic that allows for few options. If almost every capitalist outsources their product to China, the recalcitrant employer who wants to preserve “American” jobs almost invariably must find a specialized market niche that permits him to make that choice or else submit to the prevailing logic.

Contrary to the widespread belief that this condition is a 21st century manifestation of American Exceptionalism, less extreme versions of the malaise exist in most European countries. American moralism has its parallel in European denial. Although religious criteria for economic and social inequality are not typical components of European analysis, the Left in most of these countries has been isolated from the masses of working poor, most of them immigrants who increasingly perform much of the service and manual work of their nations. Uprisings of unemployed and alienated youth in suburban Paris and Marseilles, and similar discontent in Italy, Switzerland and elsewhere have been ignored by the Left or have been greeted with handwringing but no creative thought and action. This decades-long negligence has contributed to the rise of a new religious sectarianism among many immigrants and the surge of nationalism and a neo-fascist Right, which has seized on immigration as a hot button issue. One need only consult the precipitous decline of the French and Italian Communist Parties, and the integration of the Socialists throughout Europe into the neo-liberal consensus to draw the deadly parallels with the United States to measure the consequence of the Left’s failures.

After all, if we live in a global capitalist system where national boundaries, although significant, are becoming increasingly porous, we should expect rough similarities across borders in the conditions under which the class struggle is fought. There are differences from country to country in the pace of retreat, and its discourse, but not in the fact of retreat itself. Some countries of Latin America are engaged in the struggle for a genuine radical democracy and for an egalitarian economic and social system. In Germany a Left social democracy is in the process of being born, and some constituents of the World Social Forum are seeking a new politics to correspond to globalization. But when not consigned to the margins of political and social discourse, much of the global Left, has been integrated into one or another version of neo-liberal centrism, the assumption of which is to tacitly accept capitalism as a more or less permanent feature of economic, political and social life.

Whether enterprises are nationalized or privately owned, wage-labor and its exploitation are no longer challenged, even theoretically, nor are market imperatives; where once we had a lively discussion concerning the conditions for radical, direct democracy the political system of representative, liberal-democratic institutions is now taken for granted by most of the Left; and the ideological and cultural hegemony of capital remains in place because even the intellectual Left has been silenced or, if it persists in some sense, has been effectively excluded from the main conversation. And when evoked the concept “radical democracy” has been degraded to mean various aspects of electoral reform such as the abolition of the electoral college, institution of proportional representation, measures to insure that blacks, presumably reliable Democratic voters, are not systematically excluded from voting by state authorities, and instant runoff balloting. These are, of course, all worthy objectives and should be fought for with much more vigor than at present. But none challenges the idea of “representation” itself which remains the deeply flawed basis of liberal democracy, or the consequences of years of judicial decisions affirming the sanctity of productive

private property in matters such as governance and workers' rights. In the face of the most comprehensive transformation of the social geography and concentration of economic and social power of our society since the industrial revolutions of the 18th and 19th century, almost no political tendency has placed these transformations at the center of their program nor mounted a consistent struggle against capital flight.

The scandal of contemporary electoral politics is that what passes for a foreign policy debate means that the unmet needs of the majority of Americans have been ignored by the parties, and their supplicants. Even the Left is caught up in the exigencies of "foreign policy" mainly because it has lost its political perspective and, in effect, has become, at best, a moral movement in behalf of the wretched of the earth. This means that the Left is rapidly losing its political character. Under conditions of consent, politics exist when political formations and states obtain the consent, both for their programs and, perhaps more important, for the state form itself, of majorities or significant minorities of the underlying population. The activist Left has lost sight of the elementary proposition that politics is, in the first place forged in the struggle over the concerns of everyday life such as housing and food prices, whether our kids are afforded a decent education, and who controls social space, especially urban space. How do we combat the alarming tendency that forces many to engage in work without end? A crucial task of a Left turn is to transform questions that are coded as private troubles into public issues. Its second task is to interrogate the state form and suggest new forms of social rule.

