

Motivated by our different religious traditions, we believe that attitudes, priorities, and institutions can be changed to reflect a just and democratic use of the universes bounty; we believe in the value of work that contributes to the common good; and in the healing influence of respect for the differences as well as the commoness of human experience.

## WINTER 1998-99

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# Religious Socialism

THE JOURNAL FOR PEOPLE OF FAITH AND SOCIALISM

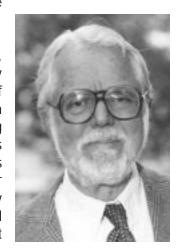
# You Shall Not Steal?

HARVEY CC

The acknowledged smash hit theatrical success of the 1990's was a music comedy loosely based on Victor Hugo's novel *Les Miserables*. In 1998 a ne film version of the gripping epoch of Jean Valjean also found a smaller k sympathetic audience. I wondered as I noticed the reception both receiv whether the people who saw either one fully realized the question Hugo h

originally raised: how are we to interpret the commandment that says "thou shalt not steal?"

The basic plot is familiar. Valjean is arrested when, overcome by hunger as he stares through a bakery window, then breaks the glass and steals a loaf of bread. Arrested immediately, he spends nineteen years in prison and the rest of his life living branded with the onus of being a convict. After his release on parole an understanding priest who has given him shelter for the night covers for him after he steals the rectory silverware. Hugo obviously meant his readers to remember an established tradition in religious ethics: to appropriate what one desperately needs to continue to live from



those who have some to spare cannot be considered theft. In fact, not long after the film was released, some of the leading Roman Catholic bishops of Braz without making reference to Victor Hugo, issued a public statement defending poor people who had "invaded" supermarkets and warehouses to steal food their hungry families. These incidents had occurred mainly in the northesection of the country where a severe drought had brought thousands of pofamilies to the edge of starvation. "The church does not condemn anyone with takes food wherever they find it to avoid starvation," Cardinal Serafim Fernand de Arujo of Belo Horizante, a spokesman for the other bishops said. Anoth bishop, Paulo Evaristo Arns of San Paulo said the people would not have take the food if they were not desperate.

The situation today in the United States is not the same as that in Brazil. At lea not yet. Too many Americans are undernourished, and some are hungry. Still

# editorial

This issue of RS presents our readers with some changes, in both appearance and staff. The Commission has a new Executive Committee, new officers, and a new editorial team. We hope to be able to offer you a publication as interesting as the previous editors have done.

A word about the previous editors: the Commission owes a great debt to Jack Spooner and Curt Sanders for their years of selfless dedication and their labour of love in making RS the quality publication it is. Too often Jack and Curt were left to go it alone when it came to making sure RS came out regularly and on time. They held things together when no one else would or could. In the last two years, Jack and Curt enlisted the help of David Seymour and Lew Daly, and they began the rotating editor method that has enabled RS to continue. The Commission expresses its sincere thanks to Jack, Curt, David and Lew for giving us a provocative and reliable newsletter, and we wish them well in their continuing endeavours.

For the coming year, we have four new rotating editors, all people with considerable experience in the socialist movement:

Andrew Hammer: Andrew is a former Co-Chair of the R&S Commission, and is currently Communications Director for the International League of Religious Socialists. He is also editor of the online magazine *Socialist*, as well as the webmaster for DSA and Socialist International Women.

Maxine Phillips: Maxine is a founding member and former National Director of DSA, as well as a former Co-Chair of the New York branch of the R&S Commission. She is currently the managing editor of *Dissent*, as well as on the editorial committee of DSA's national publication, *Democratic Left*.

John Cort: The founding editor of *Religious Socialism*, John has been active in DSA since its beginnings as DSOC. Long active in the Catholic Worker movement, he is the author of *Christian Socialism*, and has spoken around the world on the connection between religion and socialism.

Norm Faramelli: Norm is our sole cleric, an Episcopalian priest as well as a consultant on urban strategies concerning transportation and environmental issues. He serves on the Executive Committee of the R&S Commission.

Any publication requires the ongoing input of its readers. We encourage you to send us your ideas, your comments, and if you feel inspired, your articles. With the next issue we will also provide a list of our contributing editors, and we ask your patience as the new editors work together to find their way during the coming year.

# the editors



Andrew Hammer Winter 1998-99



Maxine Phillips Spring 1999



John Cort Summer 1999



Norm Faramelli Fall 1999



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#### Thou Shalt Not Steal?

cont'd from cover page

we are not faced either with drought or with the threat of mass starvation. Not yet. But with capitalism continuing to wreak havoc on the environment, and with the disparity between the rich and poor widening every year, one day we too may face the same kinds of choices Brazilians have had to face. Further, now that Amartya Sen has received the Nobel Prize for Economics, an idea which for years has been ridiculed as a left-wing eccentricity has now been given legitimacy. As a child, Sen lived through one of India's most severe famines. Later he became my colleague at Harvard. While he was here he was called to the Vatican to advise Pope John Paul II on issues of economic justice. Sen mixes a high degree of expertise in technical economics with a a philosophical approach and a strong commitment to justice. Sen's work proves that what causes famine is not the shortage of food. It is the inequitable distribution of income. People do not starve because there is nothing to eat.. They starve because they do not have the money to buy food...

