



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 universe's 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 commonness of human experience.

## SUMMER 1999

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# Religious Socialism

THE JOURNAL FOR PEOPLE OF FAITH AND SOCIALISM

## Class, Race, Marx & Pasca

A CHAT WITH CORNEL WEST

*Note: After a relentless pursuit we recently caught up with Cornel West, Harvard professor, prolific author, eloquent speaker, Christian socialist and new member of the RS editorial board, in his office at Harvard's Department of Afro-American Studies.*

RS: Tell us first where, when and how you were born and raised.

CW: I was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1953, stayed there for two weeks, went to Topeka, Kansas, for three years and moved to Sacramento, California, where I remained until I came here as a freshman at Harvard.

RS: What did your father and mother do besides being a good father and mother?

CW: Dad was a civil servant who worked for a U.S. Air Force base. Mom was the first black elementary school teacher and first black principal in Sacramento and recently had a new elementary school named after her.

RS: When were you first seriously attracted to Christian faith?

Like Breathing the Air

CW: I just imbibed it. It was like breathing the air around me.

Church and family were a continuum. Dad was not a minister, but he was a trustee in the Baptist Church. My maternal grandfather was a minister and my paternal grandfather a deacon from the age of 24 until he died at 89. So being a Christian was just basic, like being inside of one's skin.



“Marxism... is too impoverished a conception of what it is to be human.”

*cont'd on page*

## editor's notes

The assignment for this issue was: "What have we learned from the collapse of Marxist-Leninism and the political success of democratic socialism in Europe?" Thoughtful answers have been contributed by the two Wests, Cornel and Charles, and by Jack Clark, Norm Faramelli, Perry Cartwright, and Gary Dorrien, and we are most grateful for same. Jack Clark's participation is especially appreciated because he writes as a former national secretary of DSA who worked closely with Mike Harrington, who died just ten years ago this August.

In addition to these contributions Judy Deutsch has added a timely piece on the critical need for ways and means to wage peace, not war; Rod Ryon proposes to assemble a Socialist Hymnal; Lynn Fine and Bob Knott write about the ideas and activities of Buddhist socialists. In response to his own question the Editor offers the following:

After Marxism is the title of a book published in 1995 by Ron Aronson, once a Marxist himself who recently served as director of DSA's Center for Democratic Values. The opening line of the book is: "Marxism is over, and we are on our own." Further along we read this: "With the end of Communism, [we]...now find capitalism, and on the other side—nothing."

Has Aronson read the Stockholm Declaration? There is no mention of it in his book, neither that nor the Frankfurt Declaration of 1951, when the International was reconstituted. It now includes 139 parties and organizations like DSA. Aronson's opinion of the International might be inferred from his admitted "cynicism about the 'socialism' of parties and governments claiming the name in, say, France, Spain, Italy and Germany".

Aronson seems genuinely committed to democracy. One of the major virtues of democracy is the freedom of the people, the masses, who are such an object of veneration in leftist discourse, to elect their political leaders. Aronson, a university professor, seems typical of a certain kind of academic intellectual, the kind who actually have no confidence in the masses to elect either honest or intelligent leaders. True, the masses do sometimes get it wrong, but if they can't be relied on to get it right most of the time, what good then is democracy?

Those Socialist parties now controlling governments in 11 of the 15 nations in the European Union, were elected by the masses in what were much fairer contests than we are used to in this money- drenched country. Let's have a little respect for the masses, their basic intelligence and the leaders they elect.

Other glaring omissions from Aronson's book are the name, or any of the books, of Michael Harrington, who not only led DSOC and DSA for many years, but was highly regarded by his comrades in the leadership of the SI and was called on to contribute his

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Religious Socialism

1 Maolis Rd

Nahant, MA

01908

rsocialism@socialist.org

www.dsausa.org/rs

Religious Socialism (ISSN 0278-7784) is published four times per year by the Religion and Socialism Commission of the Democratic Socialists of America, and is produced by the Democratic Socialists of America Fund. Subscriptions at the basic rate are \$10.00 per year.

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•Articles in this issue are the opinion expressed by the writers, and not of DSA or the Religion & Socialism Commission or Religious Socialism. Contributions to the Democratic Socialists of America Fund are tax deductible.

•Writers may submit manuscripts via postal mail, e-mail, or on a 3.5" computer disk formatted to text files and a hard copy. Photos are encouraged.

UNION MADE  
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## Socialist International Meets In Buenos Aires, Questions "Third Way"

ANDREW HAMMER

With the theme of "Shaping Change", the Socialist International (SI) Council met in Buenos Aires, Argentina on June 25-26. The first meeting of the SI in Argentina, it enjoyed the distinction of being the top news story in the country, in a political year which could prove historic for the Latin American left. For the first time ever, socialist candidates in three of the four Southern Cone nations (Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay) have a chance at winning their national elections, and the significance of the SI Council coming to Latin America at this time was not missed by either their opponents or the media.

Fernando de la Rúa, the candidate of the Argentine coalition known as the *Alliance* (comprised of the Popular Socialist Party and the Civic Radical Union), opened the meeting with a speech in which he sharply criticized the privatizations and market madness of the last decade as leaving consumers unprotected and exacerbating the already extreme poverty in Latin America. This set the tone for the rest of the meeting, as one by one, speakers from round the world began to discuss among other things the biggest bone of contention for the socialist movement today, the ambiguous concept known as the "Third Way."

For all of the guilt-by-association that has been heaped upon the entire SI as a result of the shenanigans of the *leaders* of its British and German member parties, the truth of the matter is that the SI itself remains far from convinced about the "new" politics of its erstwhile comrades Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder (neither of which were in attendance). While he was careful to state that there are many different points of view within the SI, at numerous times during the event, SI President and former French prime minister Pierre Mauroy voiced his own disagreement with the so-called "third way," stating at a press conference that "I only know of one way, the way of the socialists, and we have been working on that for more than a century."

Mauroy's skepticism is well-founded, and welcome. Because while Blair and Schröder consider how to sacrifice that past century of social democratic policy on the altar of corporate power, history tells us that their ideas are anything but new. The real new socialists in our movement are not those who conjure up memories of Alexander Millerand and Ramsay MacDonald, but those in Europe, Latin America, and elsewhere who are working to socialize markets under democratic control *without* embracing the neoliberal politics of the marketeers.

*Andrew Hammer is Communications Director of the International League of Religious Socialists (ILRS), and represented the ILRS in Buenos Aires.*

## LETTERS

### When Is Stealing Not Stealing?

I agree with much of Harvey Cox's article, "You Shall Not Steal?" (Winter 1998/99). As chairman of the City Mission Society here at Old Colony Correction Center I led a discussion about it with our outside guests.

While I applaud Mr. Cox's efforts, I don't agree that Brazilians have the right to steal, and we in America don't. Homeless people have the same God-given right to eat nutritiously and beyond nutrition. What about the right to steal books or money for the same education given to the upper classes? People like Mr. Cox mean well but are too timid and apologetic toward the nice Fascist priests of finance who are committing an economic holocaust on America's poor....