Capital does not always afford its opponents good opportunities to build counter hegemonies. This may be one of those moments. Since 1973, with impunity, leading industrial corporations such as the Big Three Auto corporations, General Electric, the four largest steel and rubber companies, and the major packinghouse companies the constellation of industrial sectors where hard won union wages and benefits drove the vaunted prosperity of the US economy, have dismantled scores of

their major plants, sold out to private financial firms which have contracted the to low wage areas abroad or to rural areas and small towns or, if they remain open, sharply reduced employment. At the same time, where union labor once predominated in most basic industries we have seen the rise of a huge non-union production sector within United States in all of these sectors, chiefly in the South but also in rural areas of border states such as Kentucky and Missouri and other states of the Northeast and Midwest. Although many of these plants are supposedly owned by independent contractors, they are typically controlled by the giant corporations. The migration of important production industries belies the conventional wisdom that we are a post-industrial society. So, too, the huge influx of foreign auto corporations that have built and operated several dozen plants in the South and in border states. And, of course, accelerating a pattern of the post-World War Two period when many leading US financial and industrial corporations collaborated with the government to restore the economies of Western Europe, we have witnessed the growth of US capital's investments abroad, now mainly in Southeast Asia and Latin America where wages are low and working conditions border on internal slavery.

But good jobs are also disappearing in finance, administration and the retail and wholesale sectors. The periodic wave of mergers and acquisitions are not employment neutral. These gyrations of Wall Street and other financial markets, the relentless application of cybernetics to the financial workplace have produced a steady stream of layoffs among workers who gave their loyalty to employers and believed themselves immune from the uncertainties of the market. We can here note the failure of the unions in the financial sector to mobilize workers. Workers pensions have diminished by 90% to zero in state capital regulated buyouts (Bear Stearns being the most recent example) and in the bankruptcies from Enron to World Com. As in much of industrial production, job losses in finance, retail and wholesale trades are due, not primarily to outsourcing but to technological change, and restructuration of ownership, the purposes of which are the

elimination of living labor and the maintenance of profitability and restructuring of fictitious capital in times of transition and uncertainty.

However we are also suffering the effects of a massive, capital-driven restructuring of the workforce. The two main characteristics of these changes are the emergence of a new stratum of salaried, educationally qualified technical employees who produce the software, maintain highly sophisticated computers, communications and information systems, and provide the “creative talent” to major communications corporations such as Microsoft, Apple, Time Warner, Viacom and other television and internet corporations. A growing group of similarly qualified technical intellectuals are somewhat less fortunate: they have joined the ranks of precarious, contingent labor. Just as a substantial fraction of low wage labor is forced to shape up on a daily or seasonal basis, many technical workers have become precarious contract workers. For example, Microsoft has a two tier system in its main workplaces: half are regular employees and enjoy benefits, but lower salaries; the other half are better paid but are precarious and must pay for their own benefits. Tens of thousands of part-time professors are the objects of a cruel deception. From the early 1970s most who earn a PhD and remain in college teaching have failed to land full-time tenure track jobs. In the last decade, 71 % of the professoriate constitutes part of the vast army of temporary, precarious, proletarianized workers. Their working lives consist of teaching six or seven courses every semester, which leaves them little time and psychic space to pursue what they expected during their schooling: to be able to perform scholarship, writing, make films, musical compositions, paintings and other arts.

In sum, since the 1980s we have entered an era of the steady disappearance of secure employment for nearly all categories of workers, qualified or semiskilled. A dream of capital has been realized: labor has been put in competition with itself and most workers are thrown back on their own individual resources to

secure some measure of social insurance and steady employment. As the corporations of the “new high tech economy” no less than older industrial, and financial corporations expand the ranks of contingent, temporary and part-time labor, they have eliminated millions of real jobs and maintain a two-tier wage system where a minority enjoys the traditional benefits and the rest must fend for themselves. This shift is historic and, at least in the last sixty years unprecedented. Once, under the impact of strong unions, most workers could assume that when hired they could expect a wage commensurate with the historical level of material culture expressed in progressively increased wages in excess or at least equal to the inflation rate; that the employer would offer health benefits; if laid off they would be recalled when business picked up; and, even in non-union workplaces the employer would observe a seniority provision that assured some a chance for advancement. Today, workers are increasingly hired as temporary employees or contractors, without health or pension benefits, no holiday or vacation pay, and can count on a stipulated, terminal time period of employment, meaning they might or might not be renewed at the same rates of pay, or be replaced by workers willing to work for less.

