

Building a Progressive Majority at Home, Resisting Imperialism in Latin America

This issue of *Dialogue & Initiative* begins with Mark Solomon's analysis of the global crisis that demands the construction of a "progressive majority" to regain control of our political institutions. While many issues divide us, the article suggests, what must unite the left and the center is an overwhelming need to take back the country from the most retrograde right wing forces in U.S. political history. In fact, as we write, the Committees of Correspondence for Democracy and Socialism (CCDS) and other sectors of the progressive majority are working to create a coalition to achieve political victories in 2006 and 2008.

Following is an exchange of views between Carl Davidson and Mark Solomon on important issues regarding a left-center coalition. Davidson disagrees with Solomon's characterization of center forces and further explores the content of the left agenda. It is a fruitful exchange that will deepen the discussion on what is needed to build a progressive majority to defeat the right.

Fred Hicks's article, originally presented to the Kentucky Interfaith Taskforce on Latin America and the Caribbean in February, 2006, describes grassroots mobilizations against neo-liberal globalization in Latin America. With thirty percent of Latin America poor (living on \$2 a day) or desperately poor (living on \$1 a day) and the demands of global capital to accelerate privatization of public services, workers, peasants, and middle class professionals from Argentina, Bolivia, and Venezuela are building their own "progressive majorities."

Harry Targ's article, also based on a speech to a

Unitarian Church audience in March, 2006, links the exploitation of workers in the U.S. to workers everywhere. Neo-liberal globalization, he implies, constitutes a new global phase of capitalist development that is intimately connected to poverty and powerlessness on the world stage.

David Bacon and Nativo Lopez add a useful update on the struggle for immigrant rights in the United States, a struggle intimately tied to neo-liberal globalization.

Carl Bloice and Conn Hallinan describe how central racism is to understanding the provision of the most basic human services, in this case, health care. The alternative to "race-tailored" medical and drug programs is adequate national health care for all people. Race-based health problems are not based upon biology, they argue, but institutionalized racism. The ideological superstructure masks the reality of race in the United States by attributing differences in health disparities to biology.

Libby Frank analyses the connections between the so-called Israeli lobby and U.S. foreign policy drawing upon a recent controversial essay by John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt.

Together, these articles raise critical issues about imperialism, class exploitation, racism, and building a progressive movement to challenge them.

We invite readers to respond to the materials published here, as well as to submit other articles on these questions for the next *Dialogue & Initiative*. We also invite readers to access the CCDS listserv *Portside* at <http://lists.portside.org/mailman/listinfo/portside>

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A Progressive Majority - What It Is and How to Build It

By Mark Solomon

At the Jack London Museum in the Sonoma foothills, there's a large poster on display from around 1907 advertising a talk by Jack London on "The Coming Crisis." If ever there was an always timely, all-purpose and perennially relevant topic, that's it.

When we tote up outrages like an administration that abets environmental disaster; a budget resolution that shreds the last vestiges of decent social payments; worsening carnage in Iraq; insane threats to nuke Iran; a White House knee-deep in corruption, chicanery and contempt for the Constitution; a House bill that criminalizes millions of undocumented workers and those who help them; festering brutality, torture illegal rendition and denial of human rights to prisoners held across the world; near-genocidal widespread joblessness and incarceration among African American males; aggressive campaigns to undermine reproductive choice, gay marriage and other personal decisions - the crisis isn't just coming. It's here.

But crisis always provokes response - the most visible at the moment is the awakening of undocumented immigrants and their supporters demanding a fair and secure path to citizenship. Their huge demonstrations have shaken Congress and have signaled the emergence of a potentially powerful component of progressive struggle with great significance for forging coalitions to defeat the right.

As the Iraq war grinds on with steadily rising death and injury to civilians and military, demonstrative action will surely grow as counter recruitment and other anti-war efforts are growing. Recent referenda in Wisconsin and various opinion polls show deep antipathy for the war running through even traditionally conservative regions. Iraq remains a crucial, potentially determining issue, especially in the forthcoming elections.

Lingering outrage over Katrina with its inseparably linked racism and poverty uncovered in the wake of the hurricane, a health care crisis, wage stagnation, dead-end jobs, deeply rooted government corruption, disquiet over unilateralism and preventive war - all of these factors, and more, have contributed to Bush's plummeting polls and are the basis for building and consolidating a progressive majority.

Another crucial element enhancing such prospects is the emergence of fissures in the dominant right wing coalition. The Iraq quagmire has nearly ruptured the right's consensus about the use of US military power to unilaterally dominate the global system and radically reshape the Middle East. The immigration issue has for the moment sundered the alliance between corporate bigwigs hungering for cheap labor and xenophobic nationalists. Bush's

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reckless run up of debt has alienated fiscal hard-liners. A solid front of religious conservatives that formed the backbone of the anti-abortion movement has weakened, especially among Catholic clergy who have broken from the right wing consensus to support undocumented workers. Exposure of rampant Republican corruption has brought down Tom DeLay; and, the Abramoff scandal has begun to engulf other Republicans while the Plame affair is now creeping into the Oval Office itself.

Prospects for a progressive majority are also influenced by events around the world. Within the major alliances of advanced capitalist states, a deep disquiet has arisen over the Bush administration's reckless unilateralism and its embrace preventive and preemptive war. In addition, Zbigniew Brzezinski has said that Bush is facing a global "populist tide" capable of stifling the administration's foreign policy objectives. That tide runs through Latin America where new and varied forms of struggle against corporate globalization is led by new and imaginative left and progressive coalitions. The tide is running through Europe from the winning alliance of unions and youth in France that saved job protection, to a center-left coalition that defeated Berlusconi in Italy. The tide also runs through Africa, Asia, the Middle East and the Pacific Islands where daily battles take place against the ravages of the global system and against US imperial ambitions. At times that resistance is complex and even regressive, but the general trend against the hegemony of corporate globalization and U.S. military power is unmistakable.

A progressive majority is more than numbers. It is an organized, unified, coherent force able to impact the political process and ultimately overcome the dominant corporate politics - connecting constructively with the rest of the world and promoting a domestic culture of democracy and justice.

A progressive majority must be a coalition of center and left. The center generally has no systemic political philosophy save pragmatism whereby it tends to shift around issue-by-issue, at times pressured from the left or right. It is

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moderately liberal, does not see U.S. global policy as necessarily imperialist, but often opposes the negative consequences of U.S. foreign adventures. Domestically it favors government intervention to curb the worst corporate abuses and social ills while not seeing government as a sure vessel of big business and military power.

The left, clearly smaller, embraces many currents but generally shares a systemic critique of the dominant system and a consistently critical estimate of U.S. foreign policy. Under present circumstances where the bankruptcy of the right is exposed and where it is beset by mounting difficulties and growing resistance, the left can influence the center to join with it to forge a common minimum program to alter the country's political course.

A center-left coalition needs to formulate that broadly agreed upon common program that accommodates the holistic outlook of the left and the pragmatic outlook of the center. The three essential components of that program would most likely be a) a constructive global policy for peace and environmental survival; b) economic and social justice; c) defense of constitutional and human rights.

A common program does not imply unprincipled compromises that can only reduce the coalition to an ineffectual echo of the dominant political culture. Quite the contrary, a coalition of center and left has to grasp the interconnections between issues. It has to forge unbreakable connections among issues of class, racial and gender justice as well as peace and economic survival. Within the amalgam of left and center there must be a convergence of diverse social forces - trade unionists, communities of color, white collar workers, immigrants, women and men, gays and straights, old and young who recognize in the coalition's concerns a strong responsiveness to their needs. Thus, an organized progressive majority that stands with undocumented workers also demands a living wage, union rights and massive jobs programs for all - undercutting corporate divide-and-conquer strategies seeking to pit oppressed nationalities against each other.

To suggest that such an interconnected basic program, linking for example the struggle against racism to economic justice and peace, would not enlist support of the center is defeatist and does not reflect the possibilities of this political moment. At the same time, a progressive majority is not, nor can it become, a vessel of ideological uniformity. An anti-imperialist outlook, for example, cannot be a compulsory condition imposed by left forces. For the anti-war component, in particular, a clear distinction has to be made between a broadly based peace movement and an anti-imperialist movement. Failure to make that distinction sows division and ironically undercuts the building of a majority capable of stopping imperialist wars.

This does not imply that the left should abandon efforts to advance a systemic analysis aimed at influencing the coalition. The near-dissolution of the peace movement after the Vietnam War ended was due in significant measure to the failure of much of the movement to grasp a deeper understanding of imperialism and its aggressive nature. The left has a big role to play in educating, in advancing a transforming political culture and in deepening the politics of the progressive majority. But those objectives must never become conditions for forming and sustaining coalitions. Such a posture is a prescription for disaster.

The April 29 "March for Peace, Justice and Democracy" in New York City was a significant milestone toward building a progressive majority. The convergence of major peace, environmental, civil rights, women's, labor, youth and veterans' groups to engage together in a broad multi-issue demonstration can now stimulate formation of even broader coalitions embracing major religious federations and civil rights organizations as well as some of the largest labor unions and federations. The success of April 29 can also be a starting point for launching similar forms from the grass roots.

Developments such as the April 29 March, embracing diverse constituencies and a range of interrelated issues, can have a major impact on the absolutely crucial 2006 and 2008 elections. That organized progressive majority is an independent movement that impacts the electoral process by advancing those issues with clarity and persistence. The coalition would inevitably embrace a variety of views toward electoral politics and the two-party system. But it would be united in its stand on the issues. That itself would have a measurable, powerful impact on the coming elections. The strength of anti-war sentiment and activity has already compelled would-be-again Presidential candidate John Kerry to advance a rigid timetable for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq and for politicians of both parties to edge away from Bush's deadly policies.

The building of a progressive majority does not have to depend solely upon the actions of the leaders of national organizations. At every level, activists can a) submit resolutions to their trade unions, political action groups, religious, senior, women's, student, civil rights, gay, etc., organizations calling for programmatic cooperation with other progressive groups; b) petitions and Internet appeals to all progressives can be launched to advance a common program; c) meetings, conferences, symposia of the broadest range of progressive groups can be organized to forge cooperation; d) articles, leaflets and brochures aimed at promoting a cohesive progressive majority through a common program can be produced and disseminated; e) coalitions at local and regional levels can be organized around one or more crucial issues as a basis for building a more permanent,

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organized progressive majority.

The stirring of progressive activism is a hopeful sign. But hope is not enough. Greater cohesion and cooperation across wide political and social lines are needed. There is

need for a new spirit of unified struggle guided by a commitment to the issues that are links to pull the entire chain of victory for peace and justice. Let's dedicate ourselves to achieving that victory.

Shaping Direction, Exercising Leadership: Critical Issues for Building a Progressive Majority

By Carl Davidson

Mark Solomon's call for a progressive majority does a good job spelling out the various political and economic conditions that make such an undertaking both possible and imperative in the period ahead.

I'm wholeheartedly supportive, but I think the "devil is in the details." How successful we will be, if we succeed at all, depends a lot on how we approach what we used to call "the subjective factor," meaning the things that we can actually do -- on the level of strategy, tactics, policy, program and organization -- where we can make a difference.

