

WHERE IS THE OUTRAGE?

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INTRODUCTION

We are in the midst of a five-year old depression, the deepest since the early 1930s. By official measures economic growth has slowed to a near standstill; due to union weakness and a ferocious employer campaign, wages and living standards are declining. And equally grim, the social wage — the panoply of state benefits such as jobless payments, Medicare, and social security — are sagging due to budget cuts or, in the case of social security, an artificial cap on maximum taxable income. The attack on the social wage extends far and wide: cuts to school lunch programs and to school operating budgets that result in increased class size, the termination of income support for chronically unemployed, layoffs of public workers, (for years until recently together with health, the only real growth sectors of the labor market), slashed food stamp and housing subsidies. And the recent right-wing offensive against women's health, particularly the flagship which is abortion rights, has both social and economic consequences: Congress has consistently refused to fund abortions for poor women. If you are poor, many state health systems are not funded for abortions and there have been severe restrictions imposed on abortion availability. The American dream of owning a house is fundamentally finished for many. The bleak prospect is that this economic downturn in Europe and the United States will be much longer, one might speculate that it signifies chronic stagnation. As the population grows, jobless levels will also grow or at least fail to shrink, even when the economy adds paid work¹ The United States and Europe have experienced high levels of unemployment, stagnant economic growth — even by the flawed standards of official sources, the most consistent since the 1930s.

The American Dream states that, in this meritocracy, anyone who works hard in school and on the job can attain higher living standards than their

¹ I will not dignify most of the growth of paid labor with the term "job". A job is usually offered at a living wage substantially above the poverty line; it usually carries health, pension and paid vacation benefits; the worker expects to be recalled, if laid off temporarily. And there is almost no instance of wage theft. Apart from the health sector social media corporations and electronic computing, most employment is now offered on the basis of temporary "contracts".

parents or grandparents. The innovative risk-takers might even become rich. And it was true that in the industrialization era and the post-world war two years of US global economic and technological supremacy when the demand for technical, administrative labor and teachers exceeded the supply of sons and daughters of professions and small business owners — the primary traditional source of qualified labor. Beginning in 1945, colleges and universities expanded, especially public sector institutions. The funding was largely supplied by the Federal Government under the GI Bill of Rights that paid veterans to go to school, paid their college tuition, and supplied significant grant money to states that signed on to the expansion by creating new post-secondary schools. Private schools were also beneficiaries of the Federal largesse, mostly in the form of paid veterans' tuition, but in some cases, also due to the funds provided by the permanent war economy that followed the world war's conclusion. Ironically it might be argued that the Soviet Union was a primary donor to this development. After the GI bill, huge sums for higher education emanated from the Cold War growth of the Pentagon. To stem Soviet expansion, millions of young people were afforded post-secondary schooling and since the US had become the main global power, both economically and militarily, there were plenty of jobs for trained technical workers. These jobs resulted, in a large measure, from anti-communist, Cold War programs such as the Marshall plan, the technological innovations destined first for military equipment and given away to the private sector and, of course, the computer revolution which took off in the 1950s.²

In the US four million homes have suffered foreclosure and only about 20% of them "qualified" for federal assistance to forestall eviction. Perhaps most appalling, in contrast to the Great Depression which hit older workers hardest, this time they are joined by young workers, most them with high school diplomas or less but also a substantial number of college graduates. The illusion that a college education insures a good job has been shattered; the mainstream media have not caught on and some unemployed and precarious workers still harbor hope that the collapse of the good job is temporary. But most young people are living the reality that they might be the inheritors of the jobless future. And older workers, those over 50 are the victims of rampant, unapologetic age discrimination. When the Bureau of Labor Statistics announces that the economy has created nearly 200,000

² It should be remembered that the development of the electronic computer was a wartime program, even if the digital concept was a techno-scientific discovery. Like radar, universities were granted huge sums for research and development to aid the war effort. Notable among them were Princeton, Cornell, and the University of California.

“jobs” in June, 2013 what they forgot to add is that, aside from the health care industry, most of them are of the precarious variety. There is work in the service industry (a euphemism for restaurants), big box retail stores like Target and Wal-Mart, and seasonal construction. The servers make their living mostly on tips, and fast food and big box workers are paid at or close to the minimum wage which is far below the official poverty level. Many immigrant workers in restaurants and construction are victims of wage theft; often they are paid wages below the legal minimums, their tips are stolen by the boss, and they work overtime for straight-time pay. Still, the number of official jobless stubbornly exceeds 7% or about 12.5 million; but if one counts the discouraged workers who have left the workforce, the part-time and contingent workers whose hours not working for wages are discounted by official statistics, the figure climbs to 15% or nearly 24 million.³

There is also the matter of student debt. In 2013 the size of this debt exceeded credit cards. After a year of partial interest rate debt amnesty, the looming doubled interest rate provoked an outcry that reached the ears of Congress, but the proposed “compromise” did not reduce the principal; in fact, it will raise interest by 25%. Politicians are loathe to discipline the banks, the main beneficiaries of student loans, for two principal reasons: the banks and insurance companies supply campaign funds to members of both parties and are pleased to hire retired, or sitting legislators as lobbyists and public relations staff; and few if any of them, favor the enlargement of public higher education funded by progressive tax revenues. This would elevate higher education to a right rather than a privilege, like elementary and secondary education which are funded out of general revenues rather than the net income of families and individuals.

Despite the conventional wisdom that the remaining good jobs required post-high school credentials politicians no less than bankers are committed to the idea that college is a privilege that should be treated like any other commodity. Thus, higher education, like driver’s licenses and road privileges should mainly be funded as a user tax. And that is what state governments have been doing since the 1980s, the era of neo-liberal policies that now require students to bear the lion’s share of operating costs. Higher education now is mainly privatized, but students have little or no control over their

³ Recently, the Bureau of Labor Statistics has tried to measure the number of “discouraged” workers who have left the labor force, but it has still not counted involuntary part-time labor as unemployment. Moreover, the official numbers do not measure under-employment or reflect the hidden indications of joblessness.

education. Federal sequester, state and local legislatures have slashed the social wage mercilessly in pursuit of “paying down the deficit” at a time when most states pander to corporations by keeping individual and business taxes low. The attack on the social wage extends far and wide. This program is, of course, a huge historic reversal of the half century of public policy that tended to increase both personal income and the social wage in the wake of rising unemployment and economic stagnation. Needless to say, this reversal amounts to a frontal assault on the salaried middle class, and the working class, especially the poor many of whom work for wages that are far below the official poverty level.

When one peruses the internet, social media and even the liberal periodicals, they report and deplore these appalling developments. Liberal economists Paul Krugman and Joseph Stiglitz never tire to argue for a return to the job creating and income-enhancing policies that stemmed from the New Deal. They show that if current, ideologically-motivated practices persist, the likelihood of a genuine economic recovery is almost impossible. As Keynesian economists, Krugman and Stiglitz hold to the doctrine that in times of economic crisis, the government should provide income to the jobless, either by creating public jobs or extending income supports to a wider swath of the population. Implicitly they are members of the under-consumptionist camp. Their pleas and prognoses have been ignored by the Congress and the Obama administration, both of which are committed, in varying degrees, to austerity. In the past decade and well into the austerity-generated future — we are witnessing the death rattle of the fabled American Dream.

Scientifically-based technologies still account for many jobs in engineering of all kinds, and health care, but the educational boom has petered out; there are actually teacher layoffs in many states since 2008 and in many academic fields, including the sciences, hiring has come to virtual halt. Law firms are shrinking their workforces and law schools are, for the first time since the 1930s, witnessing declining applications. The Masters in Business Administration (MBAs), the credential required by corporations to fill their bureaucratic hierarchies is still a sought-after degree, but hiring has slowed to a crawl, except for graduates of the tiny group of elite schools. The reason corporations have reduced MBA hiring is connected to the technological revolution. Now many managerial functions are assumed by the computer. For example, stock trades, nearly 70%, are now largely governed by computer programs and, consequently, the number of investment professionals is on the downslide. The computer has also displaced legions of clerical workers and middle managers.