Until the mid-1950s unions represented more than a third of the private sector labor force and set the standard for the rest. Labor’s power at the workplace persisted for the next two decades, even as its membership base eroded in proportion to the rise of employment in financial services, retail and wholesale and communications. Now Organized Labor is reduced to a little more than seven percent of private sector employment and has barely managed to maintain its economic advantage over workers wages in non-union enterprises. In the face of this disastrous decline of labor’s organized power, wages are falling for all workers and not only for those who lack traditional union protections As the price of promised continuation of relatively secure employment unionized workers are becoming in fact, if not intention, “philanthropists” to corporate wealth by granting employers steep wage and benefits concessions. But the notion

of “secure” is highly doubtful. As we have learned from the 2007 negotiations in the auto industry these promises are proving to be hollow. For example, following the previously negotiated General Motors pact, no sooner did Chrysler workers, under tremendous pressure, narrowly approve a new collective bargaining agreement that established a two-tier wage system for the first time since the union consolidated its reign among all the major auto corporations almost seventy years ago, the company announced it would lay off as much as a third of its workers and shutter a number of plants. GM and Ford had already announced mass layoffs. And their union, the United Auto Workers, once the flagship of industrial union standards, despite strong evidence of deterioration of union- administered welfare plans in the public and private sector, agreed to assume management of a shaky benefits system, without having negotiated adequate funding to maintain the current level. Some workers resisted making these concessions and the union leadership, fearing defeat, called phony, short-lived strikes at GM and Chrysler to cool the opposition. Emerging with a victory in hand, we can expect the auto “bargain” to have a ripple effect in many other labor negotiations, because capital no longer needs the excuse of declining sales or falling market share to justify its assault; its only rationale for racing to the bottom, is that it has the capacity to subordinate labor and that it has a willing partner, the top leadership of many of the major unions, to discipline the work force. And lest some believe the auto fiasco was an isolated incident, we recommend they look at recent statements by the leader of the country’s second largest union who has called for a new era of collaboration between capital and labor and the leaders of the AFL-CIO who often echo some of these sentiments.

What most workers lack is a militant union with the will to fight these flagrant attacks on their jobs and living standards with a national movement to inspire and support them. We have learned from the collective experiences of workers across a wide variety of industries and occupations not to rely on the sound judgment or the militant instincts of most union leaders. Some, primarily at the local level, have shown courage and the will to fight. But currently

the general environment surrounding labor relations is one of compromise and retreat. Many local officers find themselves pressured to bow to the deals made at the top by their leaders and the central executives of large corporations, leaving the rank and file to act on its own. What the unions lack is a militant minority in the ranks and among local union leaders with the capacity to effectively oppose the disturbing drift toward class collaboration among a significant section of the national leadership. While the fragmented Opposition, including some elected local leaders, fought valiantly against the proposed Auto settlement and, as a sheer act of will and intelligence rather than institutional power, were able to make a real dent in the national leadership's hoped-for consensus among the rank and file, on a broad scale a coherent force for workers interests will not appear spontaneously. For a genuine opposition to emerge requires organizations that are independent and, therefore, not subject to the domination of existing trade unions, let alone employers. Such organizations would place their loyalty in the union rank and file and the working class generally not the large corporations. The possibility of the formation of an independent workers organization that intervenes in trade union and other kinds of workers struggles would be greatly enhanced if it was supported by a *new political formation*.