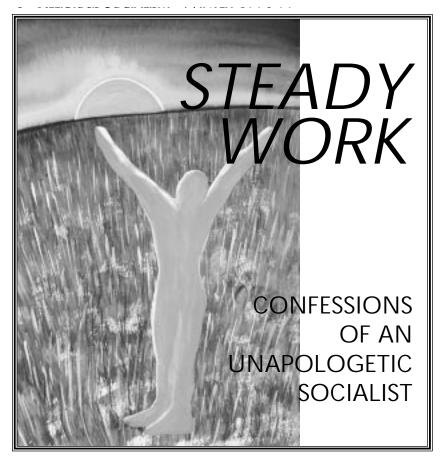
Les Miserables makes the same point. But why, other than its catchy tunes and skilled acting, does the story of Jean Valjean still resonate in capitalist America with us a century after Victor Hugo's death? Could it be that — given the high level of prosperity we are assured the country is enjoying — we are puzzled and annoyed when we encounter beggars in every major American city? If we are riding a wave of high employment, then why, some people ask, don't these people just get a job? Doesn't this beggar realize that I just put a quarter in the coffee cup of the previous one? Then perhaps we feel bad about our annoyance, and we remember a friend or acquaintance who just found himself or herself unexpectedly down-sized or restructured. We don't want to be tough or insensitive to poor people. But do they really have to accost us on our way to home from the office? It could be that a spot of confused and troubled conscience may be at work in the triumph of Les Miserables in a country that hates and fears misery. It may indicate a slight opening for a new discussion about the real nature of poverty and its causes.

True, the effect of the story may not be the one Hugo intended. The first response of a friend of mine who saw the film was how good it is that we don't treat the poor today the way they did then. Still, it seems

significant that a story centered on the ambiguity, and in some cases injustice, of what property and theft have come to mean in a capitalist culture, should surface just as the drive to accumulate wealth and to protect our property has reached new heights. It is all about money. Valjean stole bread. Today's street people ask for "spare change." With documented lineage and titles of nobility long since gone as marks of distinction, and with styles of dress no longer clearly delineating status, money has become the main basis of security and worth. A poster I recently noticed in a clinic puts it well. Eating right and exercising, it advised is "like money in the bank." A further implication was that it was like money that no one could steal. It is doubtful that most people today

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would go along fully with Benjamin Franklin's famous aphorism. Ben said, "Who steals my purse steals nothing. 'Twas mine, 'tis his. Who steals my reputation steals all." Currently reputations rise and fall. Hardly anyone is disgraced for long. Even Richard Nixon was honored as a distinguished statesman at the end of his life. But one's purse, if placed in the right bank or



■ MAXINE PHILLIPS

The following is taken from a sermon preached by Maxine Phillips at Judson Memorial Church in New York City, July 12, 1998.

When Peter [Steinfels] suggested that I talk on this date, his working title was "Thoughts of an Unrepentant Socialist." I had some feelings about that—about being typecast, pigeonholed...but I realized that my biggest objection was to the word *unrepentant*. After all, what is there to repent of? Every day that I walk out on the street or pick up the newspaper I see the misery caused by unbridled capitalism. The socialist ideal remains a good one. My only regret is that I'm not working hard enough to achieve it.

So I decided to take the tack that the Judson Search Committee did when it described our community as being unapologetically Christian. We meant to tease out the double meaning: first, as in making the case for, i.e., Christian apologetics. We don't have to argue its truth, we just have to live it as we understand it. Nor do we have to apologize for it in the sense of saying we're sorry for the excesses of those who call and have called themselves Christian.

I feel the same way about socialism. However, it seems as if today no one either makes the case for it or

apologizes for it. It's such an anachronism in the popular mind that those of us who remain should volunteer to be in an exhibit at the Smithsonian.

Nevertheless, I'm a card-carrying socialist, a member of Democratic Socialists of America, and the card I carry has on it the image of the fist and rose. It is an international symbol, used by the protestors in Tianenmen Square as well as by candidates of the European socialist parties. The fist is the power of united effort, the strength that each finger alone does not have. The rose is the promise of the better life, not only physically but spiritually. "Hearts starve as well as bodies," says the poet. "Give us bread but give us roses."

My conversion experience came twenty-two years ago in this church. The Social Concerns Committee had organized a discussion of a book on corporate power. At the last session, one of the book's authors spoke to us and challenged those of us who agreed with him to come out of the closet

and name what we were.

What were we? What was I? I didn't grow up in New York and had no connection that I knew of to a radical tradition. If socialism was mentioned in school it was linked to the Soviet Union and demonized. remember a propaganda film in grade school purporting to show what life would be like in the United States under socialism. The father opens the evening paper and it's blank, because under socialism there would be no free expression of ideas and no advertising. (I could give a jeremiad here on how advertising curtails free exchange of ideas, but I'll spare you.) If we studied any socialists in American history it was as benighted, sometimes dangerous idealists, whose best ideas were taken by the Democratic Party in the thirties, after which they faded into the oblivion of third parties in this country.

At home I learned socialism was a good idea but completely impractical. Leftists were necessary, I was told, because in the American political process they forced compromises to come out in the center rather than the right. I never heard the words capitalism or class until college, and then only in survey courses of Western thinking.

Later, I discovered that my father had voted for Norman Thomas and my grandfather for Eugene Debs, that two of my parents' best friends—transplanted New York Jews—had been socialists in their youth. Still, those stories only came after I had found my own path.

But the most important thing I absorbed at home and at church was a belief in the biblical ethic: "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" For me, in Camp Hill, Pennsylvania, the church was countercultural to the emphasis on drinking, partying, and conspicuous consumption of my upper-middle-class high school. The church I went to was not one I would be at home in today, but it was a community where ideas were debated, where humanitarian impulses could find some expression.