The basis for economic stagnation was laid in the late 1960s. With Europe and Japan's recovery, the market for US- made products — except computers and arms — was sharply reduced, especially because Europe and Japan introduced more advanced technologies in the production of steel, electrical equipment and autos before US corporations were willing to make the needed investments. When they did introduce the more advanced production technologies, they had already lost much of their off-shore markets. Indeed, now about a quarter of US car sales are of non-US origin, even though Japanese, Korean and some European auto companies have together opened thirteen “transplants” in the Southern United States. But the domestic auto and steel industries are marked by sharply-reduced employment, even as their total production has, thanks to computer-driven labor processes, been enlarged. China and other countries of Southeast Asia became the sites for much of basic textile production; the apparel industry has largely moved to Southeast Asia as well and China is producing steel for markets once dominated by the US industry.

As US exports began to contract in 1973 President Nixon took the United States off the gold standard, so the dollar began to float, although it remains to this day the referent for other currencies. Deindustrialization was somewhat slowed, but picked up steam in the 1980s. By the turn of the century, plant migration to the global South combined with computer-driven technologies meant that US production industries had lost more than half of plants and workers, leaving many cities and smaller communities bereft: Flint and Detroit, Michigan, once the center of the car industry are now below half their population size forty years ago. Buffalo, Baltimore, Youngstown, Cleveland and Western Pa. towns like Homestead and Braddock lost most or all of their steel factories. Capital flight has reduced Akron, once the center of the rubber industry, to a veritable ghost town. It is now hard to remember that New York City once had over a million industrial workers in unionized apparel, textile, consumer electrical goods such as TVs, machinery and metal manufacturing. Today, that number has been reduced by more than 90%. New York remains the country's health care, academic and financial center, but only shards of apparel production and some small machine shops remain. Its once awesome waterfront has experienced extreme automation that has sharply reduced its labor force. Construction and transportation are still important components of the city's economy but they operate with fewer workers.

Good union factory jobs were replaced by services, mostly retail stores in fast food and big box chains like Target and Wal-Mart. These are almost invariably non -union, and based to a great extent on enforced part-time,

near-minimum wage labor. As we have observed health care has experienced a dramatic expansion and until the depression so did public services. Health institutions are now the largest private-sector employer and, although under severe attack, including layoffs, the public sector still has union density of more than 33% and comprises a sixth of the country's work force. How far the attacks on unions in education and public administration can go will depend on how much the labor movement marshals its forces to fight back. In part, the question is how well they can persuade parents, community organizations and especially other unions to support their organizations from the downward spiral that seems to keep them on the defensive.

We are now in the fortieth year of unrelieved retreat for the working and living conditions of the great majority of Americans. The unions, once the bulwark of the US standard of living, are in free fall; the few instances where they were moved to protest and resistance yielded only a sprinkle of victories. The most notable victory was the 1997 United Parcel strike of 180,000 workers. The Teamsters Union led by a reform administration, fought for more full-time jobs and wage parity for part-timers and won most of its demands. But the 1980s and 1990s were marked by a string of lost strikes over employer demands for wage, benefits and work rules concessions. In many instances, union members and their leaders were willing to give ground without a fight. They believed that resistance would lead either to certain defeat or the disappearance of their jobs. These were decades when the hallowed labor slogan "solidarity" was either forgotten or brazenly violated by terrified workers and the unions that represented them. The desperate desire for security overwhelmed nearly all other considerations. It was also the era when "replacement" workers undermined strikes. Union members were advised by their leaders not to thwart replacements and certainly to maintain peaceful picket lines. The results were invariably disastrous. In sum, public and private sector workers have endured steady wage deterioration, onerous working conditions and the threats of plant or business removal or layoffs which have proven to be permanent, even if the company stays afloat.

Blacks and Latinos have suffered the worst. Blacks had made significant gains in goods producing industries during and after the war. But 1970s and 1980s deindustrialization left millions destitute. Even when they found alternative employment these "jobs" typically paid half or less the wages they earned in the production industries, came with few or no benefits and were absent protections against arbitrary firings, unilateral employer changes in work rules and work schedules, and decent safety conditions. True, Federal government policies, especially the expansion of public sector jobs, especially in the post

office and local and state administrations created a layer of stable working and middle class in their communities. But many as 80% experienced growing economic instability. Private employers sensed the weakness of the workers' organizations and boldly went on a permanent offensive and public officials were not far behind. Today, the heavily black cities like Detroit, Newark, Cleveland and Flint are destitute. Others like New York, Philadelphia and Chicago are segregated both in terms of racial and ethnic composition and economic inequality. Gentrification has decimated traditional black and Latino communities and it is barely different in historic white working class neighborhoods. New York's Harlem and Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhoods have become sites of white, young middle class settlement as rents have skyrocketed and brownstones are for sale at exorbitant prices. San Francisco, once a racially and ethnically diverse city is now largely whitefied. These developments are symptoms of the changed economy, but they raise the question "where will the service workers live?"

In Genealogies of Citizenship: Markets, Statelessness, and the Right to Have Rights, Margaret Somers acutely argues that the differential treatment of class and racial formations in our societies raises the stakes of what we mean by citizenship. One of her prime examples is the Federal and state governments' response to Hurricane Katrina. The pre-dominantly black community of the lower 9th ward of New Orleans has not been significantly restored, eight years after the disastrous destruction of entire neighborhoods in 2005. The lower 9th and parts of the seventh and eighth wards are still victims of benign neglect. Even the few efforts, conducted in the main by non-government organizations such as Habitat for Humanity, and the celebrity-led Making it Right have made only a minor dent. Housing construction is modest and where a certain density of new homes is built, there are still no nearby services such as grocery stores, lunch counters and other amenities. Somers' claim, that the right to vote, however important, merely scratches the surface of genuine citizenship may be one of the most salient ideas in social and political theory. If the state ignores fundamental economic and social needs of its constituents, they are effectively excluded from participating in the decisions that affect their lives. Tens of thousands of black residents were forced to migrate elsewhere, principally to Texas, Oklahoma and California and many have no prospect of return. Poor, working class residents are thus in state of exception. Of course, the crumbling of the lifeblood of much of Detroit and similar industrially-vacated cities and towns, elevates this condition to a major national class and racial crisis. We are heirs to a time when elementary democratic participation, let alone genuine democracy for a clear minority of the population has become normative and in time may no longer be the

exception as growing legions of the younger generations confront their own economic and political disenfranchisement.⁴ The announcement by Detroit's imposed outside administrator of his intention to file for bankruptcy is merely a symptom of the extent of disenfranchisement.

SIGNS WITHOUT ORGANIZATION

The disenfranchised have not been completely silent. The spring, 2011 Madison, Wisconsin public employees' uprising was the first shot in a season of discontent. Recall, a hundred thousand protesters occupied the state capitol when the governor and his Republican allies were poised to outlaw collective bargaining for public workers. The Madison area labor unions threatened a general strike but retreated before the Democratic Party's proposal, to recall four state senators and the governor. The recall failed to change the balance of legislative power, or to recall Governor Walker, but the most important result was that the direct action movement was dispersed and the old progressives' electoral strategy reemerged. The unions fell into line behind Barack Obama's 2012 re-election campaign, donating \$400 million to the Democrats, a gift that remains unrewarded. But neither Labor nor progressives have been moved to go into the Opposition. Most cling to the forlorn hope that somehow the Center/Right which controls the Democratic Party will rise to the occasion and lead us to the Promised Land. The union leaders grouse, but can be counted on to stay the center/right course because they cannot imagine going into the opposition.