7. **The Right to the City**

In the wake of massive deindustrialization the cities, once citadels of radicalism and labor militancy, are being more or less rapidly transformed into financial centers, real estate boondoggles, playgrounds for the rich or, in many Northeast and Midwest towns, receptacles for the working poor. New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, along with a half dozen Southern cities like Atlanta, Charlotte, Dallas, Houston and some in the Southwest such as Tuscon and Las Vegas thrive on the affluence wrought by the financial sector or oil, and also on their attractiveness to foreign money.

But the once proud cities of Detroit, Newark, Baltimore, Cleveland, Flint, Toledo, Akron and St. Louis where the labor movement and its Left once had more than a foothold of economic and political power, and where black and Latino workers, achieved through prolonged struggle a proud place in the industrial heartland of the United States are symbols of the desolation that capital has wrought in the wake of its rampant restructuring. Today more than a million black youth face a future prospect of prison or joining the military, but have little chance of obtaining civilian employment, even at substandard wages. Where forty years ago, the black freedom movement and sections of the labor movement spearheaded campaigns to force federal, state and local governments to undertake large-scale public sector employment programs and expanded income support for the unemployed, today absent protest and resistance, many black neighborhoods, are little more than receptacles of poverty. Lacking an adequate tax base, most deindustrialized cities and towns are barely able to provide education, health and other civic services. Even then facilities are broken, resources threadbare and services woefully unable to meet even the basic needs of residents. Hospitals in these communities are closing, classrooms bulge as teachers struggle to maintain minimum order, let alone being able to teach. The streets are marked by shredded pavement, potholes and local roads have become the full-employment act for body shops. As a result, many cities have lost population to the suburbs, and lack revenues with which to support their vital services. Even financialization would not materially assist their substantial black populations. With the exception of their universities and the public sector, now among the largest employers they are, in the main, victims of their incapacity for financialization, whose various branches dominate private sector investment and employment. If they lack a university they had better be close to a prison where security guards, cooks and cafeteria workers, and maintenance people get jobs.

But as the best job in town is for \$7.00 an hour at McDonald's or Burger King, and joblessness afflicts a third to

half the population, even these locations proved too costly when China and India beckoned. For example, Milwaukee, Cleveland and Newark, which were, traditionally, examples of industrial diversity and strong unions, remain thirty years after capital flight, sites of high unemployment, urban decay and despair. Like Flint, Newark is victim to an economic hurricane while New Orleans, the scene of the recent ecological and engineering disaster known as Hurricane Katrina, exemplify the wages of Capital's decision to wipe out black and workers' power through policies of less than benign neglect. That the former premier steel town, Pittsburgh, survives as semi-viable economic city is due, chiefly, to its transformation into a regional financial center; but the steel towns that surround it and many within its borders are empty of hope. Textiles and garments, once a mainstay of New England and many middle Atlantic cities such as New York and Philadelphia and also small and medium sized cities and towns, first moved South and to rural areas Fifty years after the migration of New England textile mills to the American South, and the disappearance of machinery-producing plants, cities such as historic Lawrence, Fall River, and New Britain remain beleaguered, their main streets largely abandoned, their young people gone to seek work elsewhere, including the military, their older people often living destitute lives. Even if their houses are paid off many retirees on poverty-level fixed incomes are frequently hard-pressed to pay fuel bills and eat regularly at the same time, maintain their automobiles in communities with no mass transportation and, when faced by inevitable medical bills, cannot meet the deductibles or co-pays.

In the great metropolitan centers of New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Boston, Atlanta and elsewhere living costs, escalating rents, high food prices, rising school tuition, exceed the ability of many working people to remain in the cores of these regions. We have entered a period reminiscent of the enclosures that drove hundreds of thousands of English peasants from the land. Now, manual and clerical workers and salaried technical and professional workers are driven further into the suburbs and even the periphery of the suburbs. Frequently

workers travel 25-75 miles a day to work and an equal distance to return home. With the growing cost of car and home heating fuel working class wages, including those of teachers and health care professionals can barely prevent even relatively well-paid unionized workers from sinking into de facto if not technical poverty. As the year 2007 ended, the President of the large union of commercial and residential doormen and janitors announced a successful contract settlement for 20,000 members in commercial buildings. But union president Michael Fishman was not jubilant: He allowed that the modest increases in the new agreement may be enough to equal the inflation rate and stave off economic decline for a group of workers who earn more than the average working class wage in New York City and well above the national average as well but foresaw little chance for genuine improvement in their living conditions.