That night at the Social Concerns Committee meeting, when Mark Kesselman made the altar call, so to speak, I was in the bosom of this church community, another counter culture that had already opened me to levels of political activity beyond the anti-war movement and civil rights struggles of my college and graduate school years. I knew I belonged here. And I knew that I couldn't support what passed for socialism in the Soviet Union, China, or Cuba; that third parties were doomed in the United States; that the New Left had self-destructed; but that socialism gave me a framework to understand the world and that I wanted to do something with that knowledge.

One of our members said she'd heard of a group led by Michael Harrington that called itself the left wing of the Democratic Party. Harrington was the author of *The Other America*, a book that was credited as being the impetus for the War on Poverty. His was a name I'd heard of and trusted. I called the organization and soon I was part of another counter culture.

These were not romantic revolutionaries. They were hard-headed realists who were vocal both in their denunciation of tyranny in the so-called "socialist" countries and the tyranny of the market in capitalist countries. They took seriously the first and second words in the name. Without democracy the socialist project was doomed, and had in fact been betrayed by many who carried the name. It was a relief to me to find people who believed this, because I'd always been suspicious of the fascination with violence and authoritarianism that some American leftists had. Now I learned about democracy in a way that went beyond textbook civics.

I'd always asked questions about inequality, but now I glimpsed different answers. They might not be the right ones, because any answers would have to be hammered out in a democratic process, but it was a pleasure to be with people who were thinking beyond the givens of the current society. I remember that as a liberal I had thought that the idea of teaching people to fish rather than giving them fish was a nice metaphor. Now, as a socialist, I asked, who controls the fishing rights, who sets the prices in the marketplace, who makes and sells the fishing gear, how do the fish get to market, and what happens when everyone has fished and depleted the natural resources?

We didn't have the chutzpah to call ourselves a movement, but we saw ourselves as the leaven in liberalism. We didn't buy into the apocalyptic theory that if things would get worse the proletariat would recognize the folly of their ways and embrace socialism. We believed that if things got better and

people could lift their heads from the grindstone would see that they could be so much When we more. thought of socialism we thought of Sweden, not the Soviet Union, of "sharing of life's glories," as the song says, not common misery.

it means
to be a socialist
in this day and age
is that
we have
an obligation
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and to dream.

Socialism helped me recognize and name the class struggle. This is no small achievement in a country where an overwhelming majority of the population thinks it's middle class. I may be buffered by education and accumulated resources, but as the last twenty years have shown us, downsizing puts us in our place—right there with all the other wage workers who watch the plants close and the jobs move to another country.

And socialism linked me to a worldwide community. Now I felt kinship when I picked up the paper and read about the Labour Party in Britain or freedom fighters in East Timor.

In a recent issue of *Harper's* there's an article by George Packer called "Sisyphus in the Basement:

# Steady Work

cont'd

Reflections of a Lapsed Socialist." He writes: "What could it mean to call yourself by a name that has passed not only into popular disrepute but almost out of contemporary speech!" Well, George carries a card from the same organization I do, and he hasn't turned it in yet.

I propose that one of the things it means in this day and age is that we have an obligation to remember and to dream. To tell the stories and to see visions. This need grows more acute the more shameless we become as a society whose only vision is of individual greed at the expense of community and shared responsibility.

Who still remembers when beggars were not on almost every street corner, when homelessness wasn't considered a permanent condition, when children enjoyed such luxuries in school as music and art that didn't depend on some millionaire's bounty, when public libraries had the books you needed and you didn't use Barnes and Noble as a substitute, when, in short, every aspect of our lives was not contaminated by the market? We have an obligation, if nothing else, to tell those stories, to say that life doesn't have to be this mean.

Michael Harrington was an incredible optimist, who in his book *Socialism* tells this parable about water:

"In desert societies—including the American Southwest—water is so precious that it is money. People connive and fight and die over it. . . . If one were to talk to a person who has known only that desert and tell him that in the city there are public water fountains and that children are even sometimes allowed to turn on the fire hydrants in the summer and to frolic in the water, he would be sure one were crazy. For he knows, with an existential certitude, that it is human nature to fight over water.

"Humanity has lived now for several millennia in the desert. Our minds and emotions are conditioned by that bitter experience: we do not dare to think that things could be otherwise. . . .There are some who are loath to leave behind the consolation of familiar brutalities; there are others who in one way or another would like to impose the law of the desert upon the 'promised ' land. . . .

"It is . . . possible that we will . . . make of the earth a homeland rather than an exile. That is the socialist project.

It does not promise, or even seek, to abolish the human condition, that is impossible. It does propose to end that invidious competition and venality which, because scarcity allowed no other alternatives, we have come to think are inseparable from our humanity."

I come from a tradition that speaks of living water, a tradition with stories like the one of the master who pays all the workers equally, of the widow whose mite is worth more

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than the rich man's tithe, a tradition that turns the established order upside down, as in the Jubilee when all land reverts to all families equally and to God.

Norman Thomas was a Presbyterian minister. Michael Harrington's commitment to social justice blossomed in his years as a volunteer at *The Catholic Worker* with Dorothy Day. Karl Marx was a Jew, who despite his secularism understood the liberating force of religion.

Socialists and religious people need each other as they work for their visions of the just society. Religious institutions are among the last that have not sold out, that can still speak "truth to power" and that can still offer an ideal of community. They can bring some rejuvenating energy to the socialist project. Indeed, Sojourners Community is sponsoring the Call to Renewal, which, although not explicitly socialist, is talking about biblical economics and imbalances of power in ways that make sense to non-academics; there is a revitalized national religion and labor group.

Here in New York the People of Faith Network campaigns against sweatshops and a cruel and meaningless workfare program.