I educated myself in prison and know how valuable education is. Before that I was prowling the earth like a brute. Daily I see victims on the news sacrificed on the golden altar of capitalism as spiritually dead zombies rage through America and the world.

When people asked the fiery abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison why he was so fiery, he said, "Because there are a lot of icebergs around here that I have to melt"....

*Kevin D. Hicks  
Bridgewater, MA*

### Harvey Cox Responds:

I'm glad Mr. Hicks agrees with "much" of what I wrote about the limits Christianity puts on ownership of property. I also agree that hungry people, here or anywhere else, have the right to appropriate ("steal") food for themselves and their families. But has he ever been in a real famine area? It does little good to refuse to make distinctions between situations. All shoplifting and theft is not justified. There are limits on property rights. There are also limits on my right to take your property except in case of genuine necessity.



# After Marxism, What?

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ideas and writing skills in putting together the Stockholm Declaration.

How many socialists do you know who have read either the Stockholm or Frankfurt Declarations? The latter, incidentally, has a good short definition of the nature of, and distinction between capitalism and socialism:

While the guiding principle of capitalism is private profit, the guiding principle of Socialism is the satisfaction of human needs (III, 1).

There is Socialism

Short and simple, but highly helpful in evaluating socialist performances. Wherever a government is trying honestly and effectively to satisfy the needs of all the people, and places this goal above the accumulation of private profit, there is socialism.

And you know something? By that standard, the socialist country over the past 30 years has been Japan, run most of that time by the Liberal Democrats, a right-wing party that says it is wedded to capitalism. "Every tree is known by its fruit" (Luke 6:44). Over the last 30 years one fruit of Japan's economy has been unemployment under 3 percent and even now, when it is supposed to be in recession, only a few tenths of one percent over our

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**"The guiding principle of socialism is the satisfaction of human needs."**

**— Frankfurt Declaration of the Socialist International, 1951**

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marvelous *alleged* 4.2 percent. Other fruits include high wages, greater job security, no inflation, excellent educational system, safe streets, and a much more equal distribution of wealth and income.

But the most attractive fruit of all is 2 percent child poverty, which compares with our 21 percent overall and 51 percent for black children. Why and how Japan has developed this capitalistic form of socialism is not an easy question. A bright, energetic people crowded together in a very small, mountainous country with less than 10 percent arable land, they probably had to behave socialistically or die. Either that or they took their Buddhist/Shinto/Confucian religions more seriously than we take our Christianity. Or both.

You know something else? Even before the current Social



Democratic government, Germany had 4 percent child poverty, as did Sweden and Norway, one fifth of ours, even though they all had double digit unemployment. The facts, which we isolated Americans are so unaware of, are that continental European countries, under conservative as well as leftist governments, have for years had welfare states that provide standards of living that, in William Pfaff's phrase, "many Americans still find scarcely credible." Stronger labor movements, previous socialist regimes, Marxist agitation, Christian Democratic parties influenced by Catholic social teaching, many things have contributed to this. Life and reality, my friends and comrades, are more complicated than is dreamed of in our philosophy.

At the Socialist Scholars Conference

After a lapse of some years I went down to the Socialist Scholars Conference last April, mainly to sell subscriptions in the lobby. They were still packing them in, every splintered leftie east of the Mississippi. The Trots at the table next to mine told me there was a competing faction up in the Bronx consisting of exactly three members.

At the plenary Friday night Daniel Singer, European correspondent for *The Nation*, who has just published *Whose Millennium — Theirs or Ours?*, was the keynote speaker. His line was that the Socialist parties that rule 11 out of 15 European countries have sold out to neo-liberal, free market, Thatcherite, Reaganite economics on the ground of TINA (There Is No Alternative).

The next day I asked him, "What do you think of Sections 62, 63, 64 and 76 of the Stockholm Declaration of the

Socialist Inter-national, all of which speak positively of markets and free competition?" He spoke for 15 minutes in response and never answered the question. Why? Because he doesn't believe in a market economy, regulated or unregulated, malevolent or benevolent. Like Aronson, he is still back in 1848 with the *Manifesto's* elimination of private property and the "concentration of all instruments of production in the hands of the state". Not immediately, of course, but somewhere in the new millenium — ours, not theirs. Check it out in his book.

But thank God, both Aronson and Singer and *The Monthly Review*, which has published Singer's book, have all given up on Marx's "dictatorship of the proletariat" and embraced democracy. Aronson even spends a whole chapter lamenting the absence of a solid consensus on "right and wrong" in Marxist discourse. He senses that Marx himself looked more to historical, scientific inevitability than to any moral argument for the triumph of socialism. And he is right. Marx and Engels, as Trotsky so clearly saw, had nothing but "contempt for official morality". Only that was moral that favored the revolution, and the revolution justified the means. And the means degenerated quickly into wholesale homicide.

Aronson is gloomy about finding a moral consensus; "Any divine sanction for morality has long since dried up." Nor does he, apparently, see the rational consensus behind the Golden Rule, acknowledged as binding on both conscience and reason by religious and secular thinkers from the ancient Egyptians to Max Weber and Malcolm X.

As Charles West and Vyteslav Gardavsky have reminded us, "God is not quite dead". Nor dried up. And neither is Marx. But some of us are betting that God will outlive both Marx and Marxism.

If you ask the national office, DSA may be able to dig up another copy of the Stockholm Declaration. And there you will find, written in Harrington's lucid English, many excellent ideas about how to regulate markets and free competition in the interests of the common good and the satisfaction of human needs for all God's children. It's worth a look.

#### About Our Diversity

We are a very diverse group in the Religion and Socialism Commission of DSA. Some of us, for example, find it difficult to comprehend how an RS contributor, to whom morality is obviously important, can write two consecutive sentences like the following (Spring/1999, p. 4). The first is a quotation: "The deaths stopped overnight in 1973, and I never saw another abortion death in all the eighteen years after that until I retired." The second sentence: "Twenty-one million women have had 35 million abortions since *Roe v. Wade*." Clearly the writer's opinion is that anything fatal that happens to a child in the womb is not death. A difficult concept, but we must struggle to


understand, so that we can work together on those matters where we do agree.

One of the beauties of the Stockholm Declaration is that the only mention it makes of sexual matters of any kind is a reference to "dissemination of information and practical assistance for family planning" (Sec. 72). Those practical men and women, elected by the socialist masses to represent them in Stockholm, knew that sexual questions are both explosive and divisive, and it is far better to leave them aside in the interests of maximum unity and strength in the struggle for the satisfaction of *common* human needs. ▀

J.C.C

AFTER MARXISM. WHAT?

## Socialism: Religion or Science?



PERRY CARTWRIGHT

Socialism was a religion. From 1848 until 1989 it evoked a faith, a commitment to sacrifice, a belief in a better world, and on its fringes, like religions before it, a fanaticism.

Unlike predecessor religions, which claimed justification from an infallible God, the socialist religion invoked the new 19th-century God, which they called Science. Marxism called itself "Scientific Socialism". Actually, it was 50 percent scientific, the part that analyzed the faults of capitalism. But the other 50 percent, the part that sought to describe the new socialist society, was about as scientific as anything ever dreamed up by some prophet on a mountain top.