Fall, 2011 was even more inspiring. A few hundred, mostly youthful protesters occupied Zucotti a privately owned park near New York's Wall Street. Their sole demand was that the 1% of the population that had accumulated 45% of the country's wealth be held accountable, in various ways for the relative deprivation of the remaining 99%. New York's municipal powers hesitated to drive them from the site, but when the Occupy Wall Street Movement ventured to block Brooklyn Bridge the police came out swinging and arrested 700 demonstrators. The arrests provoked elements of the local unions to mount a demonstration at a downtown courthouse, but more significantly,

⁴ My comments on New Orleans do not rely on Somers' evaluation although her formulation of the citizenship question is superb. I visited New Orleans and toured, block by block in 2007 and again in 2013 and observed the dereliction of city, state and national governments. The levees have been rebuilt under the supervision of US Army Engineers according to specifications that duplicate the inadequate standards of the previous barriers, even as independent engineering recommendations argued for erecting higher walls between the water and the land.

the Occupy Wall Street movement caught fire. In hundreds of cities and towns in the US and around the globe activists of all ages established encampments in city parks, business districts and city halls. Protesters occupied public space in a largely spontaneous demonstration of the will to resist. The progressives greeted direct action with sympathy, but were determined, following Madison, to steer the protest in to acceptable channels. The Occupy movement was inundated with liberal entreaties to craft a list of demands that could be presented to the local and federal governments and to the leading financial institutions. This was a strategy that would have provided the liberal center, including the Obama administration, with leverage to negotiate a settlement, thwart further direct action, and enlist some of the organizers in the upcoming national electoral campaign. The organizers spurned these efforts and their refusal was rewarded by a coordinated action by the administrations of eighteen cities, most of which were Democratic strongholds, to clear the spaces that had been occupied. The coordination was probably the work of the Justice Department and succeeded by the use of police force.⁵

More recently, in April, 2013 civil rights activists in North Carolina spearheaded a project call Moral Mondays. They demonstrate against the state legislature's frontal assault on voting rights. The revival of direct action, however, is still defensive. Like the Madison uprising the coalition that stages this protest seeks to preserve the status quo, but like Madison and Occupy the movement has no discernible strategy to form a permanent organization that is able to stay alive after the initial flow of activity is spent and to engage the flagrant attack against the black poor on a number of fronts. Similarly students have occupied the governor's office in Florida against the cruel acquittal of George Zimmerman for his murder of Trayvon Martin. And, in protest against solitary confinement and other abusive policies, 41,000 California prisoners went on a hunger strike in the spring. A series of one day strikes by fast food workers in a dozen cities demanded a \$15 an hour minimum wage, about double what the leading corporations offer its non-union workforce.

⁵ Two years after its demise, small Occupy units are still active. In some places they have assisted the evicted to reclaim their homes after foreclosure. In the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, Occupy committees rendered exemplary service to the homeless and displaced residents of Staten Island and other lowland areas. Organizers never cease to promise a comeback and claim that the movement is not dead, but what remains can hardly be called a movement.

The rashes of recent protests are signs without organization. The unions and the established civil rights organizations that support these protests are still tied to the New Deal and Great Society legacies. They cannot (yet) conceive of calling into question the limitations of the liberal center that, in the main, has revealed itself to be a reliable ally of finance capital, or are at least unwilling to challenge it, a fact that was made all too apparent during the depth of the 2008 financial meltdown when Obama as much as Bush lost no time to bail out the banks, insurance companies and troubled auto corporations by a massive transfer of working class and middle class tax money. Besides, we have heard almost no dissent against Medicare cuts, Obama's willingness to entertain proposals to reduce Social Security, and the phony attempt to address the doubled student debt by a "compromise" that eventually would actually raise the interest rate.⁶

We are at a moment when unease characterizes the response of large sections of the people but there is little evidence that, with few exceptions, there is sustained, multi-faceted organized opposition to the prevailing austerity. The intellectuals are mostly bystanders and the activists have returned to largely uncoordinated local protests. In fact, the most impressive movement of this period, Occupy Wall Street explicitly rejected forming a national organization, developing a set of priorities to give flesh to its imaginative slogan, suggesting a large alternative vision to the status quo, and spelling out a strategy to achieve it. Some of Occupy's organizers and supporters argued that to fulfill these goals would inevitably "split the movement". But the lessons of history cannot be ignored or dismissed. All great insurgencies entail splits. The American Revolution left fairly substantial groups of British loyalists behind. The civil war witnessed debates between those wishing only to limit slave expansion and the abolitionists who wanted to abolish it. Radical Republicans pushed through Reconstruction which empowered blacks against those whose desire to preserve the union prompted their proposal to restore elements of the old order. As for social movements, populists broke from the Democratic Party in the 1880s, only to be re-integrated within it through the presidential candidacy of William Jennings Bryan. And the labor movement endured a half century of struggle between its craft and industrial contingents. The Syndicalists who spurned electoral activity and advocated sabotage as a strike tactic bolted the AFL. They formed the Industrial Workers of the World, a revolutionary industrial union, and were expelled from the Socialist Party

⁶ A small group of Senate Democrats led by Elizabeth Warren and Jack Reed have exposed the fraudulent compromise. But except for small groups of student opponents, there is no movement directed to reversing the current prospect that most certainly that the interest rates will increase.

which in the early 1900s was committed to participating in liberal democratic institutions and eschewed all forms of violence, even in self-defense.

SDS and the Anti-Vietnam war movement that it helped inaugurate were estranged from liberal Democrats who, until 1967 steadfastly insisted that the Johnson administration would end the war and militant opposition to the administration would aid the right. Only when Johnson escalated US intervention in Southeast Asia did some prominent liberals like Eugene McCarthy, UAW President Walter Reuther, black freedom leader Martin Luther King Jr., and the leading Socialist intellectual of his generation, Michael Harrington openly criticize the administration's war policy. Moreover, we are recently reminded that the short, but powerful career of the Black Panthers was propelled by the conviction that black oppression could not be effectively countered by peaceful means. Their advocacy and practice of armed always defensive struggle, internationalism instead of Black Nationalism, and revolutionary dialectical materialism, represented a sharp departure from the mainstream of the civil rights movement, and evinced hostility among black cultural nationalists, although they worked with others to oppose police violence against the black communities, and their own members.

Divisions do not necessary weaken the movement. But without a strong organization, a vision and a strategy for change as well as a commitment to open debate controversial questions within and without the organization, the initial impetus for the expansion of the movement will likely peter out. SDS, which took on its initial adult sponsors on questions of anti-communism and the Vietnam War and, after 1967, was often allied with the Panthers, ultimately failed because it refused to become a more coherent political formation. "Coherence" would not have meant strict discipline and ideological unanimity as was the tendency of communist parties. But it would have recognized the importance of vigorous debate about larger ideological questions, would have crafted an organizing program that assisted fledgling chapters to prosper, and would have honed its relationships with other, like-minded organizations and movements. Instead, it remained a loose federation of autonomous groups, did not organize regionally with offices, regular conferences and organizers. It maintained a publications program, mainly the occasional periodical *New Left Notes* and some pamphlets which did provide members with news and opportunities for presenting their views. Instead, when challenged to adopt Marxist-Leninist politics, its leadership was largely unarmed; it had no alternative perspective to offer its 60,000 members and dozens of chapters and so fragmented into Leninist fractions,

most of which were Maoist, neo-Trotskyist or veered toward the Communist Party, and a small anarchist group. The radical democrats who had founded the organization had mostly moved on: some joined the liberal Democrats and ran for public office, became union functionaries, earned their Masters and PhD degrees and entered higher education teaching. But some of the most talented SDS leaders of the late 1960s became Weather activists, or affiliated with the Revolutionary Communist organization and October League, the US labor committee and Progressive Labor. Two efforts toward New Left re-groupment followed: The Movement for a Democratic Society — a post student organization — that was all but still born. A few years after the demise of SDS, the New American movement was formed in 1974 and lasted nine years until it merged with Harrington's Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee.⁷