In the early 1940s novelist Ruth McKenney published her semi-autobiographical novel "My Sister Eileen." Later made into a successful movie, and a blockbuster Broadway musical "Wonderful Town" it is a narrative of two sisters from Ohio who come to New York in search of their destiny. Finding a Greenwich Village basement apartment the story is a hilarious account of what until recently was a fairly common migration story: Cheap Manhattan rent enabled artists, writers, actors and other intellectuals of various sorts to forge careers. They lived in working class neighborhoods, mostly South Greenwich Village and the Lower East Side that resembled the great ethnic diversity that was part and parcel of one of the great American myths. But foreclosures, evictions, and other causes--notably the migration of working class, technical and second tier professionals such as teachers and social service workers--, are producing an historical reversal. Since the early years of the 20th century, people of newly- won means gravitated to the suburban and rural districts of metropolitan regions where old money traditionally resided: single-family dwellings and rural environments provided some of the amenities missing in the overcrowded cities. This trend continued into the 70s. But the past quarter century has witnessed

the transformation of center cities into posh, upper middleclass neighborhoods where rents and other everyday costs far exceed the incomes of ordinary folk. Now only first tier professionals, successful artists, business people and high and middle level corporate and government officials can afford to live in these areas. As older residents retire or die, or are evicted by real estate developers eager to convert their apartments to luxury rentals or condos, the ecology of traditional working class neighborhoods is more or less rapidly transformed. Where once people of varying backgrounds, ethnicities and races lived together, now the city is increasingly segregated and more economically and racially homogeneous. Students and creative people still come from small town and provincial America to imbibe the wonders of urban life. But unless they are willing to pack three or four in small East Village apartments they too must seek habitats in the city's internal peripheries of Bronx, Queens and especially Brooklyn. With the migration of the working class also came the dispersal of Bohemia, but without the cheap rent that once made its facsimiles possible.

The imperial imperative has wrought devastation to Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, among many other parts of the globe and this imperative has monopolized media and political attention. One of the main sites of the capitalist imperative *within* manifests itself in the great urban purge, or the modern enclosures. This purge, the result of the alliance of financial and commercial capital and the state in a mammoth effort to solve the problem of excess money with no place to go, raises the questions What are the forces laying claim to cityscape? Where are the voices demanding solutions to the contemporary form of the land question: who has the Right to the City? A new political formation is needed to place the class fight in the cities at center stage. This fight transgresses the traditional divisions between country and the city because the "country" is diminished by ecologically dangerous suburban sprawl so that the concept 'urban' embraces a wider geographic and social space.. The fight transgresses the separation of housing, education and transportation movements. It includes groups that have produced city gardens that periodically are threatened by

commercial and residential development geared to the upper reaches of society; the consumer cooperatives, some of which have formed alliances with small organic and other farmers that challenge the large private food retailers; and the small number of worker production cooperatives and small artisans whose autonomy is perpetually threatened by banks, developers and their allies in City Halls.

The Right to the City resolutely opposes ruling and managerial class- exclusive residential and commercial building, and the exercise of eminent domain to achieve this goal by evictions and property condemnations and grants public authorization for sports stadiums and high priced condominiums rather than housing that meets working-class needs . It poses the urgent need to treat housing as a non-commodified public utility, that is either publicly owned or organized as limited equity cooperatives(no tenant can sell her apartment privately, only back to the co-op) to set priorities in other aspects of urban space that provide parks and other popular recreation facilities, and through progressive taxation transfer funds from private coffers to public uses such as mass transit and education rather than using mechanisms such as bond issues for financing construction that ultimately result in higher taxes for workers, small business people and professionals. The Right to the City would invest authority for issues regarding the allocation of space to community democratic decision-making.