Religious socialists have every right to say to Marxist socialists, "Stop your sneering. You are just as religious, just as idealistic, just as unscientific as the most dogmatic churchgoer." What we all need to do now is to formulate a truly scientific structure for a future socialism.

**"The hard part is figuring out how to lay out this better world."**

But that won't be easy. The fun part of socialism was the passionate belief and camaraderie, the unshakable conviction that what we are doing is going to produce a better world. The hard part is figuring how to lay out this better world. Lenin, for example, was a genius at overthrowing czarism, but didn't know his butt from the Bolshoi Ballet when it came to building a just and productive economy. He must have thought it would be revealed from the Marxist scripture.

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Have our friends in the other branch of the socialist movement, the European social democrats, anything more to brag about? No, not really. Did their program of adding a bit of reform here and there, of keeping their respectability, bring about the socialist paradise? With double digit unemployment, with Blair, Schroeder et al happily supporting every military cruelty of American imperialism, with ethnic hatred rampant, is that better than communism? Well, maybe just a little, but not much.

#### Economics Is No Fun

All branches of the socialist movement have come to a dead end until a productive, just and democratic structure for the economy can be formulated, and offered up as a substitute for capitalism. We've got the hardest job ahead that any of us have undertaken. It's called thinking about economics. Economics is no fun. It's like studying math or chemistry. It's not warm and fuzzy like literature or sexology.

Fortunately, a few of our members have made a good start in laying out their ideas about market socialism. At the end of this article is a partial list of books on the subject. They are all trying to detail some of the obvious lessons from

socialism's collapse. These lessons are: the useful role of market guidance if combined with public ownership; the need for an overall plan to correct market failures; the need to acknowledge that both clubs and carrots are needed to roll us out of bed on rainy Monday mornings. We need to be as unsentimental as Adam Smith, but not as mean as Alan Greenspan. ▀

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*Perry Cartwright is a long time DSA activist in labor, civil rights and peace movements.*

*The following books are all available from Networking for Democracy, 3411 West Diversey, Suite 1, Chicago, IL 60647:*

- 1. Leland Stauber, A Concrete Proposal for a Socialism That Works.*
- 2. John Roemer, A Future for Socialism.*
- 3. David Schweickart, Economic Democracy.*
- 4. Thomas Weisskopf, Toward a Socialism of the Future .*
- 5. CY REV: a Journal of Cybernetic Revolution, Sustainable Socialism and Radical Democracy*

## AFTER MARXISM. WHAT?

# Socialism: What Next?



**JACK CLARK**

This issue of Religious Socialism poses the question of what next for socialism. I find the question large and more than a little daunting. I approach it question as a friend and long-time colleague of Michael Harrington.

"I write at the end of a right-wing era that resulted from the crisis of the Keynesian welfare state — and on the eve of a new move toward the Left in the West, and perhaps in the Communist East and the Third World." Those words begin Michael Harrington's summation of *Socialism: Past and Future*. Five months after these words were published, the Berlin Wall fell, and the collapse of Communism as a world system quickly followed. Harrington, who died in August 1989, ten years ago, three months before the jubilant crowds tore down the Berlin Wall, would have been cheered by the end of a system that he strongly opposed. Given Mike's eternal optimism, he may have seen the mass movements that toppled Communist oppression as harbingers of the move toward the Left that he anticipated so eagerly.

The reality has been more difficult, complex and challenging for the Left. In the early 1990s, the parties of Reagan, Thatcher and Kohl continued to govern, and voters in the former Communist bloc chose parties of the Right. Subsequently, Kohl personally and successors of Reagan and Thatcher were defeated at the polls, but their opponents have, in some significant ways, ratified the policies of their conservative predecessors. Clinton's embrace of NAFTA and welfare reform stand out as clear examples. The Eisenhower Presidency ratified the New Deal, and the Tory governments of the 1950s signaled an acceptance of the Labor-created welfare state.

Current governments of the Left — social democrats in Europe, Democrats in the US — are playing a similar role in relation to the Reagan-Thatcher "revolution." The Right has redefined political discourse and will continue to push its agenda: privatization of public property and services, reduction of public benefits to citizens, tax cuts and reliance on market forces to solve most problems.

The Right will, of course, also marshal the full force of government to promote and protect the interests of its corporate allies.

Am I arguing that we are now limited to the minimalist politics of the 1996 Clinton campaign? Not at all. In fact, the victories of Clinton and Blair and Schroeder, for all their limitations, have been our victories. Just as Eisenhower and his Tory contemporaries broke the momentum for a further expansion of the welfare state, the exceedingly moderate Left in power now has broken some of the momentum of the Right. On a few issues (the minimum wage, family leave),

we've had victories; on others (Social Security), we benefit in the continuing struggle by having an Administration that must respond to the constituencies of the Left. Most important, the respite from governments of the Right provides breathing room for a revitalized Left to grow and develop.

Part of the Left's dilemma right now reflects uncertainty. More precisely, the socialist Left lacks an appealing vision of a good society, an immediate program of reform and a convincing strategy of how the two are connected. Some of the lessons outlined in *Socialism: Past and Future* need to be learned again — or perhaps really learned for the first time. For all the limits of our era, we face unprecedented opportunities.

A decade and more ago, defining socialism required defining what it was not. Mike Harrington and all of us committed to fundamental democracy and human rights always explained that when we spoke of socialism we did not mean the tyrannical rule of a bureaucratic class in the Soviet Union (or China or East Germany or Cuba). After 1989, that long preface should have seemed unnecessary. Yet, the identification of socialism with centrally-planned, poorly-run economies seemed stronger than ever after 1989.

Part of the problem remains an outmoded conception of socialism, which remains the popular view of what we believe. For generations, socialism meant the nationalization of major industries. No serious democratic socialist believes any longer that socialism equals the nationalization of key industries. When dealing with General Motors and US Steel, the idea might have made some sense (even there, the experience of nationalized industries has not been a model for social enlightenment). Can anyone imagine nationalizing Microsoft or AOL? The idea lacks coherence. Yet, the straw man of incompetently managed nationalized industry is built up and attacked constantly by the Right to define and discredit socialism. The specter of Stalinist repression is thrown in for good measure. The function of anti-socialism now, as in Mike Harrington's life and in the nineteenth

century, is to shut off debate and thinking about any alternatives to the status quo. *Our job clearly is to open up thinking about what socialism can be.*

All of which brings us back to the beginning: what next for socialism? Harrington's last work gave us some of the elements of that vision. I want to list just a few here and relate them to current struggles:

Equality. The American and French Revolutions signaled the political coming of age of the bourgeoisie. Both made the demand for equality a central theme of the struggle. Glancing over a few days of news makes a mockery of the idea of equality. Bill Gates' current net worth has reached \$90 billion while millions of people around the world subsist on less than a dollar a day. No economic calculus can justify such disparity. A more egalitarian United States can help create a more egalitarian world.

Global communities bound by a commitment to justice. College students protest that the athletic uniforms and T-shirts for their universities are produced under sweatshop conditions in the Third World. Conscious movements of workers and consumers can begin to establish some levels of control over global capital. We need international institutions to enforce rules over global capital (see point on social markets). Creating those institutions will be a long-term struggle. In the meantime, movements of labor and citizens can help establish some minimal rules of conduct; violating those rules means international boycotts, shareholder actions and the like.