THE STATE: IDEOLOGY, SYNDROME AND THE MEDIA

There are two problems that inform the history of the American Left and the social movements that have, periodically, electrified a significant fraction of the underlying population. The first and the most ubiquitous is the enormous weight of the state. The second is that of "subjectivity". In contrast to Europe with its centralized political structures, the American state, historically, was decentralized. Although the national government controlled international affairs, domestic politics were left, largely, to the states and to local governments where, at different times, the Left and left-liberals exercised some influence. Some held electoral office, especially at the level of cities and towns; however, beginning in the 1920s and through the 1930s the populists controlled rural state governments, North and South, notably Minnesota's Farmer-Labor Party and populist governments in the Dakotas, the city of Cleveland, and Pennsylvania and California governors who were confirmed populists. Left Democrats were serious contenders for municipal power in Detroit as late as the 1970s, controlling the city council and elected a mayor, Coleman Young, who had been part of the Communist left in the UAW. Socialist administrations governed the cities of Milwaukee, Reading Pa., Stanford and Norwalk, CT. until the end of the 1950s.

However, by the late 1970s and the 1980s the left faded from the electoral scene as, in an era of fiscal crisis, the dominance of the Federal government

⁷ In the interest of full disclosure, I was close to SDS although a few years older. I joined NAM in 1976 and became active in its Los Angeles chapter, taught in its Socialist School and helped with the Gramsci school that preceded its annual national convention. I became a member of its national executive and was on the negotiating committee that effected the merger with DSOC in 1983. I have apologized in print for my support of that merger.

over state and local jurisdictions was tightened. Capital flight and tax concessions to the rich and corporations left many communities flat broke; in fact, in an effort to preserve industry, they granted tax and infrastructure concessions to keep plants in town, further reducing their tax base. Federal education, construction and straight cash grants to bolster local employment meant that the community's resources were more dependent on the Federal and state governments. These were years of gradual surrender of home rule. In New York, for example, the 1976 fiscal crisis resulted in measures that deprived the city of the ability to control its own finances; local autonomy was confined largely, to non-fiscal matters. The city could propose a budget, but it had to be approved by the state. Since Wall Street had gone on a virtual capital strike to provoke the crisis, New York and many other cities were condemned to permanent servitude. Tragically, state and municipal public unions gave their consent to fiscal austerity and showed their loyalty by agreeing to mass layoffs, wage freezes, and relaxation of work rules and job security. The strike weapon, which had been the hallmark of the organizing phase, was systematically surrendered through the enactment of state laws prohibiting them. They were willing to enter into a Faustian bargain: in return for surrendering the strike, state and local governments reversed decades of refusal to recognize unions for the purpose of collective bargaining. But some rank and file movements at the turn of the 21st century succeeded in taking union power at the local level. In Los Angeles an insurgent teacher slate captured the second largest local of the American Federation of Teachers. In New York the largest higher education local of the AFT passed into insurgent hands and the fabled local 100 of the Transport Workers Union became an insurgent. The Chicago Teachers Union, an AFT affiliate was won by the rank and file slate and, 2012 conducted a strike which, for the first time in decades demanded teachers be involved in curriculum decisions and that high stakes test results be removed from the list of criteria for teacher evaluations.⁸ The strike was settled when the city administration offered a salary increase and agreed to limit the role of student performances in teacher evaluation to 30%. The union did not win a new voice in determining the content of what is learned and what is taught, but the built strong alliances with parents and community organizations, a step that prepared teachers to fight another day. Like the Teamsters and Mineworkers before them, public workers' insurgencies could capture union offices and restore a degree of democratic unionism.

⁸ I was part of the insurgent movement of the Professional Staff Congress which took office in 2000 and I served on the executive council and negotiating team for nine years. Like other public workers' unions, without the strike weapon we could only nibble at the edges of urgent issues such as adjunct equity pay, shared governance and salary demands.

What they cannot do is change the nature of collective bargaining without repealing the laws that imprison negotiators and subject unions to punitive controls. That the Chicago teachers can strike without penalty, except by the courts, accounts for their relative success in limiting the power of city authorities to break their strike, as had happened to transport workers in New York City who suffered fines, deprivation of their rights and other forms of humiliation. The history of labor insurgency is replete with instances where, far from being liberating, the law and the state's enforcement of it have proven to be barriers to workers' autonomy.

The collapse of the Soviet Empire, beginning in 1989 with the tearing down of the Berlin Wall plunged the battalions of the global Left into crisis. The Soviet empire may not have been admired by the independent Left but its demise realigned world politics: the developing (third) world found itself without a powerful defender; capitalist countries were now free to pursue austerity policies even during economic slumps; and capital's triumphalism infected the morale of a Left that, against its will, had to admit that its fate had been, even unwillingly, tied to the fate of the really-existing Socialist world. Western Communist parties, already battered since 1956 by the revelations of Stalin's crimes, began to lose militants as much as chunks of their once considerable periphery. More to the point, suddenly capitalism and a new regime of accumulation was the only realistic game in town. The idea that social movements could function outside the liberal or social democratic consensus that capitalism was the given within which social struggles occurred became a utopian fantasy and all but disappeared. Revolutionaries became parliamentarians and those parties with a long history in parliament abandoned their radical education programs and became, in effect, center-left formations. This pattern was duplicated in the United States on a much smaller scale.

It was almost a decade before signs of a movement revival appeared. The 1999 anti-World Trade Organization (WTO) demonstrations in Seattle, follow-up mass gatherings in Quebec and elsewhere and the formation of the World Social Forum in Brazil promised a new beginning for the Left. The Seattle demonstrations were notable for the coalition of students, feminists, Steelworkers and Longshore Workers unions who participated. The Longshore union shut down all West Coast ports in support of the protest, although the Steelworkers confined themselves to a peaceful march. The direct actionist wing of the movement briefly shut down the downtown area as city officials were caught napping.

But, the events surrounding the New York World Trade Center and Washington D.C. explosions on September 11, 2001 brought a resounding halt to the promising new movement beginnings, a period which has lasted for at least another decade in the US. In reaction to allegations that the terrorist attacks were perpetrated by Al Qaeda, the United States became an avowed National Security State. The new enemy was global, mostly Muslim terrorism, and the new state of exception to the “rule of law” which guaranteed indictments, a fair trial and the right to representation to suspects, were those domestic and foreign opponents who vowed to attack the United States. Non-citizens are without rights, But the National Security state under Bush and Obama openly violated constitutional guarantees of indictments, trials and civilian courts for citizens as well. The state declared war on terrorism as its rationale to suspend civil liberties and has gone further. It has arrogated to itself under the post-September 11 Patriot Act the right to surveillance of the emails of all US citizens whether or not they are suspected of nefarious acts or plans. The Patriot Act is not fixed law. Congress regularly “updates” it by adding new restrictions on liberties. That both Democratic and Republican Congressional leaders support this program of indiscriminate surveillance is no longer an emergency measure prompted by flagrant and violent attacks. It has little to do with security; instead, the state is now engaged in arbitrary population control that conceivably could extend to any form of protest and resistance, as it did against the Occupy movement in Spring, 2011.