I don't think Solomon would disagree with that point, nor do I think he would even necessarily disagree with much of the critique of his call I'm going to offer. You can't say everything you want in a short paper. So this is not meant as a harsh polemic, but as a strong nudge to get a much-needed discussion going among all concerned.

I'll state up front that I have no problem with multi-class alliances, left-center coalitions, popular fronts, or even temporarily but timely alliances, direct or indirect, with factions among the imperialists. Rather than shy away from these things, I'm very much in favor of them and believe we can't win much without them. But for that reason, I also believe it is very important to set aside illusions and to be very clear about what we are fighting for and what our capacity is to get it.

If we don't, we can face major errors of both the "left" and "right" varieties that can derail the project or prevent it from ever leaving the station in the first place.

Let's start with what I consider the "left" error: our "anti-corporate" politics. This is a popular phrase on the left, but I think it is vague, empty of content, and has, for far too long, kept us on the margins by distorting our assessments of the political and economic arenas.

For example, there are roughly 8 million corporations in the U.S., including the less than 20,000 that are publicly held. Are we against them all? And even among the publicly held corporations, the large majority of them employ less than 100 workers. All of these corporations want to make profits from their workers, and many are backward politically and economically. Many, however, are more

mixed, and some even pursue relatively progressive goals, in and out of the marketplace.

Some might say, "Well, we don't mean all these folks, we just mean the BIG corporations." Very well, what do we mean by "big?" The bottom line is that it's rather arbitrary; and it doesn't really matter, because you'll find a range of perspectives at the top as well as at lower and broader levels of corporations: in different proportions, to be sure, but a range nonetheless. It's better to cluster corporations by their public policies and their business plans, rather than simply by their size.

Here's my point: If you want to build a left-center coalition against the right, along with all the popular forces, there are a good number of corporations, of all sizes, that also belong in it, in one form or another, and are critical to its growth. Simply being "anti-corporate" won't do. We need to segment the business world, especially in answering the first question of strategy, "Who are our friends, who are our adversaries?" To do so, we need a contending, positive transitional program on how the country should develop, both politically and economically, in order to be able to differentiate friend from foe, and unite all who can be united, within and among all classes and other groupings. We need to set out a "low road" and a "high road" for the business world, and then wage struggle to see where the chips fall among them.

With that preface and for the sake of brevity, I'll now pose three topics.

My first issue with Solomon's paper is how he describes "the center."

The "center" generally has no systemic political philosophy save pragmatism whereby it tends to shift around issue-by-issue, at times pressured from the left or right. It is moderately liberal, does not see U.S. global policy as necessarily imperialist, but often opposes the negative consequences of U.S. foreign adventures. Domestically it favors government intervention to curb the worst corporate abuses and social ills while not seeing government as a sure vessel of big business and military power.

I would agree that there are a number of trends and groupings in the center, and they often waiver, case-by-case. But I would also argue that almost all of them do share a systemic politics: redistributionist liberal capitalism. They see government as a tool to redistribute wealth downward to ward off crises, provide a safety net for the weakest and

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thus strengthen social stability. They also believe in having a military to defend the country and a foreign policy to defend U.S. interests and project the values of liberal capitalism globally. They will oppose certain wars or conflicts, but generally speaking, they are not anti-intervention abroad. In a way, they hold Samuel Gompers' view when he was asked to define his ideology for the American workers: "More," was his one-word answer, but he meant it broadly, as in more wages and benefits, more schools, more health care, more leisure time, and more peace in the world.

Setting the matter of pragmatism aside, which is a far deeper philosophy than is often thought, I think the center is relatively clear about where it stands and what it wants. The tougher question is, where does the left stand and what does it want? As part of building the broader left-center alliance, the left has to become more united itself--not in one organization, that's hardly on today's agenda--but certainly united around a strategy and program as best as we can. As Ho Chi Minh was fond of putting it, "the harder the core, the broader the front."

This leads to the second issue, the "right error," and it concerns the nature of "the left". Here, Solomon doesn't say much:

"The left, clearly smaller, embraces many currents but generally shares a systemic critique of the dominant system and a consistently critical estimate of U.S. foreign policy."

Later he uses "anti-capitalist," "anti-imperialist" and "wholistic" as descriptors, but not much more. I appreciate his problem, since one can describe "the left" in various ways, almost all of which are less than satisfactory to most on the left.

But who's "in" or "out" of one's conception of the left is not the real issue here. Instead, it's what is the strategy and program that we want to distinguish ourselves from the center's liberal redistributionism and global interventionism? I think we need to raise the bar: not by sticking a slogan about a little defined "socialism" here and there, but by developing a counter-hegemonic transitional program of radical structural reform that goes beyond liberal redistributionism. While it can't be spelled out here, it's already being done, at least in segments, in a number of places. I would argue that its core values, which are measured on a global scale rather than just within one country, are consistent democracy, sustainable development and the expansion of popular control of society across the board: in the market economy, in politics and in the culture. We need to help gather the critical forces among our close allies, get to work, and put out a left "High Road" program and fight for it. Then we can see how all those who consider themselves "on the left" sort themselves "in" or "out" of this left pole within the broader alliance.

Here's another way to see this issue: One obvious task

As part of building the broader left-center alliance, the left has to become more united itself--not in one organization, that's hardly on today's agenda--but certainly united around a strategy and program as best as we can.

of the left-center alliance is to defeat the right, in a variety of ways, partially and completely. But within the alliance, all trends naturally want to grow their own strength, if only to better enhance their influence in winning the alliance's immediate goals, not to mention future battles. If we don't have a program of the left, even if limited in scope, it's doubly difficult to bring out positive change and adjustment in the common program of the broader alliance. Otherwise, the program of the center will tend to become the program of the alliance. And as we saw in 2004, that's an event that often leads to the defeat of both left and center. In brief, we would become the wagging tail on the dog of liberalism--the road to perdition, for sure.

Solomon gives a brief description of his estimate of topics for the program of the left-center alliance:

"The three essential components of that program would most likely be a) a constructive global policy for peace and environmental survival; b) economic and social justice; c) defense of constitutional and human rights."

The problem is there is no content here. This could be the outline of talking points for almost any of the 2008 presidential candidates. Unless some actual measures are offered - "Out Now" from Iraq, equal funding for every child in school, oppose the repeal of Roe v. Wade - it's probably better to say nothing at this point.

I agree with Solomon that compromises are inevitable in such a coalition. The question is what kind of compromises. But we can't answer that unless we have, first, a good deal of unity within the left on a starting position, and, second, an estimate of our strength at the appropriate time.

This leads to my third point, the matter of the left's organizational nature and strength.

"The building of a progressive majority," says Solomon, "does not have to depend solely upon the actions of the leaders of national organizations." He then lists appropriate activities: resolutions, petitions, meetings, articles, coalition-making. All these points are valid, but the emphasis is wrong and he leaves one out, the base community. It would be better to start off stressing the building of the base community: at work, at school, in the neighborhood, and then say building the progressive majority "does not depend solely on the grassroots, but involves wider alliances at the citywide, state, national, and international levels."

This is elementary, but it needs to be said. If you don't have organized forces on the ground that you can deploy, then you have little or nothing with which to approach another group for the job of coalition building. At best, you can be a catalyst or facilitator for two or more groups who do have some troops to bring together. But catalysts and facilitators without a base community, fortunately or unfortunately, have little power to have a critical impact on the coalition's outcome or direction.

One reason this is important is the different strengths of the left and the center. To put it bluntly, the strength of the center politicians and groups is mainly their money. (And they know how to use it. We in Chicago recently saw first hand how the money power of the 'center' DLC destroyed a substantial left-liberal grassroots antiwar insurgency in the IL 6th District's primaries this year.) Our strength is "people power" in grassroots organization: in voters, strikers, protestors and activists of a wide variety of talents. Without the base communities, though, all we have are "letterhead coalitions" with a D.C. offices, staff and bank accounts. While I would pay careful attention to working with these "letterhead" groups and elected officials, on their own they are not even going to mobilize a progressive majority, let alone bring it to power as some-

thing other than global capital "with a human face." In brief, I don't think we get anything at the top that's not a reflection of the strength we have accumulated at the base.

To close here, this leaves us with an important and ongoing question we have debated since the founding of CCDS. What should be our most basic unit of mass organization in our communities: not the local coalitions, but the group we bring to the local coalition to be our voice and our troops within it? Is it a neighborhood socialist club? A peace and justice group? Or what? That takes us beyond the immediate topic here, but at some point, better sooner than later, we will have to, since it's very much connected.

June 3, 2006
Chicago

Response to Davidson on Building a Progressive Majority

By Mark Solomon

Thanks to Carl Davidson for making an important contribution to advancing the effort to build a progressive majority. His theoretical knowledge, political depth and organizational experience all came into play in his critique of my article on a progressive majority, thus helping to sharpen issues and needs as well as directly helping me to tackle my own muddles and vagaries.

Carl is right that I would not disagree with the need for an unsparing analysis of what we in CCDS and on the left in general can actually accomplish on the critical planes of strategy, policy and organization. Nor would I disagree with his contention that the forging of that majority requires a "base community," of organized left forces and left program as mandatory starting points upon which to seek alliances.

But his paper raises some questions that have to be explored, questions that go to the nature of the politics we advocate and the agencies we view as essential to forging a progressive majority.

Carl argues that "anti-corporate" (his quotation marks) politics constitutes a "left" error, denying a proper place within a progressive majority for significant corporate clusters that "pursue relatively progressive goals in and out of the marketplace." Surely there are corporations, and corporate officials, concerned about ecological survival, clean energy, sustainable growth, a stable world, a diverse work force etc., that may relate to a progressive program reflecting such views. Any broad and politically mature alliance should welcome such forces. Not to do so would constitute a self-inflicted sectarian wound.

At the same time, is "anti-corporate" politics fully negative? Can it be separated from defeating the right? Isn't a growing public animus toward corporations a key path to opening exploration of deeper systemic change? Opinion polls show that majorities across social lines view corporations as vessels of greed and unfairness. Some ninety per-

cent believe that big business has too much influence over government while only two percent consider corporate executives "very trustworthy." Despite media disinformation, perceptions of the assaults on public health by pharmaceuticals, profit gouging by oil companies, downright criminal practices by WorldComm, Time Warner, Bristol Meyers, Halliburton, Tyco and many more, leave little room in the public mind for the complex sorting out of the corporate world's good, bad and ugly.

Liberals tack more to the left on corporate assaults on democracy than perhaps on any other issue. William Greider recently attacked "the demands imposed by capital and corporations that stunt or stymie the full pursuit of life and liberty in this complex industrial society." Robert Borosage has written: "corporations build not only the ideological arsenal of the right but also the money wing of the Democratic Party." He goes on to say that corporate influence has been pivotal in government-fomented undermining of the labor movement and in spawning the virulent racism and sexism that produced Reagan's "welfare queens" and Clinton's "welfare reform."