Religion can bring, in Peter Steinfels's words, "insights into the potential and limits of human nature...into the sources of ambition and domination, into the importance of silence and retreat, into the necessity and/or fragility of intimate love and family ties, into the basic fact that we cannot live without one another but that we die alone." And we can bring a knowledge of the human capacity for sin and redemption. We have no false illusions, yet we have boundless hope.

Conversely, socialism can bring the questions and the framework in which to place our prophetic work.

In the passage I read earlier by Irving Howe, written more than thirty years ago, he asks what would have happened if cont'd on page 15

# Was Dorothy Day A Saint?

■ JOHN CORT

Cardinal O'Connor of New York has gone to Rome to initiate the process of canonization for Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker movement, a loose coalition of one

hundred Houses of Hospitality spread around the world, farming communes and radical newspapers.

The Cardinal, who is also a retired admiral and chaplain of the U.S. Navy, sees nothing incongruous in his advocacy of one of America's foremost pacifists. "If anybody in our time," he says, "can be called a saint, she can."

The New York Times, speaking for the secular arm, has now added its approval with a feature in its Sunday Magazine (II/8/98) under the title, "The Patron Saint of Paradox." Part of the paradox is the fact that some of the less rational Catholic Workers are opposing canonization on the ground that "Dorothy was too good for the Catholic

Church." She herself derided the idea of canonization, but not on the ground that she was too good for the Church. She had a great love for the Church. Despite the fact that Cardinal Spellman, then Archbishop of New York, was reactionary enough to use his seminarians in an unsuccessful effort to break a cemetery strike, she often said that if he told her to fold up the Worker, she would do it.

Born in 1897 into a family of newspapermen, Dorothy spent her first 30 years as a kind of left-wing Mary Magdalene. She had an unhappy love affair that ended in an abortion, married briefly, and then had a child out of wedlock. She was part of the Bohemian circle in Greenwich Village that included Eugene O'Neill, Max Eastman and John Dos Passos, and was said to be able to drink all of them under the table. She wrote for Socialist and Communist publications, and then, to her friends' great surprise, became a Catholic.

She died in 1980. I.F. Stone, no mean writer himself, came to her funeral and told a fellow mourner, "Of all the journalists of our generation, she wrote the best."

I first met her in 1936. I was less than a year out of Harvard, writing badly for a Boston suburban weekly for \$15 a week.

I had been converted to Catholicism myself while an undergraduate, a fact that later moved Arthur Schlesinger's wife Marian to exclaim, "How positively bizarre!"

Together with a French wandering philosopher named Peter Maurin, Dorothy had founded the Worker in 1933 in the depths of the Great Depression. She came to Boston to speak about the movement, and I arrived late at the meeting in a dingy hall in the South End. I had listened to her for only a few minutes when it suddenly occurred to me that I should give up my \$15 a week and go down to New York and work for nothing. I did go down and helped to run the breadline and the House of Hospitality, and edit the newspaper, in a building in a downtown slum that was infested with rats and bedbugs.

What was it about her that so moved me? She was not an

eloquent speaker. The style was conversational, given to anecdote and quotes from the Gospel and her favorite writers. Dostoyevsky was one of them, and she probably included a favorite line, "Love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing, compared to love in dreams."

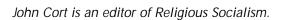
What moved me the most was her humor and laughter. She seemed to be getting a lot of fun out of her harsh and dreadful life in that infested House of Hospitality. And the thought occurred that if I wanted to have that kind of fun I must try that kind of life.

We disagreed a lot, about her pacifism, about the agrarian anarchism that she borrowed from Peter Maurin. Part of the

paradox was that she went to jail in 1917 for picketing the White House over woman's suffrage, and then never voted. At one point I tried to impose some degree of order on the flat that I shared with nine homeless men. I posted three simple rules. She made me take them down. There was no staff meeting. She was a kind of anarchistic dictator, a benevolent but absolute monarch.

After a few years a case of TB forced me to leave, and this had some harsh aspects, but on balance the fun has greatly outweighed the harshness.

Do I think she should be canonized? Of course. The simplest definition of sanctity is heroic virtue. That she had in great abundance. For 47 years she led and inspired a movement that fed the hungry and sheltered the homeless, as mandated by Jesus. She filled the paper and her books with some of the finest spiritual writing of this or any century. She spoke all over the country and the world to spread the Gospel. She led a devout, ascetic, exemplary life from the day she joined the Church. She was a Mary Magdalene, a paradoxical Mary Magdalene, for the paradoxical 20th century.



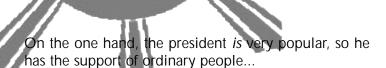
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Striving for Democratic Socialism In The Philippines

A few issues back, we ran a couple of articles which dealt with the notion of "Christian Maoism" in the Philippines. Afterwards, we felt that it was important to get a democratic socialist perspective on that nation from our sister party there, so Andrew Hammer interviewed Elizabeth Angsioco, the Foreign Affairs Director for the Democratic Socialist Party of the Philippines, regarding the progress being made by democratic socialists there.

How would you describe the political situation in the Philippines today?

I can't say that it's good... I mean, sure, we have a "working democracy," where the people elect their leaders, but that's about it. At the moment, we have a president [Joseph Estrada] that's very popular, but we feel he's a president who does not know what to do. For example, he will make one statement one day, and then reverse himself the next day, clarifying his statement as a personal position, and not that of the government. So it's not easy to designate the lines between personal opinion and the government position, and there it has not been easy to follow clearly the decisions implemented by the government.



He's a movie star, right?