Beyond that, we can imagine a world in which hunger and extreme poverty cease to exist. That could and should become an explicit goal of trade policy; again citizens' movements can enforce some sets of standards as they did in the global campaign against Nestle. Capitalism has an inherent dynamic toward inequality, but socially aware human beings have an inherent drive to care about one other. The levels of human misery in our world demean all of us.

Social markets. Robert Reich quipped that God did not create the market on any of the six days outlined in Genesis. Socialists need to be clear that the market is itself a social creation. Saying that society needs market mechanisms to make key decisions should be the beginning, not the end of political debate. What kind of markets? Under what rules, with what incentives?

*cont'd on next page*



## TEN YEARS AFTER Michael Harrington's death we need a new look at his vision of **SOCIALISM** as "the hope for human freedom and justice".

Bill Gates may have exercised and abused monopoly power on his way to becoming the world's richest man. In some ways, the most fascinating element of his case is that the very possibility of Microsoft grew from anti-trust action against IBM a generation ago.

As Harrington notes in his *Socialism: Past and Future*, Marx saw the struggle to limit the working day (a form of regulating the labor market) as the political economy of the working class. Figuring out the interventions where we can reshape the market to meet social needs remains the political economy of the socialist movement. As we try to reshape markets to meet social ends, we can forge new alliances with the growing numbers of socially responsible investors and socially responsible businesses.

Time as the ultimate commodity. Julie Schor has written of the overworked American. With two earners and demanding jobs, family and leisure are endangered. Socialists have always fought for a society that realizes full human potential. That means people having the time and energy for activities beyond work. It probably means a democratic decision to take the value of increased productivity in leisure rather than in increased wealth. But conservatives may argue, people have the choice between leisure and added income, and they choose more money. Isn't this a case where socialists are really elitist social engineers trying to outsmart the free market choices of individual consumers? The "choice" of additional income is a free choice in the same sense that working in unattractive jobs is a "free choice" for low-income workers. People choose additional income because they need it. The current economic boom is based on consumer spending, much of it financed by debt. A more egalitarian distribution of income could allow the bottom two-thirds of the society to climb out of debt and find more time for leisure. And as Julie Schor's more recent work argues, we could move toward a less consumerist society in the process, which definitely relates to the next point.

The Red and the Green. Germany's left-wing government is a coalition between the Social Democrats and the Green Party which grew out of the peace and environmental movements. In the United States politicians from Al Gore to New Jersey Governor Christine Whitman are campaigning against sprawl. Central cities continue to lose population as suburbs spread into what used to be undeveloped land. No one can get around without a car, but traffic becomes increasingly jammed. Even conservatives advocate for some level of planning so that people can get what they wanted in the first place: a decent, affordable house close to work, good schools and opportunities for recreation. Socialists need to join that discussion insisting on the link between social justice and environment.

Community and utopia. Modern socialism began as a quest for community. The utopians and the Guild socialists wanted to restore what industrialism was taking away. Marx dismissed the utopians for failing to understand that early

capitalism relentlessly centralized and concentrated activity. Socialists understood the monopolistic tendencies of capital and saw a solution in nationalizing the firms that dominated their industries.


Late capitalism has a different technology and a different set of possibilities; it's the difference between the blast furnace and the personal computer. While the drive toward monopoly and centralization continues, there is also a tendency toward decentralization in capitalism now. Technology allows endless possibilities of breaking down large-scale bureaucracy, and we've seen highly focused small firms outperform corporate behemoths.

Capitalism has endless possibilities of rebuilding the large-scale bureaucracies, and the small, agile firms can and will be outspent by the corporate behemoths. But we have the possibility here of returning to some pre-Marxist conceptions of socialism. Small work communities and revitalized residential communities, where Jeffersonian notions of citizenship bind us together are attractive ideals that are materially possible if people can control the social abundance our world can create.

Mike opened his last book with these words: "Socialism, I want to propose, is the hope for human freedom and justice under the unprecedented conditions of life that humanity will face in the twenty-first century." He leaves us with a challenge, and the challenge begins by understanding and debating what's next for socialism. ▀

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*Jack Clark is a former national director of DSA.*



**AFTER MARXISM. WHAT?**

**Triangulating to the Right: Social Democracy in Europe and the United States**

**GARY DORRIEN**

I think I understand the drift of the Editor's question, because my early books on democratic socialism operated along a similar wavelength, but I cannot say that the second half of the question makes any sense to me today.

Thirteen years ago, in *The Democratic Socialist Vision*, I wrote hopefully about the establishment of the Meidner Plan for Economic Democracy in Sweden and the elections of several progressive social democratic governments elsewhere in Europe. Four years later, *Reconstructing the Common Good* developed an argument for a decentralized, pluralistic and strongly anti-communist politics of



democratic socialism. I was still hopeful that European social democracy was moving in a post-welfare state direction that focused on the democratization of economic power, though my doubts were growing.

Then the Berlin Wall came down, the Cold War ended, and the Soviet Union imploded under the pressure of its backwardness and paralyzing repression. In the preface to the paperback edition of *Reconstructing*, I exulted in the downfall of Soviet Communism and made a case for the timely relevance of economic democracy, while noting that I found rather unsettling the reaction of many ostensible comrades to the downfall of Communism.

Robert Heilbroner was a representative example. In a long *New Yorker* article, he confessed that the disintegration of the Soviet bloc was depressing and disillusioning to him. He found it especially disheartening that the (still existing) Soviet Union was applying for acceptance into the International Monetary Fund. Heilbroner ruefully opined that the loss of an alternative world system proved that Friedrich von Hayek had been right all along about the superiority of free market capitalism and the futility of any kind of socialist alternative to it.

The people who made the latter argument most loudly were the neoconservatives. It seemed to me, at the time, that they were overdue for a critical examination, which I sought to provide in *The Neoconservative Mind*. There and elsewhere I held out for a communitarian economic democracy that constituted a difference in significant degree, but not in kind, from the triumphant capitalist ideology. This is a key aspect of the vision of a good society in which I still believe. I do not believe, however, that in recent years we have seen anything like “the political success of democratic socialism in Europe.” Today the Meidner Plan is forgotten, welfare states are being downsized across the continent, and no social democratic party anywhere is talking about a politics of economic democracy.

I do not say this from the standpoint of some true-believing democratic socialist orthodoxy. I have long believed that Michael Harrington’s conception of democratic socialism assumed and required an undesirable degree of centralized national government, especially state economic planning. Nonetheless, I cannot kid myself that the ascendance of the Blair and Schroeder governments in Great Britain and Germany signifies anything like “the political success of democratic socialism in Europe.” I retain *some* hope that Blair is a progressive social democrat in some part of his political soul, but it’s too much for me to hope even that much for Schroeder. If this is possible, Schroeder seems even more opportunistic and philosophically beliefless than his and Blair’s role model, Bill Clinton.