That raises a larger question not explicitly addressed in Carl's paper: the claims of class and race in building a progressive majority. The working class may be all over the left-right-center ideological map, as Carl has claimed, but ultimately, the objective relationship of that class (including, of course, its huge awakening immigrant component) to capital makes it the most reliable agency in framing the issues that bind a progressive majority. Similarly, the right's racist and sexist core mandates the resolute commitment of a gathering progressive majority to nurture its unity and breadth by making anti-racism and anti-sexism institutionalized aspects of the coalition.

We can agree on the need to develop "a contending positive transitional program," among other things to assist in

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RESISTING IMPERIALISM IN LATIN AMERICA: EXAMPLES FROM VENEZUELA, BOLIVIA, AND ARGENTINA

By Frederic Hicks

It is being said more and more openly that the United States is building a world-wide empire. Perhaps it is not exactly an "American" empire, but an empire of the leading capitalist powers, under the general direction of the United States. Most Americans should not expect to benefit from this, any more than most Englishmen of the 19th century benefitted from the British Empire. Now more than ever, empire-building is a form of class warfare. One example: the labor market is now world-wide. With the advanced communications systems of today, a company headquarters in Louisville, let us say, can keep tabs on its operations in Brazil or India as easily as it can on its operations in Tennessee or Ohio. Jobs can move to wherever the costs of production, including labor costs, are lowest. Increasingly, working people are being told they must accept lower wages and benefits in order to compete with workers in Malaysia, Brazil, India or China. This applies not just to manual labor, but also to professional work, including the kind of "symbolic-analytic" work that Robert Reich, Clinton's first labor secretary, once assured us would always stay here. We are in a race to the bottom, with imperialism smoothing the way.

The way imperialism works today is not by sending armies in to re-draw borders and put Americans or Englishmen or Frenchmen or Japanese in charge of a conquered country, with all the responsibility and expense of governing and building the infrastructure. That was a needlessly expensive way to extract wealth. Today it's done much more directly, and more cheaply, through international financial institutions. Get the country to take out loans through the World Bank that they will not be able to repay. Give them another loan so they can repay the first one, but under conditions, imposed by the International Monetary Fund, which essentially transfer the country's wealth into the hands of transnational corporations based in the rich countries. And if they don't do it, see to it that they can't borrow from any other source. It's sort of like racketeering, but on an imperial scale. The conditions imposed invariably involve privatization, opening the economy to foreign control, reduced social spending, firing non-essential workers - an "austerity" program. And, of course, the country must build its own infrastructure to facilitate all this. This offers many opportunities for wealthy capitalists in the target countries to make money,

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and they usually run the country, so they go along.

This is all presented as a way to raise the countries out of poverty. This lets the local capitalists save their consciences. The process is often called the "Washington consensus" since the relevant financial institutions are all based in Washington, D.C.

Resistance to imperialism is also taking new forms, and in Latin America they are beginning to be quite effective so far. If it works -- and it looks promising-- it could set the pattern for other parts of the world.

The people who are most effectively resisting imperialism are not studying Marxism-Leninism, they are not reading Che Guevara, and they are not going out to remote places and becoming guerrillas which was the fashion in the sixties under the mistaken impression that that's how the Cubans did it. The new left resistance is democratic. They usually don't even try to overthrow the government by force, although sometimes the government resigns out of frustration or despair. They don't advocate collectivization nor an end to private property, nor even an end to capitalism, although they definitely want to bring it under control. They don't provoke the whole capitalist class needlessly. They may call themselves "socialist," but they don't try to over-define it. Outside the United States, this is a mild term, and has generally good connotations. They look at what's wrong in their own countries, now, and with the backing of the people, they tell the government what they want it to do. If the government doesn't do it, they do it themselves.

I want to look at three countries in Latin America where important things have been happening: Venezuela, Bolivia, and Argentina. Bolivia has been poor for centuries, Venezuela less so, for the last half-century at least, and Argentina was until recently a relatively prosperous middle-class country with substantial industry and productive farms and ranches. All three countries became increasingly impoverished over the last few decades, with the help of the IMF, World Bank, and neoliberal policies in general. But lately, people in these countries have been taking things into their own hands and turning things around. If they succeed -- and so far they are doing quite well -- and it catches on, it could be the biggest sea change the world has seen in the last half century.

Argentina

I want to start with Argentina. It's not as dramatic as the other two, and doesn't seem to have gotten George Bush into as much of a tizzy, but it makes a significant point.

Like other countries, Argentina in the 1990s was persuaded to accept World Bank loans, and eagerly followed

all of the WB's and IMF's advice. It sold off state enterprises to repay its debts, cut back on public spending, laid off surplus workers, took out more loans to give severance pay to laid off workers, in short, did everything the IMF assured them would bring stability, development, and prosperity.

The result was disaster. Over 200 factories shut down, leaving debts and wages unpaid. Poverty got worse. Social welfare programs were cut. But the IMF said hang in there, stay the course, take out another loan to repay the banks. And in 2001 and 2002 Argentina defaulted on its \$140 billion debt, the largest public debt default in history. And all because they did everything according to IMF rules, with IMF supervision. To practically all Argentines, from workers to bank presidents, and beyond Argentina, all the way to Washington, all this proved, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that as a recipe for development, which is what they claimed it to be, the WB-IMF prescriptions, the "Washington Consensus," was a total failure.

The people organized. When factories shut down and workers were fired, in many cases the workers took over the factories and put them back into production. They formed committees and elected administrators to run them, and everyone got the same pay. They took over at least one hotel in Buenos Aires. Popular assemblies were formed in urban neighborhoods, to form community kitchens and provide other help; and to shield the occupied factories from the police, since when they were put back into operation and became profitable, the former owners often wanted them back. In one case they urged people not to pay property taxes, but to give the money instead to the hospital so it could buy medical supplies. In addition, roving bands of piqueteros blocked highways demanding jobs, set up radio stations, and operated at least one pirate TV station.

In short, they saw what needed to be done, and since the government wouldn't do it, they did it themselves. Popular demonstrations forced a series of presidents out of office, five of them within two years. Finally, in 2003, Néstor Kirchner was elected president, and he began moving the country away from the kind of neoliberalism that brought so much grief. He is usually included as part of the "leftward shift" in Latin America, which also includes Hugo Chávez of Venezuela, Lula Da Silva of Brazil, Evo Morales of Bolivia, and Tabaré Vázquez of Uruguay.

Of course, every country needs to borrow sometimes, and Kirchner wants Argentina to have a respectable credit rating though not bound by impossible conditions. So he did not simply refuse to pay. Rather, he worked out compromises, sometimes offering so-many cents on the dollar owed, sometimes getting more time to pay. Then last December he said that by 2007 Argentina would pay off everything owed to the IMF. Many Argentines resented that, saying the debt was illegitimate, but he figured the country should remain an affiliate of the IMF, just not borrow any more money from it. And it will be free from any obligation to follow IMF dictates.

Brazil has announced it plans to do the same, and just

recently Venezuela and Bolivia have said they would too. That would be a terrible blow to capitalist imperialism, because it deprives it of one of its major tools. It means these countries could no longer be pressured to do as the IMF tells them, no longer be forced to privatize and sell off assets, no longer be in debt peonage. In addition, it could result in an economic shortfall for the IMF.

Venezuela

Hugo Chávez was elected president in 1998. Before that, Venezuela had a series of more or less liberal democratic governments, with some social protections, and it was a good ally of the U.S. in the cold war. But in the 1980s, it succumbed to neoliberalism and soon had to accept an austerity program imposed by the IMF-WB which enraged the people. In 1988, Carlos Andrés Pérez was elected president, promising to oppose neoliberal policies, but once in office he embraced neoliberalism with a vengeance. The result was a rise in prices, stagnant wages, and massive riots, culminating in the massive riot of 1989, which was put down by force leaving 400 dead in the working-class districts of Caracas. The people were angrier than ever. Hugo Chávez, an army paratroop officer, attempted an army takeover, but it failed, and he was arrested. But it made him immensely popular. He was soon pardoned and freed, ran for president, and in 1998 was elected with a whopping 54% of the vote in a 3-way race. Turnout was unusually high because at last the poor had a candidate they could vote for. It scared the pants off the middle classes that had been used to running the country in their own interests.

One thing to make clear: In Latin America, and probably in most poor countries, most people are poor, but there is a comfortable middle class, quite well off. This is not an upper class; that's much smaller, and often called the "oligarchy." But the middle class lives at least as well as the middle class in the U.S., or maybe better, as they often have a servant or two, and can afford a lot of services, and they buy things. They and the upper class together are sometimes called the "consuming classes." In some countries



President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela waving to throngs of supporters.

they make up only about 15 or 20% of the population, and are not all that conspicuous, but in others, including Venezuela, they may be as much as 35 to 40%. Then they are very conspicuous. They have professional jobs, buy a lot of stuff, patronize shopping malls and good restaurants, and have cars. And they are most concerned with keeping working class wages low so they can afford this standard of living. They identify more with the upper class than with the working class. The main social cleavage in most of Latin America is between these "consuming classes" and the rest of the population.

Development people in the U.S. often like to point to the growth of the "middle class" in Latin America as a good thing. It raises GNP and shows their policies are working. But actually, it is not a good thing at all. It misses the whole point. As long as the poor are just as poor as ever, they still are part of the "bottom" that capitalists are racing to. The only way to halt the race to the bottom is to raise up the bottom. Not the middle, but the bottom.

So Hugo Chávez won, and went to work. First, a constituent assembly was elected, by popular vote, to draft a new constitution which they did and it was approved overwhelmingly. It stresses "participatory democracy" and provides for such things as local planning councils in which the people as a whole would decide on most local issues, including the town budgets.

In November 2001 the congress passed a land law, which gives the government the right to redistribute idle or poorly-worked land, and subordinates the principle of private property to that of the common good. Large estates are threatened; actually, large estates were formally outlawed back in 1961, when "land reform" was considered a good thing even among Kennedy democrats, provided it didn't hurt the rich, but it was never implemented. The state has also taken over some unproductive factories with compensation, and is regulating banks, so they can't easily sabotage these programs.

The oil industry was nationalized back in 1976, and a state oil company, PDVSA, was created. It is state-owned, but run like a capitalist entity. Foreign companies, including those in the U.S., are encouraged to invest in it. Chávez tries not to alienate them, and it seems to work; note that CITGO, which is owned by PDVSA, is not being harassed by the Bush administration. Oil profits have increased, but instead of it all going to the oligarchy, it has been redirected to health, education, cheap food, etc.

As you might imagine, though, there has been quite a bit of capital flight.

The Bush administration does not like Hugo Chávez. When the U.S. government, acting as always on behalf of big capital, does not like a government, there are measures it generally takes. The first is to try to influence the election. Pour vast amounts of money into rightist opposition parties, and try to impugn the honesty of the election. They did this, but Hugo Chávez not only won the 1998 election, he's won every other election held in an effort to oust or undermine him, nine in all, including a recall referendum, all of

them carefully monitored, and won them overwhelmingly. And in elections in December, 2005, his party won a huge majority in both chambers of congress. By the standards to which the Bush administration normally gives lip service when convenient, Venezuela is just about the most democratic country in the hemisphere. It's also got the freest press in the hemisphere. It is mostly owned by the oligarchy, was overwhelmingly opposed to Chávez, and freely expressed this opposition.