Yes, he's a former star of action movies where he played sort of a "goon," if you will, who does good things for the poor, somewhat like Robin Hood. But to us it seems that sometimes the public cannot distinguish between the the real person and the actor, and as a result, there are some rather bad developments in the Philippines today. For example, the Marcoses are back. The case against Imelda Marcos was junked, She was found guilty in the lower courts, but the verdict was reversed by the Supreme Court.

A lot of the cases against the cronies of Marcos have also been junked by the ombudsman, who has a role something like a special prosecutor, and the ironic thing is that these very cronies are back in control of a lot of corporations. Marcos' son is now a governor, his daughter is in the House of Representatives, and the president is very friendly with the Marcoses.

Tell us something about your party and its history.

It was born out of the underground movement, so most of our original members were active in the trade union and student movements of the '60s and '70s. In the '70s they formed the Democratic Socialist Coalition, which was eventually formed into an underground political party. At first we were lumped together with the PKK (Communist Party of the Philippines), because under Marcos anyone who opposed Marcos was automatically considered a communist. So a number of

our leaders were jailed, others went into exile. At the moment, we can claim that we are the only party that is truly rooted in the people, because our membership is made up of the common people... the poor, the farmers, ordinary women, the fishing communities, and youth... this is the profile of the party leadership. On the one hand, this is an advantage because then you know how the people really feel about issues and what they want. But on the other hand, it's a disadvantage when it comes to the question of resources, because you don't have rich members who can contribute to the party, and as a result we're a poor party.

What is your representation in parliament?

Unfortunately, it's still in question, because in the last election we had the first implementation of the party

list law, and the party formed several local organizations run through this party list system. The constitution mandates that 20% of all seats in the lower house should be composed of those who won in party list elections, but the law which activates this constitutional provision has a lot of limitations and loopholes in it. So after the elections to the 123 seats.

out of all of our organizations which were running through the party list, only 13 were able to make it, because of those limitations. Now here comes the question of constitutionality. When the commission on elections saw these results, they wanted to have more of these organizations allowed into parliament, but the winning party has been strongly opposed to this. So at the moment we can't claim any seats in parliament, but we do have governors, and mayors and councillors who are members of or party, as well as number of people elected at the village level.

There are groups in your country that continue to take up arms in the attempt to bring change to the system. What is your party's response to that strategy?

The party's position is very clear: we're not into armed struggle, unless we feel we are really being pushed to the wall. And then that is strictly a defensive position. The party's major strategy is that of using the mass

movement along with electoral efforts, and we don't feel that armed struggle is an effective strategy to achieve power. We have had news that certain armed groups are regaining some strength, but in our view, we do have a formal democracy, and we do now have elections. Flawed as it may be, and there *are* a *lot* of flaws in it, I think that this formally democratic state is there for us to use.

What is the PDSP's vision for the Philippines, and how would you describe a "Filipino model" for democratic socialism?

It used to be that we were "anti-imperialism," "anti sexism"... we had all of these "isms." But now it's just one call: anti-neoliberalism. On the political front, we want to see a *lot* of changes in terms of the political system and the political culture. You see, it's not just

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about the electoral system, we want to change the whole culture of politics in the Philippines.

At the moment, if you speak of politics in the Philippines, it's automatically related to elections. But an election is just one day. And the election campaigns are very traditional because if you have the money you win; if you're famous, you win. This is the kind of political culture that we want to change. We want a politics that is based on ideology, on program, and not on personality and money alone. Of course personality and money will still be factors, but they cannot be the criteria which determines who will have power.

And that said, we do want to see a lot of changes in our electoral system. For example, in the United States it takes a day to know who has won an election; in the Philippines, it takes more than a month to learn officially who has won. The thing is that the longer and



#### ANDREW HAMMER

Trying to write a brief article about the common threads between one particular faith and the politics of socialism is a bit like trying to write a leaflet version of the Bible. Such links go back long and deep, and particularly in the case of Judaism, it can be argued that this is where one finds the seeds of socialism. Some of the oldest and most common phrases we use related to social justice stem from the the Tanakh, the book Christians know as the "Old Testament." Beating our swords into plowshares, studying war no more, loving one's neighbor as oneself, and even the very notion that through our choices and actions we are able to change a difficult and oppressive world are all concepts which arose from Judaism, as it calls for the just society that God would have us create.

the continuing social theme of the prophets is one of defending the poor and asserting their *rights* against oppression by the rich

In Hebrew the phrase used to describe what is an obligation to God to create that society is "tikkun olam," or "healing the world." It evokes the understanding that each of us have a role to play in taking care not only of ourselves and our families, but also our fellow humans and indeed, the whole of creation. To seek to manifest such a vision is to move towards a society which insures the well-being of all of its people, a society which asks the question, "How does God want us to live?"

Beyond these rather universal exhortations to be kind to one another, the Tanakh itself provides numerous examples of a socio-economic philosophy that many of us would recognize as overtly socialistic, and it is through the teachings and traditions of the Jewish faith that one is inspired to see socialism as the only political choice to realize the goals of that philosophy. Matters of wealth and its distribution figure substantively, as economic concepts more radical than would be considered by most world leaders today are carried out simply as God's law. (e.g., the periodic cancellation of debts every seven years, as well as the idea that any interest asked for on a loan is considered usury. Even something that we take for granted today, the weekend, can be arguably traced to Judaism and the concept of the Sabbath, a day of rest. 150 years ago, this was such a unique idea that even the problematic anarchist Proudhon took note of it in a time when most people worked horribly long hours seven days a week.)