Since September 11, 2001 the National Security state overrides Constitutional provisions such as representative government, privacy and civil liberties. Its response to the alleged terrorist threat far exceeds that of other advanced industrial societies such as France, Italy and Germany which have experienced bombings and assassinations. For other countries the suspension of law has been a temporary measure and when rightist and centrist authorities attempt to make them permanent, these efforts are opposed by mass protests. In the United States restrictions on liberty have become a permanent feature of political and social rule. Some Congressional libertarians — right and left — have opposed the continued surveillance by the National Security Agency(NSA) and mid-summer 2013 public opinion polls show that 2/3 of Americans oppose the broad-scale surveillance program. But lacking a genuine public debate it is likely that state intervention into private lives will expand and that its response to forms of direct action by social movements will become even more harsh.

Almost sixty years ago the social theorist C. Wright Mills concluded that, at the national level, there was no democracy in America. Contrary to

constitutional limits to executive powers, he argued that Congress had been relegated to the middle levels of power, at best and the Supreme Court usually ratified the executive's unilateral initiatives. The National Security state, an executive combine of multi-national corporations, the military and the top layer of the political directorate had virtually no limits to their exercise of authority in a time when, according to Mills, the business of government was focused, chiefly on foreign policy, particularly securing US military and economic interests. In 2013, Mills' judgment seems, sadly, vindicated. The widely publicized Congressional gridlock applies chiefly to how much the social wage should be trimmed, but as for the operation of war and war preparation, and of domestic population controls, the consensus at the top is all but complete.

Beyond description this explanation must begin with an review of the consolidation of power at the top of the political and economic systems. I will begin with a brief review of the historical materialist theory of the state. Under liberal/democratic and authoritarian systems the state is constituted by three related but distinctive domains: chief among them are the repressive apparatuses of army, police, courts and prisons. For most of the industrialization era of the 18th and 19th centuries repression was the main feature of rule. Workers' efforts to organize unions were usually met by a combination of army and police violence against strikes, prison terms for activists, or state terrorism in the form of assassination. But the rise of the workers movements has modified the forms of state rule to what Jurgen Habermas has termed, secondly, its *legitimation* functions, or a parallel formulation by Louis Althusser of *ideological state apparatuses*. The rise of the state's ideological function in the 20th century was forced by the spread of social wage demands by insurgent labor movements and the Left. Althusser suggests that the ideological apparatuses of the state now include the trade unions, civil society organizations, religious institutions and certainly the public schools. These apparatuses were first initiated by the German government under Bismarck, but greatly extended by the American New Deal in the 1930s when the right of workers to organize and bargain with their employers was guaranteed by law; social security (old age pensions) and unemployment compensation was enacted; and limited public housing built for working-class tenants. After the world war, European governments added universal health care services financed by taxes, and all advanced industrial societies vastly expanded access to higher education, a measure of the overlap between legitimation/ideology and the third major function of the state, its historic investment in the stability and expansion of the economy.

The third key function of the state is its support of the capitalist economy and its expansion. Karl Polanyi has insisted that the state has played a vital economic role in the development of capitalism for centuries by providing transportation and communications systems (roads, railways, postal services), imperialist adventures abroad aimed at securing raw materials such as cotton, iron ore, minerals and oil for industrial production. The state's support of colonies, subsidies to settlers, support of exploration and research in natural resources are, alongside repression, intrinsic to its character. Of course, no observer would doubt that today the US state's bailouts to banks and insurance corporation during financial crises, the permanent state-funded war economy together with its pursuit of wars, first in the US and elsewhere against indigenous people, then intra-imperialist rivalry — from the Spanish-American War, the US Open Door policy in Latin America and China, to the world wars- and against revolutionary upsurges in the so-called third world (CIA support of the Chilean counter-revolution in 1973, the US intervention in Southeast Asia). France's disastrous Southeast Asian and African colonialism, Britain's domination of India are just some of the examples.

The role of the state in promoting US empire interests dates from the pre-revolutionary period in the service of geographic and commercial expansion. British troops conducted unrelenting wars against native Americans. This program pervaded US policy throughout the 19th century. But since the early decades of the 20th century, the ideological or legitimation function has taken on increasing political importance. Of course, the great impetus was the uprisings that finally responded to the brutality of the Great Depression, especially the indifference of the giant monopolies and the Federal government to mass suffering. In the post-New Deal era the rising social wage occupied, along with war and war preparation became central themes of government, with the important exception of the never-ending state repression of black and brown people, radicals, and the Southern labor movement.

The liberal center insists that racial discrimination and the repression of political expression are gradually alleviated by laws such as the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts, a succession of Supreme Court decisions supporting political freedoms, racial integration and abortion rights. The liberal center, including the unions has supported, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, the main direction of US foreign policy which, despite the breach of Vietnam war protest, has been received with either indifference or only rhetorical opposition. For example, after the mass multi-city demonstrations against US invasion of Iraq in Winter 2003, with few exceptions, there has been no popular protest for the past decade. America's eyes are diverted. We are

experiencing a moment of what might be called the September 11 syndrome. Vietnam no longer lingers as a brake on the popular support for war; although the Iraq war was never popular, the specter of terror has effectively overwhelmed our willingness to contest, by direct action, American imperial interventions. Many have lost sight of the radical transformation that has occurred since September 11.

The state's legitimation or ideological domain has not disappeared; it still lives in the fading institutions that support the social wage and the popular imagination. We still want a state that will address popular needs in the fragile economy that emerged from the post-cold war era. We want to be secure in our retirement years, we don't want to starve when our jobs disappear and we want our schools to educate our children, not keep their noses to the grindstone in order to produce what Marcuse termed a "moronic" generation. Despite the general view that education is a key to prosperity for the many, our schools continue to deteriorate, their budgets slashed and classrooms overcrowded. In many areas of the country, access to health care is severely resisted by similar budget reductions. But state power has turned its attention away. In fact, it is engaged in dismantling many of the social institutions that were built throughout the 20th century, except of course, the prison system that now holds 2 million, half of them black and Latinos. But the unions, black freedom organizations and women's groups have born witness to the dismantling, even as they loyally support the purveyors of demolition. In short, the repressive apparatuses and their functions have taken command.

We can observe the often hidden fact that at this moment the US has been engaged in permanent war for a hundred years. Further, the local police, schools and urban streets have been militarized. Law and Order, once the leading edge of Republican national administrations but often contested by the Democrats, has now become a consensual perspective as two recent Democratic presidents have fostered deep reductions in the social wage, even as they pursue aggressive wars and police repression to counter domestic protest. Thus we can no longer declare the equivalence of the three historic state functions. Repression is now dominant.

Towards the end of his life, in 1960 Mills calls the "cultural apparatus" a relatively autonomous domain of the state. The cultural apparatus, that is newspapers, television, film and recently the internet and social media, may not be subsumed under ideology, although they perform a major ideological function. Beyond political economy, the cultural apparatus has become the crucial determinant of the system's reproduction. Mills was among

the earliest proponents of this position. In his unfinished exploration of the cultural apparatus, the originality of his discovery was that electronic media were not merely an industry, but formed a new mass sensibility, a new condition for the widespread acceptance of the capitalist system, even the general belief in its eternity. Our social character has become entwined with communications technology. He linked the institutions of culture with what he termed the Fourth Epoch or, what is now commonly called post-modernism. This intricate interlock between cultural institutions, political power and everyday life constitutes a new moment of history. It has become the primary machinery of domination. And a central aspect of domination is the abrogation of concept that we can know the totality, but are condemned to understand the division of the world as a series of specializations. Thus, the well-known fragmentation of social life is both a result of the re-arrangement of social space and the modes by which knowledge is produced, disseminated and ingested. The cultural apparatus is largely responsible for the intellectual darkness that has enveloped us.