Another trick is to create turmoil, like staging demonstrations, which usually involves middle class housewives banging on pots and pans, but sometimes a labor union can be coopted and drawn in. This is photogenic, and good for influencing non-Latin Americans who see it on their TVs and think it means there is lots of opposition, but I don't think it converts many people locally. They did that.

The next step is a military coup. That was tried a couple of years ago, and was a spectacular failure. They ousted Chávez for a couple of days, but he came back. Chávez seems to have very good relations with his army officers. He himself is an army lieutenant colonel. The oligarchy in many countries likes to co-opt up-and-coming army officers, offer them lucrative business opportunities, or high paid jobs using their military skills in the service of private businessmen, like putting down strikes. In some Latin American countries, including Venezuela, there is a tradition of military officers being concerned with social improvement, and they cannot always be relied on to serve the oligarchy.

Another possibility is sanctions. Get the countries that would normally trade with the target country to stop, to isolate it. But Chávez is so popular with the masses throughout Latin America, and George Bush is so unpopular, that it is doubtful that it would work. Besides, U.S. capitalists, including oil capitalists, are still doing business in Venezuela.

That leaves assassination. Will that be the next step? It should look like an accident, of course. Omar Torrijos of Panama died in an airplane crash when he defied the United States, and many believe it was not an accident.

Bolivia

Bolivia is another country where exciting things have been happening, really more dramatic than Venezuela. Because while the Venezuelan revolution quickly elected a president, Bolivia was more grass-roots.

And while Venezuela is in a rather comfortable position economically, with lots of oil and oil prices rising, and a relatively modest foreign debt situation, Bolivia is a lot poorer. As a "Highly Indebted Poor Country," Bolivia has had a lot of its foreign debt cancelled, but they are still dependent on foreign aid. And while the Venezuelan army seems to be quite loyal to Venezuela, the loyalty of the Bolivian army is not quite so clear. Sometimes the army gives the impression it takes its orders from the U.S. embassy. But Bolivians are by no means docile.

For a lot of its history, Bolivia's main products came

from its mines. Tin, silver, and zinc mostly. It is said that there is something about mining, underground, that gives miners an especially great sense of solidarity and militancy. Especially after the 1952 revolution, mines became state-owned, and provided the income to support a number of social services. Unionized and militant miners were a force to be reckoned with. But then, the price of many minerals declined, Bolivia was lured into debt, and in 1985, on orders from the WB-IMF, the mines were privatized and sold at very low prices, with no benefit to the people. Production declined, and some 24,000 miners lost their jobs. Many of them moved to the cities, particularly La Paz, the capital, and to El Alto, a sprawling working-class suburb on the plateau up above La Paz. Some 30 years ago, El Alto was just where the airport was, and not much else, but now it is a sizeable city. And one where labor militancy is in the air.

Three commodities have been at the center of the recent turmoil: water, gas, and coca. Let's take water first.

In 1999, the World Bank ordered the sale of the municipal water system of Cochabamba, Bolivia's second or third largest city, with about 800,000 people. The system was to be auctioned off, but there was only one bidder, a consortium headed by Bechtel, called Aguas del Tunari. In addition to the municipal water company, there were neighborhood water cooperatives, which in the surrounding rural areas oversaw the distribution of water from wells the people had dug, mostly for irrigation. Aguas del Tunari was given the right to install meters, at the consumers' expense, and charge for the water, including water from wells the people had dug at their own expense. No subsidies were allowed, and water rates soared. The consumers organized, called for a demonstration, and 10,000 showed up. The government said it would revise the contract, but didn't, so they called a mass meeting to decide on an action, and this time 70,000 showed up. They occupied the main plaza; there were police assaults, tear gas, and one person was shot. It was caught on video and the killer was identified as an army captain, a graduate of the School of the Americas in Fort Benning, Ga.

That got the people mad. They stormed the Aguas del Tunari building, evicted Bechtel, told the government to expel Bechtel from Bolivia, which it did, and established a new organization to administer the water.

That was the first water war. The second one took place in El Alto where, in 1997, the World Bank had ordered the privatization of the water of La Paz and El Alto, and it was bought by a French company, Suez Lyonnaise, which set up a branch, Aguas del Illimani. By 2003 it was clear that Aguas del Illimani was going to raise water rates beyond what people could pay, and that 200,000 of them would be left without access to any water, so they got mad. They blocked the roads out of La Paz, some of which go through El Alto, carried out marches and work stoppages, and forced the government to cancel the contract with Suez, but it was not as clear a victory as in Cochabamba, and it's not really over yet.

Then there is the issue of natural gas. In the 1990s,



President Evo Morales of Bolivia.

huge deposits of natural gas were discovered in southern or southeastern Bolivia. Quickly a transnational consortium was formed, and it planned to pipe the gas across the Andes to Chile, on the coast, where it would be liquified and shipped to the United States and Mexico. It was said that for every \$100 worth of gas extracted, the companies would get \$82 in royalties, and Bolivia would get \$18. The Bolivian people, except for a very few powerful businessmen, wouldn't get anything. It looked like it would be the same old story. Bolivians sitting on vast quantities of mineral wealth, all of which is shipped out in raw form.

The people were already stirred up by the water issue, and organized. They called for a new hydrocarbons law, in which the gas and other such resources would be industrialized in Bolivia, with Bolivian labor, and used for the development of Bolivia. In September 2003 there was a huge demonstration in La Paz, with thousands of people demanding the gas be nationalized. The government responded with force and a lot of people were killed. That did it. The gas and water protests coalesced, thousands of people from El Alto descended on La Paz, joining the people who were already there. They laid siege to the government palace and forced the president to resign. He is now living in the Washington D.C. area. The new hydrocarbons law was passed, but it isn't all that was hoped for.

The president who resigned was Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada ("Goni"), who was a confirmed neoliberal free-marketeer and could not imagine any other way to go. He was replaced by his vice-president, Carlos Mesa, who shared pretty much the same philosophy. To him, the most important thing was to keep Bolivia attractive for foreign investment, and all these protests were likely to scare it away, which would be disastrous. He offered to resign, but his offer was rejected. He had learned not to use excessive force against the protesters; his predecessor did, and as a result was thrown out of office, barely escaping with his life. The people appreciated his restraint.

Meanwhile, there were the coca wars. The coca leaf has been grown in Bolivia for thousands of years. It is chewed, or made into a tea, and is said to be refreshing and helps people endure hard work at high altitudes. Consumed this way, it does not yield cocaine. Cocaine can be made out of it, but that requires additional materials and equipment. In recent years, with the loss of so many mining jobs and the

general decline with globalization, a lot of people have been planting extra coca, for the cocaine industry.

The United States wants massive coca eradication, and has mobilized the Bolivian army, with American advisors, to go into the coca areas and uproot and burn coca plants. The law allows each coca farmer an allotment of 1/4 hectare on which they can grow legal coca in certain regions where its cultivation is "traditional," and there are legal coca markets. But the U.S. keeps claiming that more than the legal limit is being grown, and they are itching to uproot it.

What many Bolivians find interesting is that the army and its U.S. advisors don't go after the big dealers, nor the major cocaine labs, nor the material used to make cocaine, and certainly not the foreign demand. Just the small coca farmer. U.S. officials say, if asked, that they are trying to introduce alternative crops, but they do not say it with much conviction, and they are certainly not trying very hard. Bolivian law prohibits using fumigation, so they have to pull up the plants by hand, but that's fine, because it gets soldiers into the field, and that's the whole idea. Many Bolivians seem to believe that all the U.S. really wants is an excuse to control troops in the rural areas. The Bolivian army often looks like it is run out of the U.S. Embassy. This could be a problem for progressive forces.

Finally they let poor Carlos Mesa resign as president and, following the constitution, he turned the government over to the head of the senate, whose only duty was to call for new elections. He did, and a few months ago they elected as president Evo Morales, head of the party called MAS, Movement Toward Socialism. He had a majority, and his party has a majority in congress, but it is not as absolute as Chávez has in Venezuela.

Morales, a well-known political figure, seemed a long-shot to be president but the previous U.S. ambassador kept making speeches condemning Morales, branding him as a dangerous radical, a drug-pusher, and warning Bolivians of trouble if they voted for him, and every time he made such a speech, Morales's approval rating in the polls went up. By the time the ambassador was finished (and replaced), Morales was a major candidate, and ultimately the winner.

Morales recently announced the renationalization of its hydrocarbons, including the gas deposits (they had been privatized in 1996). The transnational companies operating them can continue to operate, but under conditions more favorable to Bolivia. He defends legal coca, but he has condemned the production of cocaine, and assured the United States that he will not demand the DEA or other U.S. officials leave the coca areas, despite the coca growers union voting to demand they leave.

Now, these movements are very different from those we saw back in the 60s. They are not ideologically driven. They look at the problems facing their country right now, figure out what needs to be done, and

tell the president to do it. If he doesn't want to, he may resign. And they can do it because they have the support of huge masses of people. When a mass protest meeting was called in Cochabamba, Bolivia, a city of 800,000 people, 70,000 people showed up! How'd they do that?

They could do it because the people at all levels of society are a lot more aware of what causes their problems, and consequently much more radicalized than they were 50 years ago, and more so than we are. When I was in Bolivia a year ago our group met with a political analyst who remarked that he thought the average Bolivian small farmer or worker, with a fifth grade education or less, knew more about how the international financial institutions work than the average college educated North American does. Because they are directly and openly affected by them. They feel the open heavy-handedness of the institutions of the "Washington Consensus."

Our people in the U.S., I think, are shielded from most of this. They haven't a clue how the system works or how it affects them, much less how it affects people in other countries. Some are aware that employers are shifting their jobs to other countries, but they often tend to be amazingly confused as to why, or they accept it as just the way the world works. Or worse yet, they imagine the workers of poor countries being "willing" to work for less (as economists often put it), and take jobs that Americans should have. Rarely is the point made that in this era of globalization, the standard of living of American or European workers can only be maintained in the long run if the standard of living of the poorest people in the poorest countries is raised. Even more rarely are people made aware that the trade agreements and other diplomatic actions of their own governments help to keep those people poor. I think the most important thing we can do is make people in North America aware.

It can be done. People are beginning to look critically at some relevant issues. Free trade agreements have at least become controversial now, and that's a first step. Outsourcing to low wage and low cost countries is increasingly unpopular. We need to keep up, and increase, the pressure.

For additional reading:

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- Olivera, Oscar, *Cochabamba! Water War in Bolivia*, South End Press, 2004
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What many Bolivians find interesting is that the army and its U.S. advisors don't go after the big dealers, nor the major cocaine labs, nor the material used to make cocaine, and certainly not the foreign demand. Just the small coca farmer.