The obligation of providing for those in need is exemplified in the concept of *tzedakah*, a word which has in modern times become associated with charity, but which literally translated means "justice." In otherwords, the idea that those who have should give happily to help those who have not is not a matter of pity, but simply the natural and just thing to do in order to achieve balance and harmony in society. It is the recognition that we are all equal before God, and therefore we are all interdependent upon one another for our welfare.

Proverbs 19:17 makes this even more clear, in what could pass as a great argument for a progressive tax system: "One who gives to the poor lends to God, and is repayed with ample reward." The argument is strengthened when one realizes that the highest form of this giving or *tzedakah* is giving anonymously, and that no one is exempt from the obligation to give because even if you are yourself poor, there is always someone else who is in need of something you can share with them. Further, when looking at the nature of what is to be given, it is taught that it is better to give seeds than to only give actual goods, so that the recipient may be empowered to raise their own crops. This is the precursor to the axiom about teaching people to fish rather than only giving them fish.

Again, the obligation to provide for those in need, or those unable to provide for themselves is spelled out in the Law, as specific instructions are given regarding the distribution of wealth in the community. In addition to the remission of debts every seven years (Deut. 15), a full tithe of all crops harvested is to be collected every three years and given to those who have little or nothing of their own (Deut. 14:28-29). A year of jubilee is commanded every fifty years, in which land that had been bought and sold over time was reclaimed by its original owners, with the instruction of God that "the land must not be sold beyond reclaim, for the land is Mine; you are but strangers resident with Me." (Lev. 25:23) The idea that at the end of the day, we are all no more than tenants on God's Earth may be a bit bothersome to socialists who seek full ownership of the means of production, but at the same time, the larger and more significant message here is that none of us has the right to claim ultimate ownership of what belongs to us all equally through God.

Of course it is inevitable that when looking at the positive aspects of scripture that support an inspiration toward socialist politics, one also has to deal with the negative aspects as well. For example, slavery and the different treatment of non-believers come into play not only in the Tanakh, but in almost every major religion, and they are a disturbing part of sacred writings that reflect the characteristics of ancient life. There is clearly nothing socialist about allowing such things as slavery to be a part of a social system. But the focus of this article is to point out those elements of the Jewish faith which do inspire Jews to embrace socialism, and perhaps one way to deal with the dilemma of these unsocialist aspects is to look at the attitude of God towards the rich as opposed to the slave or the poor.

It is significant to note that the "heroes" in Judaism are not the kings of Israel, nor the rich, but her prophets, who railed against the actions of the former. Elijah, Jeremiah, and Isaiah are those whose names we remember, whose books we read, not Ahab or Jehoiakim. And the continuing social theme of these prophets, even in the face of the negative aspects of Israel, is one of defending the poor and asserting their rights against oppression by the rich. This notion of the poor having rights is unparalleled in other ancient societies.

Consider the words of Jeremiah to King Jehoiakim, who used forced labour to build his palaces: "Disaster for the man who builds his house without uprightness, his upstairs rooms without fair judgment, who makes his

fellow-man work nothing, without paying wages" (Jer. him his 22:13). The prompt and fair payment of wages is commanded in Leviticus (19:13), and reinforced in Deuteronomy (24:14-15). Jeremiah continues to say that such a person will be given the burial of an ass, and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem. In the way, Ahab same condemned by Elijah when the king has a man killed in order to obtain his property. Clearly the rich do not fare well in Jewish scripture, unless they have understood their obligation to give of themselves and of their wealth back the to community.

the notion that those who have should give happily to help those who have not is not a matter of pity, but simply the natural and *just* thing to do in order to achieve balance and harmony in society.

The book of Isaiah speaks further of the rights of the poor, in language that could just as easily be applied to the political representatives of capitalism today: "Woe to those who enact unjust decrees, who compose oppressive legislation to deny justice to the weak, and to cheat the humblest of My people of fair judgment." (Isa. 10:1-2).

So even with the areas of scripture that modern Jews would find to be somewhat alien (e.g., the use of animal sacrifice, the allowance of slavery, and death penalties for homosexual behavior), one has to able to put this into context with the more enduring messages about social justice and the actions which arose from those messages.

If we look into the past history of prominent socialists, we will find that Karl Marx was blatantly homophobic, Jack London was a white supremacist, and even Eugene Debs was considered by some to have been less than committed to equality among the races. Yet that does not eliminate the fact that they were socialists in the context of their time and environment.

Fortunately, politics and religion are dynamic and evolutionary, adapting to our own enlightenment and

# People of Faith Work to End Child Labor

#### MAXINE PHILLIPS

It was a bright, brisk October day, and the demonstrators in front of the ABC Studio where Kathie Lee Gifford broadcasts her show chanted, "End Child Labor," "Sweatshops are unfair," and sang freedom songs. "Winnie the Pooh," "Mickey Mouse," and "Superman," walked the line with signs reminding passing cars and passers-by that the nearby Disney Store carried items made in sweatshops. Gifford endorses a line of clothing carried by Wal-Mart stores.

It was part of a day of action on sweatshops and child labor planned by the National Labor Committee (NLC) and the People of Faith Network (PFN), which would also sponsor a candlelight vigil on December 10, the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In the thick of the crowd was David Dyson, founder of PFN in 1995 and of the NLC in 1981 and pastor of Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church. It was a scene Dyson had been in many times during a career that's taken him from the fields of California with Cesar Chavez to coordinating religious support for the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers' boycott of J.P. Stephens Co. in the seventies to human rights activism for trade unionists in Central America in the eighties to his current effort to organize the unorganized in communities of faith.

"One of the most unorganized and underrepresented sectors of society is religious progressives, " charges Dyson. "There are thousands of people who care about the growing inequality in our society. They're looking for expression."