Since the development of the mass circulation newspaper, critics on the Left have referred to commercial publications as the “bought” press. The newspapers were regarded as tools of capital, and subordinated through advertising, their life-blood and punctuated only by a handful of independents like the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, the *Chicago Sun-Times* and the *New York Herald* and, briefly, the *New York Post* and *PM*. Accordingly, the *New York Times* has been viewed as the Establishment’s organ, barely reliable in its coverage of foreign affairs, but rarely fair to labor and other social movements. The emergence of radio and television as leading sources of news and commentary did not basically alter this evaluation because these media followed the game plan of the newspapers. Most were profit-making-seeking corporations. Consequently, until the late 1970s which witnessed, via the computer the beginnings of electronic, consumer-based media, save a few genuinely independent journalists like Haywood Broun and Walter Lippmann, reporters were employees rather than critical or independent writers and, in the main, took orders from editors and publishers.

But the time may have arrived to evaluate the role of the news media. Is it a state cultural apparatus or does journalism still contain an independent role and spirit? The media have been assigned to the state’s legitimation or ideological spheres by most theorists. But Mills, Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy are among those who have placed what Mills calls the “cultural apparatus” as a fourth major domain that cannot be reduced to political economy, even though they overlap with both the corporate and state spheres. In his recent

book *Digital Disconnect* Robert McChesney has decisively shown that media are now a powerful part of monopoly capital. The collective influence of its hardware, electronic and communications sectors extends to the state as well as the composition of the capitalist division of labor. However important for the assessment of the social and technical division of labor, for our purposes we will concentrate on the cultural apparatus's significance for the constitution of subjectivity.

Digital Disconnect brings the complex story of corporate domination of the media which shattered the democratic dreams of inventors for a non-commercial communications technology up to date. It is not a great revelation to claim that the character of social life has been utterly transformed by communications technologies. Radio, television and film were, and remain, powerful influences on the popular imagination, not only in electoral politics, but in the ways in which we define ourselves, delineate our aspirations, and form our values and even our moral beliefs. But, according to McChesney, even these astounding technologies are now significantly challenged and even replaced in the popular imagination as much as in corporate portfolios by the internet. As McChesney shows by the mid-20th century some media corporations had entered the charmed circle of the Fortune 500. By 2012 internet-related corporations such as Verizon, ATT and Google comprised 40% of the top 30 US-based corporations but employed only 4% of the labor force, a result of their high degree of automation. When Apple and Microsoft are added these top five corporations had overtaken the size and influence of most production corporations.

Digital Disconnect is perhaps the most comprehensive narrative and analysis of the political economy of the internet, today the leading edge of mass communications. In addition to providing a highly detailed account of the structures of corporate hegemony over the media and the internet in particular, McChesney argues that our politics are ineluctably shaped by media corporations, extending to all levels of government. He is especially concerned that freedom of the press has been crippled by corporate intrusion, that journalism itself has lost its stature as a public good. Journalism is now an adjunct of corporate domination of news and other forms of public knowledge.

McChesney employs the category of "critical juncture" to mark the moment when a revolutionary new technology is being introduced, but its fate has not yet been determined. These moments are crucial for determining the fate of the technology because the possibility still exists that the media could bring a democratic communications era to birth in which the public participates

in their crucial forms and content. In a brief historical survey he shows that at first the new technology is greeted almost universally as a public asset, free of control by private interests. For example, the internet, whose wide use may be dated to the late 1980s and 1990s, was heralded by media writers and activists as the harbinger of a new birth of democratic society. Free of ads and restrictions, access was available to anyone without cost. While radio and TV are largely one-way media, the internet allows ordinary people to have their say, providing they can master the technology. But times have changed from brave beginnings. Alternative on-line magazines, websites, and blogs have blossomed and waned. Those that survive never have enough money to maintain their sites, so they are forced to hound their subscribers and a relatively small casual audience for contributions on a weekly or monthly basis. Many worthy alternative media disappear; others such as Inter-Global Communication are bought by media giants like Microsoft. Consistent with the way the market operates, McChesney demonstrates the halcyon days of the internet, just as the radio before it, were relatively short-lived. These short days bred hope that a new moment in history where democracy and popular power can flourish. Despite the remnants of popular mobilization afforded by the internet, eventually the big guys take over. Capitalism will tolerate a measure of freedom at the outset of a new technology to permit the innovators to iron out the bugs, but once it learns how to make money from it, it tightens the screws. Small start-ups that invent useful products are bought up, others fail; even the non-profits discover the pecuniary virtue of selling out.

By the turn of the 21st century, many features of the internet and television technology had been privatized and commercialized. Cable television, cell phones that afforded access to the internet, premium television channels came into the home at a steep price. In rural areas and other small-towns the TV does not work without a satellite connection sold by a commercial provider such as Direct TV. And home computers remain little more than word processors for most consumers unless they purchase an internet connection from the Verizon/ATT cartel or some other large communications corporation. Yes, there are alternative non-profit companies that offer internet and television service. But most of us are not aware of these alternatives because their outreach is confined to marginal constituents.

Digital Disconnect differs from both celebrants and critics of the older technologies in two principal respects: First, McChesney is interested in stressing the importance of a political economy of communication rather than updating the social and cultural critiques of previous writers. And, while Lewis Mumford, the Frankfurt School Mills and philosophers like

Martin Heidegger and one of his students Hans Jonas link, in various ways, the relation of technology to nature and its consequences for the relations among human beings, McChesney focuses almost exclusively on the power of the leading media corporations not only over every aspect of the industry — from the production of hardware to the production of knowledge and its dissemination — but it is his greater claim that knowledge/information is fully controlled. Since knowledge, including the news is now the main productive force and source of political wisdom, corporate control of the most advanced digital media as well as conventional broadcasting endangers democracy itself. Beyond the field of communication, according to McChesney this power has extended to all levels of government, including the executive branch's regulatory agencies such the Federal Communications Commission and Congress. Pressured by corporate lobbies, corporate-funded campaign contributions and, as media corporations have monopolized news organizations from newspapers to all other venues, we are experiencing the near collapse of independent journalism. So, these institutions have become "soft" on the media moguls. News gathering is now largely a function of public relations. McChesney writes:

"The dirty secret of journalism is that a significant percentage of our news stories, in the 40 to 50 percent range, even at the most prestigious papers in the glory days of the 1970s, were based on press releases. Even then, a surprising amount of the time, these press releases were only loosely investigated before publication." Journalism has, in the main, become an institutional apparatus of the state.

McChesney notes one of the limitations of American -style professional journalism. To illustrate his point he quotes Christopher Lasch: 'What Democracy requires is vigorous public debate, not information. ..We do not know what we need to know until we ask the right questions, and we can identify the right questions only by subjecting our own ideas about the world to the test of public controversy". What is missing is public controversy about the most important questions. For McChesney this absence is due, primarily, to the cartels and monopolies that dominate the media. Entailed in this formulation is the claim that the political directorate, and its regulatory agencies and the media monopolies conspire to stifle public debate. He argues that the internet has "done more damage to news media than it has done to entertainment." Since news is for most people their main source of political knowledge, when journalism is not a source of debate, knowledge is reduced to "information" bereft of controversy because its origin is almost always official sources. Democracy becomes the loser because the public has

been blocked from participating in an informed manner in the processes that determine political decisions. These decisions remain in few hands, largely hidden from public view. But, lest we believe that private ownership of the news media is solely at issue, public broadcasting is subject to some of the same constraints as the commercial media. According to McChesney, “paltry budgets” and “spotty performance” are largely to blame though the public media have higher public approval than their commercial counterparts.

Public media’s paltry budgets are significantly supplemented by corporate sponsors, among whom are oil companies, Big agricultural product corporations such as Monsanto and Archer Daniels Midland, and major banks. The administration of public broadcasting is occasionally constrained by these sponsors, not necessarily by their direct intervention but, more typically, by self-censorship, a tendency that spans commercial and non-commercial media.