Injustice and Neoliberal Globalization

By Harry Targ

*The following was originally presented in lecture at the Unitarian Universalist Church, Lafayette, Indiana
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"When people do not have sufficient access to income, tools, opportunity and ability to accumulate assets, their fundamental right to work and earn a livelihood is threatened. Around the world and in the United States, systemic injustices, disparities based on gender, race and class, market fundamentalism, reworking of trade agreements and the erosion of labor rights all contribute to the erosion of people's ability to earn a living wage with dignity."

This fine statement, on the website of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (www.uusc.org), very well captures the crisis that working people worldwide face as they struggle to provide basic sustenance for themselves and for their loved ones. Today I will present some commentary and data that underscores the depths of what in reality has become a problem of human survival. I will refer to globalization and its impacts on working people, including the threat to what I call positive government. Finally I will address the rise of popular resistance to these changes.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, pundits, politicians, and academics have been describing a new world political and economic order. They have referred to it as a new era of "globalization." Liberals and conservatives, Republicans and Democrats have celebrated the dawn of this new age. Technology, particularly computer and information technology, has ushered in this age; one based upon global integration of economic and cultural institutions, and in the end political institutions. The commentators I call "global celebrants" suggest that historical evolution and technology have caused this new age and the vast majority of humankind will reap grand benefits from it. For a few commentators, this new global era has represented "the end of history," that is the end of pain and suffering, violence and oppression, and human conflict.

Most of these global celebrants insist that rich and poor countries alike could best achieve the levels of economic, cultural, and political development promised by the globalization vision by adopting a particular set of state policies. These have often been called "neoliberal" by peoples around the world because they are contemporary adaptations of ideas recommended by classical economic liberals such as the 18th century father of capitalism, Adam Smith. The centerpiece of the neoliberal agenda, as I call it,

is the shift from state directed policies protecting peoples' vital interests to the "market." Downsize government, cut government programs, privatize public institutions, deregulate economies, and produce goods, not for domestic consumption but for export markets. Beginning in the 1970s and expanding ever since, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, and the collective pressure of the wealthy capitalist countries have forced these market policies on poor countries. But it was not only the poor countries that shifted from mixed economies to so-called "market economies." No. European, Japanese, and particularly United States and British policy shifted in the direction of so-called "free market" reforms. Former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was the most adamant defender of the neoliberal agenda when she declared: "There is No Alternative."

In sum there has been a quantum shift in public thinking from what I call "positive government;" that is a commitment to the idea that government policy can serve as a vital source of protection for the basic living conditions of workers, to "negative government;" that is the idea that the less government involvement in the economic life of its citizens the better. Concretely, a central issue in the political debate is the struggle over the privatization of formerly public institutions, programs, and goods. Let us now look at some data about the impacts of this historic shift from positive to negative government in this era of globalization.

If we start by examining a variety of data about working people in the United States we discover that real wages today are significantly less than what they were in the 1970s. With the exception of a short rise in real wages in the late 1990s, most American workers earn less now in real dollars controlled for inflation than they earned in 1973. Wages, working conditions, job security, hours of work, and numbers of those living in poverty were worse in the mid-1990s than the 1970s and American workers in the new century were not as well off as their counterparts of thirty years earlier. In the late 1990s, almost 30 percent of the work force earned at or less than poverty level wages. Among these, about 40 percent of African American and Latino workers earned poverty level wages. Shifting earnings are intimately connected to the transformation of the economy from one based on high paying manufacturing jobs, often unionized, to low paying non-union service employment. Income and wealth inequality has risen in America over the last thirty years as well, no doubt stimulated by Reagan, Clinton, and Bush era tax cuts. The top 1 percent of income earners, received 39 percent of the nation's income, controlled 65 percent of its assets, 88 percent of its stock, 96 percent of its bonds, and had 26 percent of the nation's debt (compared to 74 percent of the debt held by the bottom 90 percent of income earners).

A recent report by the Economic Policy Institute summarized findings about the first five years of the new century:

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- 1) Profits are up but wages and incomes of average Americans are down.
- 2) More and more people are deeper in debt.
- 3) Job creation has not kept up with population growth and employment rates have fallen significantly.
- 4) Poverty is on the rise (increasing by 5.4 million people since 2000).
- 5) Rising health care costs are eroding families' already declining incomes.

This grim portrait is paralleled by data from the global economy. 1.2 billion people in the world live on less than \$1 a day and close to half the world's population live on less than \$2 a day. The income of the top 1 percent of income earners in the world equal the bottom 57 percent of the population. 840 million people are malnourished. 6 million children below the age of six die each year because of inadequate food and water. 1.1 billion people do not have access to clean water and 2.4 billion lack adequate sanitation. 40 million people are living with AIDS. Women constitute the greatest share of those living in poverty, 70 percent. Women work 2/3 of the world's working hours and produce half the world's food yet earn only 10 percent of the world's income.

In addition, despite outsourcing of jobs from developed capitalist countries to poorer countries of the Global South, the trajectory of employment over the last 50 years has involved significant shifts from agriculture, to manufacturing, to service, and most recently to the informal sector. Essentially agricultural employment has declined by half since 1950, while industrial employment has risen only modestly. Service work has doubled. And finally, employment in the so-called informal sector has risen to 40 - 50 percent of the working populations in various regions of the globe. This has meant changes from modest self-sustaining agricultural production or higher wage manufacturing jobs,

to lower paying service employment, to extremely marginalized, insecure, and low wage earners in the desperate pursuit of survival.

Dire developments in the human condition have paralleled significant structural changes in the global economy, the real source of "globalization." These include incredible economic concentration. For example, 200 multinational corporations produce about one-third of all that is produced on the face of the globe. 40 percent of global trade is intra-firm, that is importing and exporting unfinished and finished products from within the firms themselves. Since the 1970s there has been a qualitative shift in total global commerce from trade in goods and services to financial speculation. \$1.5 trillion is exchanged every working day including the buying and selling of stocks, bonds, currencies, and other forms of paper. Policies of the IMF, World Bank, WTO, and wealthy capitalist countries have forced poorer countries (and rich ones) to open their economies to these corporate and banking giants. This is what the neoliberal economic policies are really about.

Renowned economist, Samir Amin, has recently described the depths of this human tragedy and demanded of us that we move beyond a philanthropic vision of the problem. He wrote: "A discourse on poverty and the necessity of reducing its magnitude, if not eradicating it, has become fashionable today. It is a discourse of charity, in the nineteenth century style, which does not seek to understand the economic and social mechanisms that generate poverty, although the scientific and technological means to eradicate it are now available."

Amin estimates that 20 million high tech farmers can produce the world's food needs while nearly 3 billion peasants cannot compete in local markets, and thus can not earn even a modest living. About 1.5 billion urban workers are in marginal, insecure jobs. Therefore, about 2/3 of the global population constitute the "precarious classes," increasingly marginalized, unable to engage in employment that earns a secure income. And these precarious classes, he claims, are the byproducts of the global capitalist economy of the 21st century. Ultimately, he suggests, we must see the connections between multinational corporations and banks, international economic institutions, the policies of powerful capitalist countries and the human misery that has beset the globe. And, he implies, we must see the common experiences and common interests of workers in the wealthier countries and those in the Global South and the common interests of workers everywhere.

In the long run we as progressive and concerned citizens must work to build a global economy that puts "people before profit" and that celebrates public goods over privatization and cruel so-called "market freedoms." We must build campaigns of advocacy for what I have called positive government; that is public programs that protect each and every person in the United States and the globe from joblessness, malnutrition, homelessness, illiteracy, and despair.

The good news is that there already exist massive movements for justice and peace in this country and



The Argentinian delegation at the World Social Forum in Caracas, Venezuela held banners reading "Another America is on the march," January 25, 2006.

around the world. We look with appreciation at the growing global opposition to neoliberal globalization at the meetings of grass roots groups at the World Social Forum. We applaud the Bolivian people for their fight against the privatization of their water and natural gas resources. We are excited about the efforts of Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia, Brazil and other countries in the Western Hemisphere to throw off the yoke of exploitation and to build solidaristic movements across national boundaries. And in our own country we support the efforts of ACORN, Community Labor United, and other groups to rebuild hurricane devastated communities for the people who live there. We support struggles for living wages and labor rights in our communities. And we oppose efforts by those who wish to pri-

vate institutions that our forbears fought long and hard to create, such as schools, libraries, public utilities, and ports and roads and benefits such as social security, pensions, affordable access to higher education and health care.

The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee on this Justice Sunday has committed itself to raising the consciousness of people to global plight. It encourages participation in campaigns in the United States for living wage legislation. It encourages campaigns against market fundamentalism at home and abroad. These reform campaigns are of critical importance today. As global activists have declared in response to the Thatcher thesis: "Another World is Necessary" and "Another World is Possible."

The Voices of Immigrants Must Be Heard

By David Bacon and Nativio Lopez

On Monday, May 1, over a million people filled the streets of Los Angeles, with hundreds of thousands more in Chicago, New York, and cities and towns throughout this country. Immigrants feel their backs are against the wall, and are coming out of their homes and workplaces to show it.

In part, their protests respond to HR 4437 - the Sensenbrenner bill - that proposes to eliminate all social space in which undocumented immigrants can work, survive, and provide for their families.

The protests do more than react to a particular Congressional agenda, however. They are the cumulative response to years of bashing and denigrating immigrants generally, and Mexican and Latinos in particular. The protests seem spontaneous, but they come as a result of years of organizing, educating, and agitating - activities that have given immigrants confidence, and at least some organizations the credibility needed to mobilize direct mass action.

This movement is the legacy of Bert Corona, immigrant rights pioneer and founder of many national Latino organizations. He trained thousands of immigrant activists, taught the value of political independence, and believed that immigrants themselves must conduct the fight for immigrant rights. Most of the leaders of our movement today were students or disciples of Bert Corona.

Together, these factors have produced a huge popular response, a fightback like we've never seen before.

Unfortunately, however, these protests are also being used in Washington D.C. to justify compromises which betray the interests of immigrants and working people generally. Some more liberal Washington legislators, and their



On May Day 2006 immigrants and their supporters of all races and nationalities filled the streets of Los Angeles twice in one day -- a huge march downtown, and another through the Wilshire district's Miracle Mile. There were so many people that those participating said they were "sin numero" -- uncountable.
photo by David Bacon

coterie of beltway lobbyists, even claim credit for the marches, or at least use them to justify their proposed compromises. But people have poured into the streets, not to support these proposals, but driven by fear of the harm they will do.

All of the various compromises offered in the Senate have repressive Sensenbrenner-type measures within them. The three-tier Hagel-Martinez legalization program, for instance, would produce a codified caste system, a sort of Bantu Apartheid that is un-American, and would rip our families apart. The Democratic Party's answer to the Sensenbrenner bill has been the McCain-Kennedy immigration proposal, which contains huge guest worker programs and increased workplace raids to punish the undocumented for the crime of working.

The huge number of immigrants and their supporters in the streets find these Senate compromises completely unacceptable. We will only get what we're ready to fight

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for, but people are ready and willing to fight for the whole enchilada. This is not the best that we can get, and we have nothing to lose.