The religious right, he pointed out, has done a good job of organizing. "Now it's our turn."

People of Faith Network was born when Dyson was working on a campaign to get the GAP clothing stores to stop exploitation of children in maguiladora factories. "I had a list of about 500 progressive church people and I asked other friends to lend me their Rolodexes for the weekend." From that first mailing the organization has grown to include 6,000 Jewish, Christian, and Muslim congregations and employs three full-time staffers who work out of the church Parish House basement.

"We're building a base among religious progressives on racial and economic justice issues," says Dyson. In New York City, PFN has helped block the privatizing of Coney Island Hospital and is working to keep remediation programs in the City University of New York. Nationally, it has focused on ending child labor and sweatshop abuse, an issue that has visceral appeal to all but the most hard-hearted and that illustrates the



Members of the DSA Religion and Socialism Commission Executive Committee rallied with People of Faith Network in New York City against child labor and sweat shops. L. to r., Juanita Webster, Mark Finkel, Judith Deutsch, Andrew Hammer, Norman Faramelli, John Cort, Maxine Phillips, Rod Ryon

dilemma of global capital. A person can be drawn to the issue out of concern for twelve-year-old workers who must stay in the factory for twenty-hour shifts. But the links to job flight, poverty in the United States, and the need for international solidarity soon become apparent.

"We're not against development," says Dyson, but people are concerned when they learn about how companies that paid decent wages to unionized labor



Dave Dyson urges passers-by to support the season of conscience campaign

here go to countries like El Salvador and drive wages down in the garment and light-industry sectors."

Dyson believes in the power not only of the people, but of organizational letterheads. The GAP campaign, for example, was modest, generating perhaps two hundred letterhead letters as well a couple hundred However, it was enough for a from individuals. company that prides itself on its apple-pie image to send top executives out to Lafayette Avenue. There, in a church that had served as headquarters for the anti-Brooklyn, slaverv movement in where Emancipation Proclamation was conceived and drafted before being delivered to President Abraham Lincoln, they promised to institute reforms in their factories in El Salvador.

Now PFN and NLC have taken on Wal-Mart, which uses more than 4,000 factories worldwide. In the just-ended Season of Conscience campaign, they asked consumers to shop with a conscience and write letters to Wal-Mart CEO David Glass asking that the company disclose who makes its products and under what conditions. They are not urging a boycott. "When people get a reply, they are so angry at the patronizing tone and lack of information, that they become even more committed to the campaign," noted Dyson.

Wal-Mart is the largest retail operation in the United

States. If it would adhere to a code of ethics and raise wages in its factories, the rising tide could lift a lot of boats. Precisely because the stakes are so high, the company has dug in its heels. "This campaign will be like the Nestle fight," remarked Dyson, referring to the ongoing struggle to keep Nestle from aggressively marketing infant formula to women in countries where poverty and lack of pure water mean that babies on formula often die."

The Walton family, which owns Wal-Mart, is the second richest family in the United States, with an estimated net worth of \$40 billion to \$50 billion. (Microsoft founder Bill Gates controls \$58 billion, but who's counting?)

Coincidentally, they are also big contributors to the Presbyterian Church. This may account for the hesitation of some mainline church groups to get involved with PFN. "We name names," says Dyson, "and that makes a lot of people uncomfortable." Support for PFN comes from foundations and individual congregations that have signed on. PFN is often designated as a mission beneficiary and receives checks ranging from \$25 from individuals to \$7,000 from a church that took up a special collection for it.



even
bears
of little
brain
know
that
sweatshops
are
no good

"If we had 25,000 congregations we could be almost completely self-supporting," believes Dyson. He does not think this is an impossible goal, given the number of communities of faith and what he perceives as the need people feel for an organization that can address the problems of inequality. "This is an entry to activism.

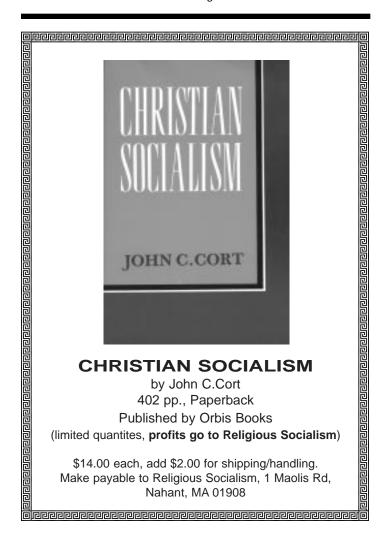
## Thou Shalt Not Steal?

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stocks, just keeps growing. Banks pay the same rate of interest to scoundrels that they pay to those who have kept their reputations intact.

The commandment against stealing is clear. On the one hand it suggests that people have the right to retain and use their property, including their money. But it also defines limits on the acceptable ways of acquiring them. No one has a right to stolen property, and capitalism, as many religious thinkers (and not all of them socialists) have taught in the past, legitimates theft. Worse, it stimulates covetousness and creates whole institutions to help the privileged groups expropriate the property of the poor. The Brazilian bishops are right. The biblical view of property undercuts capitalism's cultural and legal definitions of what it is, and who has what right to it. The encouraging thing about Les Miserables is that, despite efforts to bury these important questions, they are still present in the popular culture. Religious socialists need to make them more explicit and to point to new - an old ways of answering them more justly.

Harvard professor Harvey Cox is one of the nation's preeminent theologians and author of The Secular City, among other works. He is a contributing editor to RS.



# People of Faith

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There are a lot of decent, open-minded people with no tradition of activism for whom this is their first political and social justice campaign."