#### The Golden Straitjacket

The three of them clearly belong to the same generational phenomenon and political school. These men are entirely comfortable with the golden straightjacket wrapped around

their politics by the bond markets. They are very short on principled beliefs. With perhaps two exceptions, Clinton simply does not possess convictions that he wouldn’t sell out for political advantage.

He does seem to genuinely care about racial injustice—it’s the best thing about him—though he has precious few achievements to show for it. To greater effect, he also clearly believes in free trade. In his early presidency, when the polling data was still unclear but leaning the other way, Clinton pressed hard to pass the North American Free Trade Agreement. He took the argument to people who didn’t agree with him and struggled to persuade them that free trade is good for the United States.

I cannot recall another example in his presidency in which he argued from the standpoint of a deeply-felt principle, committed himself to a strategy of persuasion, and therefore struggled to *shape* popular opinion. The point of this observation is too obvious to belabor, as is the meaning of the only exception to it. It’s a good measure of Clinton’s liberalism that free trade is the only cause he has championed on principle. Approximately three days per week, I’m tempted to think, “This is probably the most we can hope for in these jaded times. We have a president who won’t take a position that’s any worse—or better—than the polling data.”

That’s the kind of political leadership they have in Great Britain and Germany, too. It’s cynical, it’s completely compromised, and for a while, it’s a viable way to govern without capitulating entirely to the political Right. “For a while” obtains especially in the United States. Clinton’s “third way” keeps tacking further and further to the Right, because you can’t triangulate with a Left that doesn’t exist. If a serious single-payer constituency had mobilized during the health care debate, Clinton might have wrung some meaningful health care reform out of Congress. As it was, the medical establishment and political Right dominated the debate, and the single-payer movement barely got a hearing. It was too small and underfinanced to be a serious political force.

The action now is between an amorphous political center and various conservative coalitions. Great Britain and Germany have deeper social democratic traditions, but the electoral situations in these countries are basically similar to the United States. Compared to the alternative, there *is* something hopeful about the victories of a triangulating third way politics in the United States, England, and Germany, but let’s not claim that it bears any likeness to the hope of democratic socialism. ■

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*Gary Dorrien’s recent books include The Word as True Myth: Interpreting Modern Theology and the forthcoming The Barthian Revolt in Modern Theology: Theology Without Weapons, both published by Westminster John Knox Press. He is Professor and Chair of Religious Studies at Kalamazoo College.*

## Small Steps May Still Be Beneficial



**NORM FARAMELLI**

Changes are emerging throughout Europe. Within a few short years European communism has collapsed, and market capitalism is growing in places where it was once forbidden. Also, new governments have emerged in France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy and elsewhere that are more progressive than their predecessors.

Despite all that, it is difficult to give a clear, concise answer to the question, “What have we learned from the collapse of Marxist-Leninism and the political success of democratic socialism in Europe?”

One reason for the difficulty is that it is too early to tell. Are these changes simply part of the pendulum swings between liberal and conservative forces in European politics? Perhaps. It is still too early to tell.

The formulation of the question immediately reminds one of the flip side—i.e., communism has been overthrown and free market capitalism has emerged triumphant. At least that is what has been celebrated in the media. Therefore I find the question given us a bit odd. I think, however, that what has occurred in France, Germany *et al* is a reminder to us that the ultimate triumph of free market capitalism has been heralded prematurely. Nevertheless, it would be a real stretch to say that what has actually emerged in Europe is a new democratic socialism. Maybe there have been some steps taken in that direction, but given the influence of corporate power in Europe, these have been small steps indeed. Even if they do have value.

### What Happened to Communism?

First, we have to ask, what ever happened to Soviet-style communism? Just how Marxist or Leninist was Soviet state capitalism? This could trigger a debate that we will sidestep, except to note that many forces could be credited for its collapse, including Gorbachev's leadership. It really collapsed under its own weight, especially with excessive expenditures on the military (spearheaded by the U.S.-driven arms race), the absence of freedom and democracy, and the cumbersome and inefficient nature of central economic planning. But what has emerged from the collapse?

I'm not trying to minimize the gains of progressive forces in France, Germany, Italy, and to a lesser degree in England. I believe that what is emerging is a clarion call for a vibrant “mixed economy”

that is willing to push aside the rhetoric of “free market capitalism unfettered by government”. That kind of free market capitalism never did exist in the real world—that is, government intervention has always played a major role in directing or guiding the economy.

The big issue, of course, has always been: on whose behalf does the government intervene? The attitudes of the French, German and British governments toward corporate capitalism, while not identical, have been and continue to be friendly and supportive. For instance, privatization is a celebrated topic for discussion in England, and moves in that direction have not significantly slowed down under the leadership of Tony Blair.

### Clear Call to Address Human Needs

In all three nations, however, there is a clear call for a positive role for government to address human needs. Still, to call this concern a triumph of democratic socialism is to overstate the reality.

Consider a continuum, with “unfettered free market capitalism” on one end and “democratic socialism” on the other. One can safely say that the new European movements, which affirm a stronger endorsement than their predecessors of “the mixed economy”, lie along the continuum a bit closer to the “democratic socialist” end than previously. But in my view it would be closer to the middle of the continuum, with a long way to go before we get to democratic socialism.

**The public sector needs to  
guarantee all people training  
and employment possibilities.**

There are still two other important factors to be considered:

1. A real democratic socialism has both political and economic components. As noted in the formulation of the question, the success has been “political”, but it has not been significantly affecting the economic sphere. The public sector must play a more creative and effective role in economic activity if democratic socialism is to emerge. For example, the current cries for increased privatization of services now performed by government employees move a nation in the opposite direction, even if there might be some value in privatizing certain activities. *The public sector needs to guarantee all people training and employment possibilities at decent wages and working conditions.* That goes beyond what is usually expected in “the mixed economy”.

2. It is important that progressives put events in their proper perspective — that is, not over-read or under-read their significance. It is tempting for progressive forces, for instance, to see what is happening in Europe as the ultimate co-optation of progressive prospects. A corollary of this is: if things only get a little worse, then a “real” form of democratic socialism will emerge. I understand such temptations, but I hope not to yield to them.

It is important that we recognize small steps in the right direction for exactly what they are — *small yet beneficial to many people.* ■

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*Norman Faramelli is an Episcopal minister and a co-editor of Religious Socialism.*

# Marxism Is Not Quite Dead



CHARLES C. WEST

A generation ago, during the time of “socialism with a human face”, the Czech Marxist philosopher, Vyteslav Gardavsky, wrote a book entitled *God Is Not Quite Dead*. Now it is our turn. Today, when God is much honored but too little obeyed, when a global society driven by rampant finance capitalism desperately needs a human face, Marxism is not quite dead.

The inhuman ideal of collective human power controlling nature and society in a totally planned command economy—the communist state—is gone, of course. It was a substitute for God. But other substitutes, the ones against whose evils Marx directed his polemic, are with us still. We who are believers have learned from that polemic. Our ethics and our politics will never be the same as we try to discern God’s work in our world, and respond to it. Let me suggest three ways in which this is so.