Our greatest problem is that the Democratic Party is unwilling to stand and fight to oppose the repugnant idea of second-class status, in its haste to make a deal. National advocacy organizations claiming to represent immigrants are showing signs that they will accept these deals as well. At the same time, Washington legislators and lobbyists fear the growth of a new civil rights movement in the streets, because it rejects their compromises and makes demands that go beyond what they have defined as "politically possible."

People are willing to fight for more, and are making far-reaching demands. The immigration debate must be resolved by immigrants themselves, and their voice must be paramount - not the voice of the politically well-connected.

Much of the leadership of Washington's liberal hierarchy has already accepted the McCain/Kennedy proposal, and further Senate compromises, with no real consultation with immigrant workers. They have become compromised by ties to political parties and large corporations, all of which have more powerful voices than those of immigrants. This elitist approach has been rejected by millions of people in the last month's marches and demonstrations who want a voice in the decisions that will affect their lives.

These ties have never been honestly discussed with immigrant communities. Before the latest marches, those ties led these organizations to tell us not to stop work, leave school, or buy anything for just a single day. Yet it is obvious that the national debate has changed only because of

our willingness to do those very things.

The May 1st actions highlighted the economic importance of immigrant labor. Undocumented workers deserve legal status because of that labor - their inherent contribution to society. The value they create is never called illegal, and no one dreams of taking it away from the employers who profit from it. Yet the people who produce that value are called exactly that - illegal. All workers create value through their labor, but immigrant workers are especially profitable, because they are so often denied many of the union-won benefits accorded to native-born workers.

The average undocumented worker has been in the U.S. for five years. By that time, these workers have paid a high price for their lack of legal status, through low wages and lost benefits. The Senate compromises would have them pay even more - fines for legalization, as though they were criminals. These compromises would then have them wait over a decade to gain real legal status, not even considering the millions who would not qualify, and would then be deported.

Undocumented workers deserve immediate legal status, and have already paid for it. On May 1st, immigrant workers demonstrated their power in the national immigration debate. Their absence from workplaces, schools and stores sent a powerful message that that they will not be shut out of this discussion, and that corporate-funded national organizations do not speak for them.

They are rescuing from anonymity the struggle for the 8-hour day, begun in Chicago over a century ago by the immigrants of yesteryear. They are recovering the traditions of all working people.

Code Gray: Race, Health and Medicine

By Carl Bloice and Conn Hallinan

*The following article originally appeared in the California Nurses Association's publication **Revolution Magazine**, June 15, 2005.*

The biotech company, Perlegen Sciences, made a dramatic announcement this February at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. At a press conference, which drew media from all over the world, the company announced it had successfully associated the "genetic determinants" of many diseases with specific racial groups. In reporting the claims, *San Jose Mercury News* science writers Lisa Kreiger and Esther Landhuis wrote Feb. 18, "the idea of race-based medicine has new respectability" and "could

help reduce health disparities among the races," including "hypertension [that] affects black Americans at a higher rate than white Americans."

Perlegen's proclamation came on the heels of similar announcements about so-called "race-tailored" or pharmacogenomic drugs, including a glaucoma drug, travatan, and the heart drug, BiDil. This focus on race and medicine even includes an examination of the Pima Indian genome aimed at ferreting out the reason why Native Americans suffer adult-onset diabetes at a rate three times that of whites.

Certainly the disparity in terms of health and morbidity between European whites on one hand, and African-Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanics, on the other, is a sobering one.

Heart disease deaths among African Americans are 40 percent higher than for whites, and deaths from cancer are 30 percent higher. Hispanics die from diabetes at twice the rate of non-Hispanic whites, and infant mortality for

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African-Americans and Native Americans is almost twice what it is for whites, as reported by Sandra Soo-Jin Lee, Joanna Mountain and Barbara Koenig in the *Yale Journal of Health Policy, Law and Ethics* in 2001.

But are health disparities among populations the result of genetic differences, or do they reflect something about the way those populations live? And would "race-targeted" drugs improve the health of these groups, or might they end up masking the underlying causes of such disparities?

"Race," researcher and internist Dr. Peter Groeneveld told *Revolution*, is an "ephemeral concept and poorly correlated with disease. It is not the most useful way to think about the human genome." Groeneveld, an assistant professor of medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, is the lead author of a recent study in the *Journal of American Cardiology* on racial disparity in access to heart defibrillators.

This sudden concern with race has opened up some sharp debates among researchers. There are some who are openly suspicious that the medical profession, according to University of California at Santa Cruz sociologist Andrew Szasz, is looking "for that 'magic bullet' that means we don't have to deal with the issue at the heart of this matter: inequality."

Unequal access to health care is a longstanding problem. Almost 40 years ago the National Advisory Commission of Civil Disorder, the so-called "Kerner Commission," concluded, "The residents of the racial ghetto are significantly less healthy than most other Americans. They suffer from higher mortality rates, higher incidents of major diseases, and lower availability and utilization of medical services."

The commission went on to argue that in everything from medicine to education and housing, "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white, separate and unequal."

Almost three decades later, a "Report on Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care" by the American Medical Association found that little has been done to bridge the gap and that "in too many aspects of our society the movement toward two societies continues."

The most recent study of this gulf, by the Center for Disease Control (CDC), found that African-Americans die at a higher rate than whites from nearly every cause, including HIV, stroke, high blood pressure and many infectious diseases. "We've been talking about this problem," Dr. Ben Truman, associate director of the CDC's Office of Minority Health, told the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, "but we haven't done enough in terms of resources and making sure interventions known to be effective are used widely in both populations."

Drug Targeting Fallacy

Some in the medical profession argue that drugs targeting specific genetic groups are an effective way to deliver better health. That is certainly the idea behind the heart drug BiDil, which trials suggest is more effective

for African-Americans than for whites. The drug's manufacturer, NitroMed, argues that aiming the drug at the African-American community makes sense, because "African-Americans between the ages of 45 and 64 are 2.5 times more likely to die from heart failure than Caucasians in the same age range."

But sociologist Troy Duster, director of New York University's Institute for the History of the Production of Knowledge, says the figures are more complex and nuanced than the company would have people believe. According to Duster, in the March 18 issue of *Science* magazine, the 45- to 64-age group only accounts for about 6 percent of heart attack deaths and the statistical disparity between the two groups after age 65 "nearly completely disappears."

Jonathan Kahn of the Center for Bioethics at the University of Minnesota, even disputes the claim that African-Americans suffer heart failure at twice the rate of whites. "The most current available data," he writes in his seminal study of heart attack statistics, indicate the rate "is 1 to 1:1." He adds, "Uncritical acceptance and promulgation of inaccurate data may be distorting current efforts to address the real health problems associated with heart failure and also lends credence to those who argue that race can and should be used as a biological category."

Hypertension is indeed a problem for African-Americans, but the black-white disparity is "significantly smaller," says Duster, among black populations in Brazil, Trinidad and Cuba, suggesting the condition is more about the social experiences of these populations than problems in their genetic structure.

A recent study in Puerto Rico by anthropologists Clarence C. Gravlee and William W. Dressler concluded that there was "no association between skin pigmentation and blood pressure."

Medical researchers currently are examining the genome of Pima Indians, trying to identify a gene that might be related to diabetes. But biological anthropologist Jonathan Marks of the University of North Carolina, thinks researchers are looking in the wrong place. "The Pima are the fattest people on earth, with lots of diabetes," he says, "but that is only since World War II. If you look at pictures of Pima before that, they look like everyone else."

Marks says that instead of searching for some kind of "genetic" explanation for the diabetes plague, researchers should be examining the "enormous changes in lifestyle the Pima have gone through," changes that include not only an increase in fatty, high carbohydrate foods "the same food that is making all Americans fat" but also alcohol use. They drink because reservation life sucks," he says.

Blood Debate

Critics of those who correlate disease with race have come under fire recently for sacrificing science in the name of "political correctness." Dr. Sally Satel of the conservative American Enterprise Institute (AEI) argues in "Medicine's Race Problem," published in a 2001 *Policy*

Review, that attacks on race-based medicines are engaging in the "censorship of inquiry."

Satel points to the new heart drug BiDil as an example of how race can be associated with both disease and treatment. Tests indicate that many African-Americans have less nitric oxide in their cells than European Americans and, therefore, usual heart medicines are not as effective for them as they are for whites. BiDil appears to replenish nitric oxide supplies.

But do African-Americans have lower nitric oxide levels in their cells because of some genetic anomaly? Or, as David Goldstein and Huntington Willard of the Duke University Institute of Genome Science and Policy told the *Raleigh News & Observer*, might it be a side effect of the higher levels of lead and pesticides among African-Americans?

Certainly the idea of using genetics to deliver drugs "holds promise," says sociologist Duster, but he warns against using a "phenotype" - how people appear, as opposed to their actual gene markers, as a basis for treatment.

Harvard Professor of Biology Emerita Ruth Hubbard believes that the rub comes when people start associating gene frequencies with certain populations. "The job of medicine is to treat an individual, not a group," Hubbard says in the publication *Gene Watch*. "By looking at a group you are liable to overlook the individual's particulars." She also points out that by simply treating the condition could end up diverting researchers from its real source.

Meanwhile, Satel contends higher cancer mortality rates among African American women are race-related. African-American women have a 50 percent higher incidence of breast cancer before the age of 35. But Hubbard believes figures like these do not indicate "inherent, biological differences" between blacks and whites. The problem, Hubbard says, is that U.S. health statistics are presented without reference to employment, income, housing and healthy living.

Getting the "Point"

And not taking social class into account can skew results. Epidemiologist Nancy Krieger, for instance, found that when social class is taken into consideration, the breast cancer mortality differential between whites and blacks drops from 1.35 to 1.10.

"When we use science to investigate subjects like race and sex, which are suffused with cultural meanings and embedded in power relationships, we need to be wary of scientific descriptions and interpretations that support, or even enhance, the prevailing political realities," Kreiger and New York Department of Health Deputy Commissioner Mary Bassett, conclude in their study. It is not just who you are, but also where you live.

The Bayview Hunter's Point neighborhood on San Francisco's northern edge is a case in point. The 34,800 residents of the 3 1/2-mile section of the city live amidst a federal Superfund site, two power plants, the city's main sewage treatment plant, almost 200 leaking underground

fuel tanks, 124 hazardous waste handlers and a recycling plant. Forty-eight percent of its residents are African-American, 17 percent Hispanics, 23 percent Asian-Pacific Islanders, and 10 percent are European whites. Nearly 40 percent of its residents earn less than \$15,000 annually, almost double that percentage for the rest of the city. Unemployment rates are twice those of the surrounding city.

The neighborhood is a public health disaster. Rates of cervical and breast cancer are twice that of the rest of the Bay area, and hospitalization for congestive heart failure, hypertension, diabetes and emphysema are three times the statewide average. The "Point" and neighboring Potrero Hill account for more than half of all the infant mortality in San Francisco.