Late capitalism has also partially transformed the nature and meaning of the gift. Gift-giving is no longer a private affair, an exchange between individuals, a sign of affection, respect, or gratitude. Since the early 20th century when corporate giants, Ford, Rockefeller and Carnegie funded foundations to provide “gifts” to individuals, scientific and education organizations and to community non-government organizations, gift-giving has been radically changed. Carnegie funded libraries as both an attempt to enhance mass literacy, and blunt public criticism of its repressive labor policies(among which is the private steel armies that broke strikes). Its “International Peace” effort is a major intervention into US foreign policy. The Rockefeller Foundation and its off-shoots have been a major source of support for scientific research, especially in medical fields, and for efforts at moderate social reform. Ford, until recently the largest private foundation,(its lead has been overtaken by the Gates Foundation, the major source of authoritarian educational ideas and policies), has a wide-ranging program of support for education, human rights in developing countries, and community organizing. Ford was an important funder of the World Social Forum, and important movements in black and Latino communities. Since the second world war, the number of corporate foundations that award grants (gifts) has proliferated. In almost every case, even among “progressive” foundations applicants are advised to make proposals that conform to their priorities. Almost never, except in foreign affairs, do these priorities include proposals that focus on social theoretical topics. The liberal foundations, generally, have no patience or interest in ideas. However, the Right is the recipient of generous financial support from the Olin Foundation, Heritage and others for work that has

a clear ideological function, among the more important examples, are the concepts that form the doctrines of neo-liberal economic and social policy, and international programs that promote US empire interests.

Marx's sub title for the first volume of *Capital* was a "Critique of Political Economy". The term critique connotes his intention to interrogate the categories of English classical political economy in order to show their partial, but incomplete adequacy. Elsewhere, in the thesis on Feuerbach he criticizes traditional materialism for its failure to address "subjectivity", a criticism that can be directed to the tendency prevalent among Marxists to engage in "objective" analysis at the expense of asking the question: what is the relation between forms of economic power, the state's complicity with capitalist hegemony and the forms of social and political reception and participation of the underlying population. Marxism has honed a finely tuned political economy of capitalism and its state and in McChesney's work a powerful extension of political economy to communications, especially the media and its corporate powers. But, political economy tends to treat the people as objects of largely autonomous corporate actors. The problem of subjectivity, which Marx found lacking in materialism remains in the 21st century remains in the 21st century. Marxists have followed the script, written by the theorists of the second and third internationals which, in the main, regard capital and its personifications as the subjects of history and the people as objects who become agents when they perceive their economic interests are violated. The workers, no less than other social formations are interpellated by the system, but have no genuine subjectivity.

What emerges from the changing focus of the state and the corporations towards repression, foreign policy and away from meeting the fundamental needs of the underlying population depends on how ordinary people act, not on a presumed breakdown of the capitalist system. As we have seen the depth of the crisis has not been met by widespread resistance or alternative to the conclusive orientation of the state toward financial capital and the very rich and their own emphasis on building the American empire at the expense of advancing the social wage. Nor can the putative public rely on the media. The fundamental question is subjectivity. How have the people introjected or resisted domination. What are the fundamental influences on how they become social and political actors?

WHAT IS SUBJECTIVITY AND ITS ROLE IN DETERMINING OUR COLLECTIVE FUTURE?

I deploy the term subjectivity to connote both the collective disposition and its capacity to resist capital's encroachments on popular autonomy, especially the barriers to democratic practices that, beyond voting, empower ordinary people to make the crucial decisions that affect their lives. Subjectivity is conditioned but not determined alone by economic conditions. The cultural apparatus, institutions of everyday practice, especially the workplace, organized religion schools and the media are immensely influential on perception of social reality, but social formations also have pre-dispositions that are situated in biographies, biological needs-fulfilled and unfulfilled- and social relations, both of production and of everyday life. Thus, subjectivity is not merely based on "consciousness", but involves the will to act. It is not enough for individuals and social formations to recognize their oppression by external powers over which they have little or no control. It is true that many Americans are in thrall of the rich and famous and devoutly aspire themselves to the heights. But throughout the histories of the United States and other capitalist countries, many people of the subaltern classes and social formations recognize that the game of politics and economic power is rigged and understand that they are the objects, not the subjects of power. The question is why in the United States, is protest and resistance sporadic and episodic? Why do we lack workers', black freedom, feminist, and environmental movements that define themselves as ideologically and politically counter-hegemonic to the domination by capital and the repressive state?. In a somewhat different register, the example of Europe constitutes a variant, but not a reversal of the American case. European workers and sections of the salaried middle class have a long history of protest and resistance organized, largely, by left political formations and a socialist-oriented labor movement. But even as Italy, Portugal and especially Greece have witnessed frequent general strikes and French workers have protested government policies on a regular basis, the resistance still functions within, and not against, prevailing powers. The European opposition, no less than the majority of the US population seem unable to craft a viable alternative to advanced capitalism.

⁹ It is true that there are several left/liberal online magazines and news services. *Counter Punch*, *Truthout*, *TruthDig*, *The Nation*, *Alternet* do offer alternatives to the mainstream, but mostly they all into the category of exposure rather than reflection. None regularly rehearse controversies within the left, let alone provide in-depth analysis of the outrages they report. The assumption is that their audience has a ready explanation, a conceit that is incomplete.

The small, but growing entourage of American radical journalists and political commentators are prone to the view that Americans lack the knowledge as a function of the mendacity of its leaders, secret and not so secret deals with corporate capital, nefarious foreign dictators, and instances of outright robbery of the public till. The assumption is that if we knew the truth, and could link it with our “interests” we would act to free ourselves and the country of the yoke of corruption and greed. Left-liberals like Bill Moyers and Amy Goodman are a constant source of revelations about the sorry state of democracy at home and abroad. The coverage of the injustices that plague the world are rays of enlightenment in a cloud-filled sky; mainstream news is a cover for the misdeeds of the wealthy and otherwise powerful, sports and other entertainments are distractions produced by a complicit culture industry. Accordingly, exposure is the work of journalism and committed scholarship.

The invocation to rational discourse, however, necessary, is insufficient. What is lacking is an explanation for the absence of a struggle for genuine alternatives to the prevailing set-up, including a debate on why protest and resistance, even when it grips the popular imagination does not lead to a genuine challenge to power. The answer to these questions go beyond the thesis of mass ignorance. It requires an exploration of subjectivity, a journey that embraces, to be sure, a historical, geographic and political economic analysis, but also requires plumbing the dimensions of depth psychology to the regions of the political and cultural unconscious.

We began this analysis by arguing that we have entered an era of the authoritarian, repressive state. This means that for the most part, the state is increasingly unresponsive to the traditional manifestations of protest and resistance, and if the resistance becomes too dangerous it is perfectly willing to use force to disperse any uprising. For example, as long as North Carolina’s Moral Monday remains peaceful and its legions fairly contained, the police will arrest demonstrators, but the legislature will enact onerous laws such as voter ID requirement and restrict abortions to 20 weeks of term. However, when Oakland’s Occupy movement called upon longshore workers to shut down the port and asked for a general strike in the area, the police came in batons swinging and shot pellets.

In the US there is no political formation capable of generating sustained movement against capital or, indeed, proposing a comprehensive, systemic alternative to the contemporary capitalist system. This absence reflects the fragmentation of the left into small groups, the lack of a vigorous theoretical

debate on the left about almost anything, but also the lack of left media that is read by a large fraction of the politically active population, let alone by left-liberals.⁹ The small grouplets that pretend they are some kind of vanguard often publish periodicals. But these are mostly unreadable, even by their own adherents. They rarely offer news and commentary about health and schooling and are even cursorily involved, if at all, in ecological questions. They offer rants that regularly proclaim a new upsurge on the basis of isolated evidence.