First, it was Marx who first explored for us the ways in which human sin, compounded into demonic power that uses human power to destroy human life, operates in the sphere of modern economic behavior. Jewish and Christian ethics have always known, of course, about avarice or greed. The tenth commandment, “You shall not covet”, condemns it. The Torah carefully controls it. The prophets link it to idolatry.

Jesus gives the idol a name, Mammon, and in his parables belittles it again and again, in contrast to the reign of God. The teaching of the Church in all its branches sought over seventeen centuries to control it by spirituality and by law. Even the early expansions of modern commerce were subjected by Roman Catholic moralists and Calvinist Puritans alike to this direction and this discipline.

## Marx Tore Off the Mask

With the expansion of the technological and industrial revolution, however, the Church lost control of Mammon, both conceptually and socially. So a compromise arose. The spiritual and material were separated so that successful Christians might live comfortably in both, philanthropic in one, self-centered in the other. What had been guidance to

society became counsel to individual believers in a system governed by economic motives and the laws of profit, investment and capital accumulation.

It was Marx who tore the mask from this compromise and analyzed the system in detail for what it was: the inexorable development of human greed, fed by technology and new energy sources, into a power that destroys human community and corrupts human beings.

We may not agree all the way with Marx’s analysis. But because of him no Christian today can be unaware of the structural power of sin in the economic system that controls our lives. Every Christian ethic must wrestle with the pervasiveness and subtlety of that power as it searches for ways to make known the saving power of God.

Second, Marx has burned into our consciousness the dependence of human thought on human social existence, in other words the power of ideology. The relativity of truth to the perspectives and interests of the knowing subject is of course an idea at least as old as the Greek Sophists of Plato’s time. But Marx was no relativist; he was a prophet. With the passion of moral outrage he exposed the self-deceptions not only of capitalists who rationalized their exploitation by the laws of economics, but also of philosophers who revolutionized the world only in the realm of ideas, and of Christians and Jews (“religious people” as he knew them) who projected a transcendent realm to ease the pain and escape the challenge of fighting to change this world.

His reality was the exploited, the deprived, whom he called the proletariat, in revolutionary struggle to overthrow the powers that oppressed them. This was the social existence that determined his consciousness. This was the praxis that his theory served. To all others he threw out the challenge: whose interest does your religion, your philosophy, or your social analysis represent? What social existence determines your consciousness, you who make objective claims for your truths, or claim to serve a transcendent God?

## The Covenant Must Be Lived

There is an answer to this, but it is not theoretical. Marx was right; consciousness is determined by social existence. What social existence, then, do we confess in the hopes and struggles of our lives. Jews and Christians believe it is God’s covenant from the calling of Abraham to today. For Christians it is the reign of the crucified and risen Christ judging and redeeming the world and making us ministers of reconciliation. But there is no way the truth of this social existence can be argued. It must be lived.

When we use it to rationalize the interests of our class or nation, or when we turn it into a heavenly realm that denies

*cont’d on page 20*

**Marx has burned into our consciousness the power of ideology.**

# wage Peace, not War

JUDY DEUTSCH

We yearn for peace, but we trust in war. In the years since the end of World War II and the formation of the United Nations, our method of dealing with "belligerent madmen" and regimes we dislike for one reason or another has not changed much. "Almost all the progress has been in the manufacture of more and more terrible weapons" (*The Progressive*, November, 1991).

But as early as the 18th century the Christian Universalist Benjamin Rush — a physician who raised money for our Revolutionary War — proposed the establishment of a Peace Office, one that would "subdue the passion for war" in our schools, in our government, and throughout the land.

On May 13, 1999, Roger Fisher, the head of Harvard Law School's Negotiation Project and the author of *Getting to Yes*, maintained that what we have to learn is how to deal with people — to listen carefully to each other, to understand each other's positions, to analyze the problem and come up with practical options, to take one step at a time.

Fisher says that inside each government there should be a team trained to negotiate — a team whose training would include role-playing the other side, and he proposes that the United Nations provide a trained third party who can help mediate, not judge. About the conflict in Yugoslavia Fisher said, "The distrust is so high that if the Serbs withdrew all their forces, the Kosovars would attack them."

Building trust among nations is what we need, and that is a slow process. To move that process along two steps would be helpful:

1. Begin to consider that the real agenda of [waging peace]... would look toward settlements and accommodations not ruled by the concepts of victory and defeat...[and would instead]...rest upon the changed lives and economies of individuals, families and neighborhoods (Sayles, *The Progressive*, November, 1991).

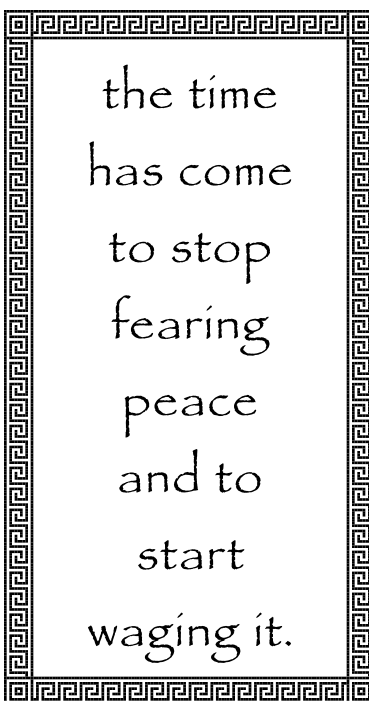
2. Recognize that [waging peace] as a way of dealing with large conflicts is not a dream but a proven possibility. We have the examples of Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr...We have the examples of some nations that have successfully pursued policies of peace over long stretches of

time...We must give the same status and prestige to the virtues and the means of peace as we have heretofore given to the means of war (Ibid.)

Good Guys and Bad Guys

Waging war operates on the principle that there are good guys and bad guys, that we are the good guys and the other guys are the bad guys. But the conflict we are dealing with now, as most others, is not so simple. In Yugoslavia there has been "a chain of atrocity and revenge, with each act of vengeance constituting a fresh atrocity. [And as the chain has grown, it has entangled millions of people and has stretched on for generations.] The Serbs...are caught in the chain themselves, reacting to thousands of ancient and newly inflicted hurts, including the...NATO bombs. When you use violence to end a chain of violence...the real victor is always violence itself" (Barbara Ehrenreich in *The Progressive*, June, 1999).

In the 1980's Congress established a U.S. Institute of Peace. This institute still exists, but it gets very little funding and thus has made little or no impact. The United States needs a smarter policy, one that involves:



Cooperating with key international and regional players to reduce threats to peace...investing in multilateral institutions that can shoulder part of the burden of heading off ethnic conflicts before they escalate into war...[These multilateral institutions] would attempt to create a range of tools that can be employed [to wage peace] (William D. Hartung, *The Nation*, May 10, 1999).

The United Nations needs to strengthen its capabilities for peacekeeping and conflict resolution, including the capabilities of broad-based regional organizations like the Organization of African Unity and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, a 55-member body that includes Russia. Billions, more likely trillions, are spent now for armaments and air strikes. Relatively little is spent for monitoring human rights and other methods of

intervention that could be used before resorting to military action. Brian Urquhart, former Undersecretary General of the UN, has called for:

The development of a UN peacekeeping force that would replace the current *ad hoc* system that requires the Secretary General to seek commitments on a case-by-case basis (Hartung, Ibid.).