Environmental justice community organizer and Green Action board member Marie Harrison says what is happening in Bayview Hunter's Point is "common across the country." She says an expert told her, "You take me to any city in the country and show me the highest point, tell me where the factories are, and tell me which way the wind blows and I can tell you about the environmental conditions and who lives there." She adds, "Where you have the greatest pollution, that is where the poor folks live."

Sociologist Szasz, who has studied "environmental racism" extensively, agrees: "No one sends a brown or black baby home with a bag of industrial waste, but that is the effect of living where most of these people live."

Placing Investments

The transcription of the human genome not only has been a windfall for geneticists, but it also has created new markets for drug companies. Many medical researchers and health providers question the priority of looking for new drugs rather than concentrating on improving health care for underserved populations.

For instance, a recent study in the *American Journal of Public Health* indicates that ending the disparities in health care would be a far more effective way to improve health for African-Americans than new drugs. "Five times as many lives can be saved by correcting the disparities (in health



Youth from Bayview Hunters Point marching May 16, 2001 to kick off a campaign to protest the pollution from the PG&E Hunters Point Power Plant. The campaign coincided with the PG&E shareholders meeting.

care between blacks and whites] as by developing new treatments," says Dr. Steven H. Woolf, lead author of the study and director of research at Virginia Commonwealth University's Department of Family Medicine. The study showed that from 1991 to 2000, some 886,000 deaths could have been prevented by ending disparities in care, while only 176,633 were averted because of improvements in medicine. The authors conclude, "The prudence of investing billions in the development of new drugs and technologies while investing only a fraction of that amount in the correction of disparities deserves reconsideration."

Pennsylvania internist Groeneveld is also worried that thinking about medicine in terms of race could produce a dangerous side effect. "Equality is what concerns me here," he says, "If more and more therapies are devised for racial groups, it is inevitable that they will benefit Caucasians because they are the larger group at the expense of other social ills in populations. I am concerned that such therapies will focus on the main population, which is where the money is."

Duster strongly agrees. "Do you actually think high-end molecular medicine will be for black people?" he asks, adding, "This was always for people of privilege."

Many biologists are leery of trying to define race, not just because of the social implications, but because it is not very good science. "We don't have the tools to use this information predicatively," says Hubbard. Does the term "race" have a place in medical care? As a biological category, the majority consensus seems to be "no." But many social scientists argue that as long as racism is an aspect of our world, the term has real value, and is the reason why so many oppose efforts like that of former University of California Regent Ward Connerly to abolish the use of race-based data.

"In health care, we are convinced it is legitimate to use traditional categories of racial differences when engaging in studies of the pernicious effects of racism itself," writes Koenig, Lee and Mountain. Koenig argues that an undue emphasis on genetics at the expense of social factors derails a real solution. "If you look at the history of improvements in life expectations in the industrial west, the things that make the most difference in terms of overall health status were not medical intervention, but those in the social domain."

The Social-Health Imperative

Groeneveld suggests there has to be "a turnaround on how hospitals are reimbursed for providing health care and for upgrading technology. There are ways to make hospitals better. There needs to be reimbursement for quality care. Medical hospitals that take care of the indigent and poor should be better reimbursed."

...a recent study in the American Journal of Public Health indicates that ending the disparities in health care would be a far more effective way to improve health for African-Americans than new drugs.

The recent assault on employer-provided health care is adding to the growing numbers of Americans with reduced benefits or without health coverage at all. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, while employee costs were rising 9.3 percent in 2003, benefits were being reduced. Some

8 percent of large private employers cut health benefits for retirees in 2004 and 11 percent plan to do so in 2005.

At the same time that private health plans are becoming more costly and covering less, 34 states have either cut or tightened Medicaid for the poor, among whom minorities are historically over-represented. An estimated 15.6 percent of the population, or 45 million people, were without health insurance coverage in 2003, up from 15.2 percent, or 43.6 million people, in 2002.

Minorities are more likely to be uninsured than the population as whole. More than a third of Hispanics and over a quarter of Native-Americans are uninsured compared to 13 percent of whites. The uninsured rate for African Americans stands at 21 percent and for Asian-Americans at 20 percent.

The problem of race-based health disparities has been the subject of discussion for many years. "We have gone from Healthy People 2000 to Healthy People 2010," from "decreasing the gap" to "eliminating the gap" of health disparities," says Ludmilla F. Wikkeling-Scott, MPH, a legislative assistant to Rep. John Conyers (D Mich.) and former public health specialist with the Department of Health and Human Services. "Yet, we are still struggling to address these issues in minority communities most affected by such disparities."

Wikkeling-Scott points to Dr. W.E.B. DuBois's 1899 study "The Philadelphia Negro," calling it a sophisticated "needs assessment" of the status of health in the black community. "Now, more than a century later, the most sophisticated state of the art medical solutions cannot provide us with answers to the dilemma," she said. "The same disparities brought to our attention then are still profound today."

Racial disparities in health care are clearly multifaceted, the issues surrounding race-based therapies complex. However there is widespread agreement that the key to improving the health indicators in minority communities lies in leveling the field in health care access and delivery.

"When we return to communities to take care of our people, not for the money but for the simple fact that everyone deserves care, this will bring us one step forward to eliminating health disparities in minority communities," says Wikkeling-Scott. "Without access, we have nothing."

That is also an assumption behind the effort in Congress to move toward a universal system. Pointing to legislation introduced by Rep. Conyers, Joel Segal, a spokesman for the congressman says, "The only way to eliminate economic and racial disparities is through universal health care. Right

now it is the way to get rid of a system that it inherently separate and unequal. We must end the situation of a large number of people uninsured."

Conyers' bill, he says, "would essentially mean Medicare for all."

Deborah Burger, RN, president of the California Nurses Association, says, "Some of the problem of racial health disparities is the differences in economic status. But when you think about it, there is surely also a connection with where

people live, how much pollution there is and how much access to health care facilities. In the end it all comes down to the need for universal access to one standard of care. The big questions are: Can you afford adequate health care? Does your job provide for insurance and, if so, what kind? You cannot eliminate the disparities until you address the inequities in the current system. Those of us in CNA see this as another important reason for pressing ahead toward a universal health care system."

Confusing the Issue: Mearsheimer & Walt's "The Israel Lobby"

By Libby Frank

The following paper reflects the U.S. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom's goal of exposing the root causes of oppression and WILPF's challenge to U.S. policy on Israel and Palestine.

John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, authors of the paper, "The Israel Lobby," *London Review of Books* Vol. 28, 6, March 23, 2006,* hold leading positions in American academic life. The paper is provoking great interest in political and activist circles and provides an opportunity to clarify issues of the "Israel Lobby" and U.S. policy.

The authors' vividly describe the oppressive Israeli actions and the billions of dollars of U.S. tax money that go to Israel. The authors also detail efforts to keep the U.S. public ignorant of what is going on in the Middle East and how debate is controlled on these issues.

However, there are many problems in the paper. I focus here on only a few:

1. The exoneration of the U.S. from responsibility for its own foreign policy;
2. The definition of the "Israel Lobby;"
3. Claims of no benefits to U.S. from Israel;
4. The "Jewish Face" of the Israel Lobby.

The exoneration of U.S. Policy

Most important, the authors (henceforth M-W) dismiss claims that the U.S. government's imperialist, repressive moves in the Middle East are an integral part of its overall foreign policy. According to them, the "Israel Lobby" is to blame.

Noam Chomsky faults the M-W paper, writing that "it leaves the US government untouched on its high pinnacle of nobility."¹

Does Israel "divert" U.S. policy from what its national interest would suggest, as stated by M-W, or do the interest

of the right-wing Israeli government coincide with those of the U.S.?

Diverse voices around the world challenge the idea that the Israel Lobby is responsible for U.S. policy vis a vis Israel. Following are some of the most eloquent:

Vijay Prashad in the online version of *The Hindu* (India)

"AIPAC (American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee) and AJC (the American Jewish Committee) are powerful, but they do not determine U.S. foreign policy. They are powerful not just because of their money, but because their views converge with those of the neo-conservative elements who dominate the ruling coalition in Washington."²

Mitchell Plitnick, *Jewish Voice for Peace* (U.S.)

"U.S. geostrategic interest in a strong Israel has been considerable for a long time. The idea that after WWII the U.S. or any other major power would allow independent Arab governments to emerge and control their own oil resources is simply not credible."³

Joseph Massad, faculty member at Columbia, in the *Al-Ahram Weekly*:

"Is the pro-Israel lobby extremely powerful in the United States? As someone who has been facing the full brunt of their power for the last three years through their formidable influence on my own university and their attempts to get me fired, I answer with a resounding yes. Are they primarily responsible for US policies towards the Palestinians and the Arab world? Absolutely not."⁴

The Palestine Solidarity Committee (USA):

"There is no evidence of a centralized international conspiracy of Jews to control banks, media, Congress, or the world in general....

"We find hints of this stereotype in the insistence that U.S. support for Israel is entirely due to the influence of the so-called 'Jewish lobby'....Furthermore, there are several

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*The paper can be accessed at:

http://www.lrb.co.uk/v28/n06/print/mear01_.html

other powerful factions that pressure the US government to support the Israeli government, such as right-wing Christian groups...and the Aerospace Industry Association (AIA). The AIA, promoting sales of weapons and equipment to Israel, donates twice as much to political campaigns in this country as all the pro-Israel groups combined." ⁵

Definition of the "Israel Lobby"

M-W contend that since 1967 the Israel Lobby has been responsible for the "centerpiece of U.S. Middle Eastern policy" being "its relationship with Israel." They allege that the Israel Lobby is behind "... the Bush administration's ambition to transform the Middle East" and that this "is at least partly aimed at improving Israel's strategic situation." The Israel Lobby is defined by M-W as "shorthand for the loose coalition of individuals and organizations who actively work to steer U.S. foreign policy in a pro-Israel direction...Many of the key organizations in the Lobby, such as the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organisations, are run by hardliners who generally support the Likud Party's expansionist policies....The Lobby also includes prominent Christian evangelicals...and 'neo-conservative gentiles'...."

But a major omission from their definition is the powerful role of the weapons manufacturers and their lobby - namely the Aerospace Industry Association (AIA).

The profits from arms sales to the Middle East by members of the AIA are tremendous. Omitting this aspect obscures the drive by the U.S. for hegemony in the region. It appears that M-W do not see this drive by the U.S. as a problem.

The AIA itself proudly acknowledges its role: "...it is assumed that for any potential sale of U.S. defense equipment, a decision has already been made that such a sale would be consistent with U.S. foreign policy interests...." ⁶

M-W state that "The U.S. has provided Israel with nearly \$3 billion to develop weapons systems, and given it access to such top-drawer weaponry as Blackhawk helicopters and F-16 jets...." But this is not due to the "Israel Lobby" as defined by M-W. They don't mention the lobbying efforts by Sikorsky, the manufacturer of the Black Hawks, or Lockheed Martin, the manufacturer of the F-16s.