Like a good organizer, PFN keeps the process simple. Unlike the Christian Coalition, which signs up whole congregations, PFN enlists individuals who promise to contact others. "These are live bodies, so that when we do a mailing, we know that they will respond," says Dyson. PFN relies on research and site visits by the National Labor Committee, then develops materials for use in faith communities. There are videos, packets of information, bulletin inserts. If there are enough congregations involved in one locale, they may join in a local coalition to work on issues of their choice, but PFN keeps bureaucracy and overhead to a minimum.

It has no choice. "We're a poor church," Dyson points out. Lafayette Avenue provides office space, but with no endowment, it lives literally from paycheck to paycheck, relying on pledges from its members and fund-raising activities. Still, its members—many of them unionized city workers—back the church's labor initiatives and support PFN.

In front of the ABC Studio the rally ended. The sponsors had promised it would take only an hour. The speeches had been short and inspiring, the music rousing. David Dyson was stacking the signs he and his parishioners had brought. "We'll be using these again," he grinned.

For more information about People of Faith Network or to join (\$25 individual), write to PFN c/o Lafayette Ave. Presbyterian Church, 85 S. Oxford St., Brooklyn, NY 11217 or e-mail pofnetwork@aol.com. For updates on the Wal-Mart campaign and other anti-sweatshop activities, check out the National Labor Committee Web page: www.nlcnet.org.



# Steady Work

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Saul of Tarsus had blown it the way Vladimir Ilyich Lenin did.

Christianity has survived long enough that the horrors of the Inquisition, the Crusades, the religious wars are just pages in the history books. Few people question the unholy alliance Christianity, and particularly Protestantism, made with capitalism. Only a few of us think it's blasphemous that members of Congress who call themselves Christians go to prayer breakfasts before going to work to reward the people who paid for their seats.

Official Christianity triumphed and lost its soul. Official socialism lost both soul and power. But the embers of resistance still burn. Religion through the ages has offered hope to the oppressed even as it was part of the oppression. Socialism hasn't been around for as long, but even in the darkest days there were dissidents. There are people who take both visions seriously.

You're sitting here on this beautiful day instead of going to the beach or catching up on paperwork because many of you think the religious project is worth pursuing despite all the betrayals of its practitioners. And I'm here still willing to call myself a socialist despite the raised eyebrows and rolled eyes, the hostility, and the betrayals. Why?

Because it's steady work.

And there's another reason. Back in the early eighties, I went to a meeting of the Socialist International. It was a worldwide gathering of all the democratic socialist parties, many of whom, at that time, were in power. Our hopes were high. In the United States Ronald Reagan was waging ideological warfare against every gain that had been won by the blood and struggles of socialists, liberals, communists, and just plain people of good will. In England, Margaret

Thatcher was doing the same. The handwriting was clear to our comrades.

"You may be small, but you are the only voice in opposition," they told us. "Your country determines our destiny. You must keep the socialist ideal alive." They knew that they couldn't survive without us. In this day of global capitalism, no less than in Marx's time, there cannot really be socialism in one country.

They were right. The Reagan-Thatcher juggernaut rolled over them, paving the way for conservative after conservative both there and here. So that now, even though people with the name socialist are again on the verge of election in Europe or, as in England, have been elected, European socialism is exhausted. It had to make too many compromises.

I don't want to sound as if we're going to be the savior of the rest of the world, but I do want to underscore how important it is for us to maintain hope in Babylon. We can be inspired by South Africa. We can look to the courage of democratic socialists in countries where failure means real death, not virtual death. But ultimately their fate is linked to ours.

Throughout the last thirty years people have tried to come up with more American-sounding idioms for socialism—economic democracy, radical democracy, jobs with justice, After all, any socialism in America will have to be an American socialism. But behind all of it there's an idea, an idea that has a name. And that idea also sees neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, East nor West, North nor South, rich nor poor. It is an idea that also believes we can break bread together, reconciled around a common table.

Countless people have died for it. What we need now is to live for it.

Maxine Phillips is an editor of Religious Socialism.

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# **Philippines**

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more complicated the process is, the more loopholes there are, and the easier it becomes for the cheats to cheat. So that is one of the major areas of our concern.

We want our migrant workers to regain their freedom, their right to suffrage. We want more ordinary people in positions of political decision-making, especially women. We want a government that is actually attuned to the needs and interests of our people. We want to set up a situation where the basic needs of the people are being met, because this is not being done. We want a government that is truly accountable to the people and which can be easily replaced. We feel that having these things can counter the graft and corruption that is now rampant in the government, because if leaders are truly rooted in the people, they will feel accountable to the people, and we can therefore call them to be accountable. That is what we envision for the future.

We say that we have a formal democracy because people can vote; but more so we want a real democracy that takes care of the people's stomachs, not just their right to vote. We are saying that there is a need for a model which is truly people-centered — not driven by markets, not driven by capitalists or international financial institutions. This is what we want. •

# Healing the World

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and the conditions of our societies. The standards are quite different today, as well they should be, and in the same way that one can look at the words of those individuals and see their socialism despite their flaws, Jews can look at the Tanakh and see the socialistic messages of the prophets and much of the Law.

Indeed, one can argue that it is impossible to read the Tanakh and not have ones eyes opened to injustices, to not notice the inequities around us, and not feel compelled by God's commandments to act to achieve a balance in our society. Understanding that doing the will of God is not to glorify the rich and powerful, but rather to care for the needy as if they were members of our own family (and truly, in the eyes of God, they are), is a powerful motivator to then go and seek out political and economic solutions to heal the problems of our modern world.

Andrew Hammer is an editor of Religious Socialism.



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