A Demilitarization Fund

The Nobel Laureate Oscar Arias has suggested the formation of a global demilitarization fund by taking a small

*cont'd on page 17*

# HOW ABOUT A SOCIALIST HYMNAL?



ROD RYON

Did you know that 1,000 religious socialists sang the 72nd Psalm when they rallied to support striking miners in London in 1912? Did you know that Newman's "Lead Kindly Light" was sung by a socialist-led march of the unemployed when it started off from Leicester, England, to London in 1905?



Did you know that when religious socialist Vida Scudder and comrades held their political meetings at Boston's Church of the Carpenter, they would sing that great hymn of redistribution, the Magnificat: "God hath put down the mighty from their thrones/And exalted those of low degree"?

Did you ever hear about a meeting of the socialist-led Southern Tenant Farmers Union in the Thirties? Just as the singing started, the old African-American song leader had to correct the young Communist organizer: "The spiritual doesn't say, 'Let the will of the union be done'," insisted the old man. "Don't you go changing that song. 'Let the will of the Lord be done.' That says exactly what we want it to say. What do you think the Lord's will is, anyhow? It's freedom. You leave that song alone!"

Socialist music tends to hold religion in disdain and mock the pious. The soaring words of the Internationale, for example, bid "servile masses" spurn "superstititon"—nearly equated with religion. Workers should be done with "condescending saviors". IWW organizers jeered "the long-haired preachers", Holy Rollers who "holler, jump and shout". Leave it to them, the song goes, and workers get "pie in the sky when they die" but "work and pray and live on hay" in the here and now.

## The Secular Left Has a Point

Of course, the secular left has its point. Historically, religious institutions too often climbed into bed with capitalism, the religious hierarchy too often "ate with the rich while it preached to the poor" (and still does), and Protestant Christianity, so dominant in the United States, practically allied itself with the rising capitalist class.

It has not been Marx alone who called religion a drug. Charles Kingley, a founder in 1848 of the Christian socialist movement in England, confessed that he and his fellow Anglican ministers "have used the Bible as if it were a special constable's handbook—an opium dose for keeping beasts of burden patient while they were being overloaded—a mere book to keep the poor in order."

Nevertheless, socialists within various faith communities have had their religious music, songs and hymns. To paraphrase Pete Seeger, religious socialists "sing because they're so happy...sing to keep their spirits from going five miles below hell...and sing to keep their courage up".

I propose to compile, edit, write and rewrite, publish and then distribute—cheaply, maybe even for free—something called a socialist hymnal. It will be short, say 40 to 60 hymns and folksongs with religious socialist themes.

What would be in the socialist hymnal? First, a few items meaningful to our religious socialist forebears. Second, familiar hymns and songs that express religious socialist values or vision: that the Kingdom of God is to be sought on earth, that the earth's fruits are to be shared or held in common and passed on, not monopolised, that a place is set for all at the Holy One's banquet of life, that work answers a holy calling (vocare, vocation) and is not the alienated labor of capitalism, that our visions of brotherhood, sisterhood and solidarity are divinely affirmed and make humans equal, and, for Christians, that the human shape taken by God forever blurs a distinction between the material and the spiritual.

## Songs About Action

The hymnal might have songs about the action that can grow out of faith—music such as "We Shall Overcome" or variations on the great brethren music of Protestantism, such as "Blest Be the Tie that Binds Good Christian Folk as One", with slight changes of wording.

Lastly, there is scant ecumenical songs of any sort, but the hymnal will surely have some that span the faith traditions.

So please hum favorite tunes, browse old hymnals and songbooks, and try your hand at new verses or word changes. And then send your ideas, suggestions and recommendations to Rod Ryon, 904 Chestnut Hill Ave., Baltimore, MD 21218 (410-889-0329), ryon@saber.towson.edu. If there's a big enough response, we might make this a collective project. ▀

*An offering to the shrine of power  
Our hands shall never bring,  
A garland at the seat of Pomp  
Our hands shall never fling.  
Applauding 'long an emperor's path  
Our voices ne'er shall be,  
But we have hearts to honor One  
Whose love bids all be free.*

—Labour Church Hymn Book

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*Rod Ryon is vice-chair of the Religion and Socialism Commission.*

*Ed. Note: Interesting idea, Rod. Don't forget to include William Blake's classic Jerusalem: "And did the countenance divine shine forth upon our clouded hills?/And was Jerusalem builded here among these dark satanic mills?"*

# Walking The Path: Grass Roots Buddhist Activism

*BOB KNOTT*

What can we do here and now? Small Buddhist organizations in several Western nations have developed responses to suffering in local communities. With grounding in sitting (meditation), we have tried to open ourselves to challenges in our immediate neighborhoods. The increasingly egalitarian, inclusive performance of these groups (or sanghas) shares much in practice with democratic socialism.



Colorado Buddhist Alliance for Social Engagement (CO-BASE) has undertaken diverse projects in the past two years. We received guidance from International Buddhist Peace Fellowship in Berkeley, CA. The BPF/BASE model drew inspiration from Latin American Christian base communities, the Catholic Worker movement, and the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, as well as Asian sources. In Colorado we have not maintained the residential groups with daily interaction that are the core Buddhist Alliance vision. We have developed weekend projects that have been transformative experiences for many participants.

What principles animate these practices? (1) Service/Social Action (seva) is the experience of engaging with suffering that is the heart of BASE. (2) Wisdom/Training (panna) is exploration of political, social, and environmental issues through group deliberation. (3) Dharma Practice (samadhi) is the insight that arises through formal religious rituals that are not separable from the scramble of street action. (4) Community (sangha) is solidarity and shared purpose of diverse practitioners working together. (5) Commitment (adhitthana) has not been fulfilled by our Colorado group, but entails sustained intention and time with a BASE group (at least six months) to achieve meaningful impact.

## A Garden For The Homeless

An earlier experience with these practices involved working with the Gathering Place, a drop-in day shelter for homeless women and children. The participants at the shelter expressed desire for a garden to commemorate sisters who had lost their lives on the streets. Many current members of the shelter community were haunted by friends and

acquaintances who had died or disappeared through experiences with violence, drugs, and broken health.

The women, children, and staff shaped the design of the garden with an empathetic landscape architect.. We Buddhists were inspired by the strength and resilience of the women who frequented the shelter. When stones in the soil seemed daunting to us, women who had worked the rock piles at Colorado's Canon City State Penitentiary kept moving with shovels, picks, and wheelbarrows. The xeriscape vegetation and new paths were celebrated at an opening ceremony in which poems and songs were voiced in remembrance of friends who had walked the streets.

More recently we have applied a "circle of support" model with disenfranchised or homeless people. Developed in Canada with differently-abled individuals, the circle of five to seven workers seeks to facilitate community networking. Homeless or disabled people who have become disconnected from family, neighborhood, and other groups can be re-introduced with one-on-one or small group companionship. The circle operates separately from existing government programs, even though the circle may assist a disenfranchised participant in overcoming obstacles in governmental or economic power structures.