Lockheed Martin Aeronautics Company is the world's largest "defense" contractor. In 2001, Israel decided to purchase 52 additional F-16 fighter jets. The contract value was reported to be approximately \$1.3 billion. ⁷ It has donated over \$1 million to members of the U.S. government committees responsible for awarding defense contracts, and in return has been rewarded with orders from the U.S. government worth \$65 million per day. There is also a "revolving door" between the company and the Bush administration, with personnel working for Lockheed Martin moving to the Pentagon, and vice versa. ⁸

The producer of Blackhawk helicopters, Sikorsky Aircraft Corporation, is a subsidiary of United

Technologies Corporation. In February 2001, Sikorsky was awarded a \$211.8 million contract for 24 additional Black Hawk helicopters to serve the Israeli Air Force. ⁷

These companies target members of House and Senate Appropriations subcommittees, which allocate federal defense money, and the Armed Service committees. Both companies spend heavily on lobbyists in Washington. ⁸

Can we imagine that Sikorsky and Lockheed Martin don't have vested interests in U.S. foreign policy? Yet M-W make absolutely no mention of this kind of influence and it is missing from their definition of the Israel lobby.

Claims of No Benefits to the U.S. from Israel

M-W express concern that the U.S. isn't getting its money's worth from Israel, but they ignore benefits the U.S. currently receives from Israel. While giving a good account of past assistance and cooperation with U.S. foreign policy, M-W tacitly convey the idea that currently it's a one-way street. That is, that the U.S. is completely supporting Israel and getting nothing worthwhile in return.

But there are many ways Israel helps U.S. aggression today. Two right-wing governments are supporting each other and gaining from each other.

As Joseph Massad has written in *Al Ahram*, "...it is in fact the very centrality of Israel to U.S. strategy in the Middle East that accounts, in part, for the strength of the pro-Israel lobby and not the other way around.... The fact that it is more powerful than any other foreign lobby on Capitol Hill testifies to the importance of Israel in U.S. strategy and not to some fantastical power that the lobby commands independent of and extraneous to the U.S. 'national interest' The pro-Israel lobby could not sell its message... if Israel was a communist or anti-imperialist country or if Israel opposed U.S. policy elsewhere in the world." ⁴

Douglas Feith, currently U.S. Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, once explained that "...Israel has formidable military forces, intelligence capabilities, militarily relevant R&D skills, strategically located ports and airfields, training facilities, medical infrastructure, and high-quality equipment maintenance skills. Israel willingly allows the U.S. to benefit from all this. Without Israel, the U.S. couldn't duplicate these benefits in the Middle East, even if we spent many billions of dollars." ¹⁰

Today, Israel is actively providing aid to the U.S. in Iraq. In the words of an Associated Press release, "After decades of U.S. military aid and defense cooperation, the U.S. military is permeated by technology developed in Israel." ¹¹

A remarkable story in the *Los Angeles Times* has recently reported on the advice and support that the U.S. receives from Israel on how to fight the insurgency in Iraq. Here are some excerpts.

"In the last six months, U.S. Army commanders, Pentagon officials and military trainers have sought advice from Israeli intelligence and security officials on everything from how to set up roadblocks to the best way to bomb suspected guerrilla hide-outs in an urban area.

"Israeli and American officials confirm that ... the

Pentagon is increasingly seeking advice from the Israeli military on how to defeat the sort of insurgency that Israel has long experience confronting.

"The Israelis certainly have a wealth of experience from a military standpoint in dealing with domestic terror, urban terror, military operations in urban terrain, and there is a great deal of intelligence and knowledge sharing going on right now, all of which makes sense,' a senior U.S. Army official said on condition of anonymity. 'We are certainly tapping into their knowledge base to find out what you do in these kinds of situations.'"

"Many of the tactics recently adopted by the U.S. in Iraq - increased use of airpower, aerial surveillance by unmanned aircraft of suspected sites, increased use of pinpoint search and seizure operations, the leveling of buildings used by suspected insurgents - bear striking similarities to those regularly employed by Israel.

"In the last week, U.S. soldiers began leveling houses and buildings used by suspected guerillas, a tactic long employed by the Israeli military in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.... The Americans learned a lot from the Israelis' use of (bulldozers) in urban combat." ¹²

In addition to weapons manufacturers, there are oil interests tied in with the administration. These interests are dismissed by M-W, saying "there is hardly any direct evidence to support this claim," that is, concern for oil.

One must also consider the gendarme role that nuclear-armed Israel plays in the region, a consideration completely ignored by M-W.

The Lobby with a "Jewish Face"

Let's be clear. Criticism of Israeli government policy or repressive actions is not anti-Semitic. But when one speaks of the "Israel Lobby," it resounds as the "Jewish Lobby." M-W, focusing on Jewish lobby groups, fuel that perception.

Mitchell Plitnick, of Jewish Voice for Peace, explains: "One of the classic anti-Semitic myths is that of Jews manipulating governments and other seats of power behind the scenes. That pretty closely describes the work of a lobby, and there is a powerful one, with a Jewish face, working to push particular policies regarding Israel. We need to understand that lobby, what its effect is, and what its nature is. That means asking, directly and fairly, is this a 'Jewish lobby', and does this truly have the power to be a tail wagging the dog of American Middle East policy?.... Jewish 'shadow control' is an old canard of anti-Semitism." ³

And Vijay Prashad in *Frontline* (India) continues "The idea of the 'Jewish lobby' is attractive because it draws upon at least a few hundred years of anti-Semitic worry about an international conspiracy operated by Jewish financiers to defraud the European and American working poor of their

livelihood. ... The stereotype of a 'Jew' without a country, but with a bank, had no loyalty to the nation, no solidarity with fellow citizens The Nazis stigmatised the 'Jew' as the reason for poverty and exploitation and obscured the role played by capitalism...."

Criticism of Israeli government policy or repressive actions is not anti-Semitic. But when one speaks of the "Israel Lobby," it resounds as the "Jewish Lobby." M-W, focusing on Jewish lobby groups, fuel that perception.

Summary

It is important to realize that U.S. policy is no more altruistic in the Middle East than it is anywhere else in the world. The U.S. doesn't need an Israel Lobby to tell it how to conduct its own dirty business.

Many readers of the Mearsheimer-Walt paper are angry and frustrated by the one-sided policies of the U.S. government and their echo in the corporate media. And many have welcomed the articulate exposé by M-W of elements in the Israel Lobby.

But what is presented relieves the U.S. government of almost all responsibility for its misdeeds in the region. Thinking progressive activists cannot accept this thesis.

Footnotes:

1. Noam Chomsky. "The Israel Lobby?" *Znet*, March 28, 2006.
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Solomon Responds to Davidson on Building a Progressive Majority

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sorting out corporate friend and foe. But we should also be alert to confusing and vitiating the opposition of broad circles to dominant corporate practices.

There are some questions regarding Carl's definition of the center. Rejecting my view that the center has no systemic political philosophy, Carl claims that there is a systemic centrist politics: "redistributionist liberal capitalism" joined to "a foreign policy to defend US interests and project the values of liberal capitalism globally." Isn't that definition dated and out of step with recent shifts in the outlook of much of the political center? It is more an echo of Arthur Schlesinger's "Vital Center" of the late forties (or the "cold war liberals" scorned by the sixties' New Left) that heralded the cold war assault on the Henry Wallace Democratic Party left. Ultimately, the embrace of "U.S. interests" by erstwhile liberals led many of them inexorably to the right: promoting militarization, global anti-communism (now the "war on terror"), hostility to national liberation movements, etc. For many, that foreign policy outlook eviscerated their liberal domestic views, especially opposition to affirmative action.

Today there is a resurgence of sorts of this viewpoint. New Republic's Peter Beinart's "The Good Fight: How Liberals - and Only Liberals - Can Win the War on Terror and Make America Great Again," tries to resurrect the muscular "internationalism" embedded in the containment doctrine pressed by Truman, Humphrey, Kennedy and Johnson. (This trend is replicated in Great Britain in the "Euston Manifesto" that rejects the alleged anti-imperialist ravings of the far left while opposing perceived regressive and reactionary regimes.)

This trend has not always been consistent - especially when its "internationalism" degenerates into neo-colonial quagmires, prompting this "center" to complain that the containment doctrine had been misapplied. That happened with Vietnam, where a segment of that current broke with the war and joined left and center-left forces in an uneasy antiwar alliance. To a considerable extent that is happening again with Iraq - making it possible to forge at least temporary alliances with such forces against the war.

However, the reactionary kernel embedded in the "defense of U.S. interests" most likely consigns a good part of that center defined by Carl to implacable opposition to a progressive foreign - and domestic - policy. In the wake of Vietnam, a significant segment of the Humphrey-ADA contingent, as ever committed to "fighting communism," went over to the neo-conservative right. That's where the likes of Jeane Kirkpatrick and a host of others live today.

Observers like H.D.S. Greenway of the Boston Globe and Helena Cobban of the Christian Science Monitor have commented that a consequence of the Iraq adventure is the long term weakening of centrist support for U.S. military interventions. That is a long way from anti-imperialism, but

in view of the fact that clashes over foreign policy have often been the primary obstacles to cooperation between left and center, this is a significant development and a harbinger of better days ahead for coalition building.

Carl's critique provokes an important exploration of what we mean by the center and where to seek alliances. For the sake of advancing discussion, I would argue that the broad center would be represented by the National Council of Churches and community-based liberal religious organizations, the AFL-CIO, the NAACP, scores of professional and service organizations, those white workers who supported Jesse Jackson in the eighties, etc. Perhaps we also need to consider literally millions who characterize their views as "moderate" and how that fluid and unstructured public relates to efforts to build a progressive majority.

I agree strongly with Carl that we need to organize that "base community" of left forces on the basis of a shared programmatic vision that gives coherence and unity to the left itself and serves as a basis to negotiate, and ultimately cooperate, with the center. Perhaps at this point we need to be even more measured and concrete in taking modest and realistic first steps. That might constitute an initiative to launch discussions with those socialist groups that are oriented towards building broad progressive alliances.

Such discussions could, of course, explore what Carl identifies as "core values" in a transitional program: deep structural democracy, sustainable development, popular control of all productive activity and culture. But should such concepts, largely developed in academic circles, become the sole basis, even on the socialist left, for formulating a program? Some might argue that a first-step left program would have to be more immediate and less abstract - for example: universal health insurance, restoration of labor's right to organize, vast expansion of public sector spending on education, health, housing, etc., a living wage in a (relatively) full employment economy, advancing and strengthening laws against racial and gender discrimination, abolition of nuclear weapons and all weapons of mass destruction, reversal of discriminatory trade policies, etc. In any case, we agree that the left needs a unified starting point with which to approach center forces. (By the way, perhaps Carl's criticism of a suggested agenda for a left-center alliance - peace and environmental survival, economic and social justice, constitutional rights -- was a bit harsh. It was only meant as an opening framework for discussion of deeper and more detailed issues.)

Thanks again to Carl for his challenging critique that spurs us all to think harder and act with greater clarity and resoluteness. Let's keep it going.

Responses to the above exchange on "Building a Progressive Majority" are welcomed. Send text for publication by email to: national@cc-ds.org.

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