8. Problems of Organization

To achieve these goals a “party”, meaning an ideologically coherent, but non-sectarian political formation, is needed to bring together workers, adherents of social movements, and intellectuals who share similar views and possess the political will to forge a new society. This political formation would intervene in struggles that oppose permanent war; fight the spreading unemployment

among blacks and Latinos, youth and many other workers; engage in everyday struggles that raise issues about the quality and the prices of food, health care, education and shelter; address the household oppression of women; fight against the passive, concessionary style of the unions, organize battles for democratic urban space; and encourage the formation of a powerful anti-capitalist wing of the ecology movement based on principles that would span the gulf between environmentalists and labor, and on the need to radically alter the ways in which we collectively interact with “nature”. And it would challenge the prevailing system of political participation, joining those who already recognize the authoritarianism of representative government and, as a transitional program, also work to enact measures that would end the winner-take-all basis of our political system.

As vital as questions of principle are those of organization. We do not propose to organize a new political formation out of whole cloth. We are mindful of two dangers: making declarations of “parties” before the conditions for their emergence have matured; and starting an organization before many of the historical and contemporary issues outlined in this statement are discussed among a fairly wide range of activists and intellectuals. For these reasons, we propose to inaugurate The Radical Project, leaving some of the more fundamental questions of political and ideological identification and organization for discussion. We do not begin with a specific platform on every global and domestic issue, even if some questions have been resolved by historical experience. To attempt to address everything at the outset is a formula for splits and rancor. Yet we will not shrink from controversy nor are we prepared to foreclose the airing of honest differences of some of the truly sensitive issues.

Beyond concrete struggles leading to building a much wider conception of political opposition, the radical political formation dedicates itself to contesting the prevailing “common sense” of the hegemonic capitalist ideology that the market is the given context for all economic relations and even if not self-

regulating in all circumstances, requires no intervention to correct its inequities. (Of course when Capital needs the state to bail itself out, it does not hesitate to raise a hue and cry. And the state obliges by pouring hundreds of billions into the stock market, granting tax relief to the biggest capitalists while distributing crumbs to the rest of us).

The Radical Project would:

1) Make the distinction between the prevailing individualism and the struggle to achieve genuine individuality.

2) Enter a long period of research and discussion of what is living and what is dead in concepts such as socialism and communism and find links, both intellectually and politically, between the anarchist critique of the state forms that arose in the wake of socialist victories at the turn of the 20th century and the democratic, libertarian socialist tradition that views the state as part of the problem, not part of the solution.

(3) Undertake discussion and research on the historical legacy and contemporary relevance of Marx and Marxism relating to questions of new and historical forms of capitalist production and reproduction, the question of organization: what is a party, what is a federation and other political forms, what is the relation of nation and state, what are the main cultural contradictions—of forms of aesthetic representation and of everyday life; questions of agency, especially the theory of class in its conventional mode in which class, race and gender are considered separately and in another mode where it may be described in terms of power; the nature and specificity of class struggle; and the significance of consumerism in relation to hegemony.

(4) Debate and discovery of new forms of society that might be instituted to meet popular needs and would be the basis of a new political program.

(5) Initiate and collect extensive scholarly work and educational activities on questions of race, sex and gender, with particular emphasis on their relative autonomy.

(6) Take seriously the achievements of psychoanalysis in both problems of individual pathologies and social pathologies and discover ways of integrating these with the Radical Project.

(7) Make serious efforts to recruit ecologists and scientists to develop the critique of capitalist industrialization and the ecological implications of the spread of consumer society. This effort would entail a profound investigation of the new forms of work and everyday life that would accompany a society that was in harmony with ecological principles.

(8) Create new institutions of education and communications and build upon the already existent alternative media. **Among these starting a newsweekly in both hard copy and internet is a high priority.**

(9) Publish books and pamphlets

(10) Organize and encourage a network of study groups and radical schools that would offer courses that address both theoretical problems and those of contemporary politics but also music, performance and art classes and offer a wide variety of cultural activities for children as well as adults such as concerts and choral societies, spaces for band and orchestra performances and rehearsals, sports, health clubs.