The geography of the American landscape has radically changed since the 1940s. Although suburbs already dotted the metropolitan landscape in the 1920s, the rapid displacement of farmland by suburbs became a central factor for solving the chronic housing crisis and accompanied the deindustrialization of our cities. What has been described as sprawl on the basis of one-household homes resulted in the dispersal of large fraction of the working and salaried middle class and contributed to the emergence of consumer society. The suburbanization and ex-urbanization of America meant that politics and culture were bifurcated. The city was the heart of civil engagement, the concentration of industrial unions, progressive legislators and cultural communities, in both senses of the term: ethnic and racial enclaves and the arts. The relative dispersal into the suburbs changed the political culture. Individualism replaced collective action to address social grievances; families were relatively isolated as neighborhoods disappeared; the suburbs and their middle class composition became the social basis of many 8 forms of mass culture

Underlying fragmentation and submission is what Wilhelm Reich termed the “emotional plague.” One of its key components is fear of taking power, a trait that is endemic to the contemporary European left. If there is a will to power, it is confined to action within the liberal- democratic parliamentary system and rarely raises the question of systemic transformation. Decades of frustration has led to mass despair. In Europe, no less than the United States, many who understand, broadly, that the prevailing system is against them, cannot envision taking power. Reich traced mass despair about the chance of social change to dammed up sexuality and, connected to it, mass subordination to authority, whose personification is the Father. In his study *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, Reich disputed the common left analysis that ascribed the Nazi victory, either to the unstoppable power of “the most reactionary section of the capitalist class” (Communists) or the capture by the Nazis of the middle class (Socialists). Exempt in both was the participation of a significant fraction of the working class in the Nazi orbit. Reviewing the election results of 1932 he demonstrated the Nazis won a sizeable vote in working class precincts and asked the question, why? He answered by an

exploration of the economic and social crisis which proved disastrous for working people. While the Communists and Socialist wrangled, the Nazis offered hope in the personification of a leader who could lead the nation to glory. Nazism was more than a regime of state terror, although it was that. It also adroitly combined the promise of socialism, German racial superiority, global conquest, revenge for the humiliation visited upon Germany by the Treaty of Versailles and the Dawes Plan that mandated German reparations, mysticism, and a revival of the family as a haven in the heartless world. In sum, the fascists promised pleasure in redemption as well as revenge, tapping into the collective libido while the left tarried, equipped with only its old slogans and programs.

Recall that Ronald Reagan, perhaps the most important contemporary figure corresponding to the authoritarian father who, in contrast to the grim prognoses of both Jimmy Carter and the Left, proclaimed “morning in America”. Surely, Reaganism was a regime of falsification, international duplicity and relentless neo-liberal policies that did not sit well even with many of his supporters. But the blue collar “Reagan Democrats” did not vote their pocketbook. They voted their hopes and for a figure who exuded optimism. Reagan was a product of the cultural apparatus who understood that politics is, at the bottom, about symbols. Taking a page from FDR’s playbook he scorned fear, even as he promised nothing. That the Left has no conception of the cultural unconscious is among the reasons for its sad state. The Right may be dangerous, not only for its policies, but for its rhetorical talent and its command of imagery.

Herbert Marcuse expanded Reich’s exploration of the political and cultural unconscious by addressing the dialectical relation of alienated labor to the advent of consumer society. He notes that workers do not fulfill themselves through their labor. For Marcuse, alienated labor would provoke revolt unless the system of domination offered a way to satisfy the innate drive for pleasure. Since the pleasure principle cannot be satisfied within the systems of capitalist rationality that reduces labor to a series of repetitive mainly, by technologies that increase the quantity of goods at the expense of extending the destructive domination of nature, capital offers a series of satisfactions to an otherwise alienated labor force. Marcuse was among the theorists of Critical Theory who focused on the emergence of consumer society in the 1930s and 1940s that provided a credit line to anyone who had a full-time job to purchase a car, one or two household home, tuition payments, and other pleasurable items. And, he called attention to “repressive de-sublimation”, that is, sexual practices without emotional ties. The old regime repressed pre-

marital sex, consigning it to the cultural underground. Late capitalism opens the doors, via mass cultural images, to sex as a compensation for the general lack of genuine erotic experience in work and love. Marcuse argues the condition of reproduction of the relations of production is that the system has penetrated the soma to human character structure.

Of course, television and film, the main sites of entertainment, crucially evoke images that become models for how we understand the social world. Series like *The Simpsons* and, more recently '24' accomplish more than assisting exhausted people to pass the time. They offer interpretations of the world. *The Simpsons* is a salve for viewers who know that the world is suffused with cynicism and receives confirmation. 24 reminds us that this is a dangerous world, that death and dying, violence and mayhem are now to be considered the new normal. For subscribers of HBO, SHOWTIME and other premium channels, the series such as *The Sopranos*, *The NewsRoom* reassure them that the media are capable of producing Art, providing critique of aspects of the social world which, taken together, reinforce the idea that all is not conformity. These series are, at least on the surface, departures from the 1950s when programs such as *Father Knows Best* and *Marcus Welby MD* were veritable advertisements for the system. Perhaps the long running multi-variant *Law and Order* is a complex, but ultimately conformist reminder that the rule of law remains part of the dominant discourse. Its popularity can be read as a vindication of the proposition that we still need reassurance that, despite all, the social order is still secure.

Louis Althusser argues that we are always, already interpellated by the ideological state apparatuses, especially the cultural institutions of schools and the media. Our character, values and beliefs, experiential orientations are not individually acquired, but inhere in these apparatuses to which we are subordinate. The "reproduction of the relations of production", a phrase Althusser borrows from Henri Lefebvre, is accomplished by what he terms the "bureaucratic society of controlled consumption", by habitual practices of everyday life: shopping as a colonization of free time, the routinization of household tasks. We are enslaved by the routines of labor whose elements are reproduced in the time away from paid work. Lefebvre argues that the achievement of social ownership of the means of production, the traditional goal of the socialist movements, is undercut by family obligations, consumption and everyday life. He insists that if there is no revolution of everyday life, the old system is bound to creep back as it did in the Soviet Union.

Thus, the capitalist system and the state requires an underlying population that participates in its own subjugation, a theme repeated in Foucault's notion of "discursive formation" which ascribes, chiefly, our subordination to a language. In this modality, we may grasp state surveillance of its citizens — the panopticon effect — and concepts such as the rule of law that neutralizes domination in favor of scripture, and the requirement that we yield to established authority, as constituents of social reproduction, not as extraordinary creations of policy. If this be true, then authoritarianism is by no means aberrant in liberal democratic regimes, but normative and, as Reich shows, is ever present in the structure of human biological constitution as well as the drive for cooperation and love.

When the Left refuses to debate issues of the cultural and political unconscious and restricts its critique to the categories of political economy, it renders itself disarmed. For the present it is not imperative that we accept any of these specific readings: what is imperative, however, is that we are prepared to entertain the habituation engendered in everyday life and the unconscious as sites of reproduction and as possible explanations for why the radical imagination seems to have fallen into barren fields.

Where is the outrage? It has turned inward by blaming itself for outrageous fortune, on the one hand, and outward in the form of rage against the poor and indigent on the other. When it seeks respite it sports and money-making schemes like the lottery, gambling, under-capitalized small businesses that are never or almost never brought to fruition. For most people to rage against the system requires, among other remedies addressing unconscious desire and its vicissitudes, and to come to terms with the distractions that detain them. A viable left must continue to analyze the political economy of capitalism, but also critique economic determinism by coming to terms with the critique of everyday life, the institutions that engulf us and the cultural apparatus that penetrates our imagination. To revive a radical imagination requires serious attention to psychoanalysis as much as to politics and economics.