In Stage One, the Radical Project will call for and assist in:

1) the formation of *working groups* around the questions raised in this statement and others they may wish to discuss. In this connection it would issue study guides, bibliographies and, if requested, supply speakers on the question of radical political organization. These working groups would also consider

appropriate forms of practical intervention in their communities, workplaces, professional and civic organizations.

2) issue *working papers, pamphlets, op-eds* on theoretical and political subjects that are relevant to the eventuality of a new political formation. These would appear on the Radical Project Website and would enter the blogosphere, meaning that it would have room for interactive discussions. Of course we invite contributions from participants and look forward to publishing a discussion bulletin reflecting the debates;

3) *intervene* through articles and papers for the labor- Left and left-liberal press on current public, political, labor, cultural and other questions;

In Stage Two, after a period of extensive discussion and political practice at the local level, *encourage working groups to become affiliates of the project.*

Eventually launch a national effort to found a radical press and call for a national conference to consider the formation of a political association, federation or party.

Conclusion

Since the dawn of the industrializing era the Left has shown its abilities to devise powerful strategies to transform workplaces, communities, nations, and the world. For example, at the turn of the 20th century and into the 1930s, the Communists, Left Socialists and the Anarcho-Syndicalists spearheaded the organization of millions of unskilled and semi-skilled industrial workers into a new type of union in which craft and non-craft labor were in a single unit. They played important roles in building democratic, militant and powerful unions. But, only in exceptional instances, did the Left and the unions they helped build extend their province to the neighborhoods in which their members and potential members lived. They honed their skills at the point of material production but the fight over the conditions of what may be termed the “reproduction of the relations of production”—housing, health, education, community development, in short not the production of things but the production of social space, captured the attention neither of the trade union leaders nor that of the rank and file of Organized Labor. As a result, the black freedom movement, labor-oriented intellectuals such as Chicago sociologist Saul Alinsky, and members of Left organizations were obliged to conduct housing and education struggles outside the framework of the labor movement. The burst of neighborhood councils and other forms of community organizations after World War Two occurred mainly without the active support of even the most progressive of the new unions, who, in the main, were focused narrowly on the workplace. There were exemplary exceptions: in the wake of the first wave of industrial unionism beginning at the turn of the 20th century Socialist and then Communist-led unions in New York City, Chicago, St. Louis, San Francisco and Memphis among a few others were in the forefront of the fight for public housing and for health care. Tenant organizations formed alliances with the new industrial unions which, in some cities, sponsored them

both financially and politically. Before World War Two without the benefit of employer recognition or collective bargaining Left-led teachers unions played important roles in promoting schools that centered on children's needs, took leadership in fighting for school lunch and after school programs and, for a time, together with some CIO councils, were strong advocates for building public recreation and sports facilities.

But the post-war period altered what was once a promising incipient labor-community alliance capable of addressing the everyday needs of working people beyond the workplace. It may be argued that Cold-War considerations, both the Left purge and the alliance of liberal labor leaders with capital, created the condition for the narrowing of the scope of the labor movement's purview to an almost exclusive emphasis on workplace issues. Our formidable task today is to recapture what was positive and progressively militant in the left culture of the past and place it in a fresh perspective that is relevant to today's issues without falling into nostalgia for the days of old.

This document has tried to make clear and place in historical perspective, one central point. The social need for a Left turn, in the US and beyond, has become increasingly urgent while (and partly because) the left movements of the past have declined. The rich lessons and legacies of the Left provide many of the materials needed for the changes that can enable its renewal. The Left turn we envision aims to fill the vacuum in the political and social spheres in the US with daring systemic solutions for and alternatives to an increasingly violent, oppressive, and unjust capitalism. While these are surely dark times, they also offer an immense opportunity if the forces on the Left can see and respond to it. That is the goal. Please join with us.

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