Those forming a circle of support are asked to seek common interests with the estranged person. Rather than "identifying needs," there is emphasis on understanding the aspirations or dreams of the individual who has often been grilled repeatedly according to regulations for government programs. Informal interactions and outings are encouraged between one or two circle members and the woman or man who is reconnecting. These excursions may include visiting a garden, shopping at thrift stores, or attending an AA meeting.

Receiving guidance from community development consultant Mike Green, Colorado Buddhists developed a circle of support with Joe, a gay and homeless alcoholic who spent time at a public library where one of our members worked. Participation from people with diverse backgrounds in religion, gender, age, ethnicity, and class has been encouraged. Circle meetings are open, informal, and egalitarian with changing leadership roles.

After Joe encountered frustration in dealing with established alcohol detoxification agencies, the circle set up 24 hour detox support with medical supervision and prescriptions at a member's house for four days. While Joe has joined a suitable halfway house and AA, circle participants have continued social outings, shopping, and job search assistance. He has enrolled in a community college computer program to restore his office management skills.

We are poignantly aware that efforts like those with Joe and the Gathering Place are small steps. Walking the streets or attending meetings with disenfranchised folks offers continued instruction in the pain and frustration that our political economy inflicts. We learn how our own greed

ignorance, and insensitivity contribute to the problems of others. These local practices, however, strengthen our resolve to enhance our spiritual awareness and to transform larger social structures. ▀

*Bob Knott is a communication specialist with a hi-tech firm, an adjunct professor of international relations at University of Denver, and a member of D.S.O.C./D.S.A. and of Denver Zen Center for twenty odd years.*

# Thich Nhat Hanh and Socially Engaged Buddhism

LYN FINE & PATRICIA HUNT PERRY

"You may think that the way to change the world is to elect a new President," wrote Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh to student friends in the United States in the early 1990s, "but a government is only a reflection of society, which is a reflection of our own consciousness. To create fundamental change, we, the members of society, have to transform ourselves. If we want real peace, we have to demonstrate our love and understanding so that those responsible for making decisions can learn from us."

I [Lyn] first heard Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh speak in the context of a political protest action, not a religious gathering. In June 1982, about a hundred religious leaders and participants gathered for a three-day conference in New York City prior to a walk from the United Nations to what turned out to be a 700,000-person protest in Central Park against the escalation of a nuclear arms buildup and deployment. "To make peace on our planet," Thich Nhat Hanh said during our discussion group at the conference, "we must do three things." "First, we need to organize a day on which nobody on the planet goes hungry."

He paused.

"Second, every major religious group should observe, honor, and celebrate the major religious holiday of every other religious group, in the way that the other group would celebrate it."

Again, he paused.

"Third, every person who dedicates themselves to engaging in action for social change and transformation should put by their telephone these words of reminder: "Breathe! You Are Alive!"

I tried to imagine the transformations in political will and social awareness, economic motivation and institutions, and cultural assumptions that could and would need to occur to make these proposals happen. Who was this monk, who, while embodying nonviolence in his very presence and being, began his proposals for peace with the encouragement to "organize!"?

Like Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., the Dalai Lama, and others, Thich Nhat Hanh's powerful nonviolent approach to strategic action in the public arena was nourished by the teachings and practice of his faith tradition and also by his personal experience with institutional violence. Born October 11, 1926, in a village in central Vietnam, Thich Nhat Hanh (Nguyen Xuan Bao) joined Tu Hieu Monastery in Hue as a novice when he was sixteen. He received full ordination in 1949.

The world Thich Nhat Hanh entered as a novice was one of traditional Vietnamese monastic Buddhism, but as a student, he developed ideas that were considered radical. For example, he asked his Buddhist elders to expand their training to include foreign languages, literature, and philosophy. When the suggestion was rejected, he and five others left monastic training and went to study at Saigon University. While there, he wrote poetry and novels to support himself and the others. In 1950, he co-founded a temple in Saigon that later became An Quang Buddhist Institute, a leading center of Buddhist studies and activism. Six years later he established Phuong Boi, a new monastic community. He was appointed editor-in chief of *Vietnamese Buddhism*, a magazine that gave public voice to his developing views of engaged Buddhism, which encompassed both monastic and lay Buddhism.

"When I was in Vietnam," Thich Nhat Hanh later said to his students, "so many of our villages were being bombed. Along with my monastic brothers and sisters, I had to decide what to do. Should we continue to practice in our monasteries, or should we leave the meditation halls in order to help the people who were suffering under the bombs? After careful reflection, we decided to do both—to go out and help people and to do so in mindfulness. We called it engaged Buddhism."

The approach to societal transformation that Thich Nhat Hanh has developed includes ongoing questing and learning from all life and encouragement of everyone to do the same, critique offered gently but firmly, and poetic metaphor. It often integrates "the best of the East and the best of the West." It is illustrated in the following story.

"Several autumns ago, " the Zen Master writes in *Love in Action: Writings on Social Change*, "I walked up to the pine tree in my backyard and asked it one question: "What is institutional violence?" The tree did not answer right away. So

*cont'd on next page*

I sat at its roots and waited. The backyard was covered with brilliantly colored leaves, the air was fresh, and suddenly I forgot that I was waiting for an answer. The tree and I were just there, enjoying ourselves and each other. After sitting for a long time, I turned to the tree, smiled and said, 'I no longer need an answer.' Then I thanked it and awarded it the Grand Transnational Peace Prize. When I told my friends this, one ...asked, 'What was the tree's answer to your question?' I did not know what to say, so I encouraged her to go out and ask the tree. . . .

"Soon I will organize an International Conference on Tree-Watching. All of the conferees will sit in the forest and just look at beautiful cypresses and pines. Then, in workshops we can discuss strategies for tree-watching and also principles for appreciating human beings, even those who do not look or think exactly as we do. When I told this to the pine tree, it began to laugh. The tree was thinking about a particular conference held at a Hilton Hotel dealing with the problems of the Third World. Not a single Third World representative had the opportunity to speak because eloquent spokespersons from the First World spoke for them. It was too difficult for them to listen to real Third World representatives, especially those whose ideas did not fit in with their own."

Thich Nhat Hanh's approach is grounded in two key principles: the transforming power of love and understanding and the necessity for personal as well as societal transformation. Individuals and society "inter-are." In this view, violent struggle and combative conflict are not the way to create a peaceful and just world order. "There is no way to peace, peace is the way," as A.J. Muste said.

Central to Thich Nhat Hanh's engaged Buddhist perspective is his insight into interbeing and the understanding of co-responsibility that arises from it. "In each of us, there is a certain amount of violence and a certain amount of nonviolence," he writes in *Love in Action: Writings on Nonviolent Social Change*. "If we divide reality into two camps—the violent and the nonviolent—and stand in one camp while attacking the other, the world will never have peace. We will always blame and condemn those we feel are responsible for wars and social injustice, without recognizing the degree of violence in ourselves. We must work on ourselves and also work with those we condemn if we want to have a real impact. It never helps to draw a line and dismiss some people as enemies, even those who act violently."

In offering this perspective, Thich Nhat Hanh was drawing not only on his Buddhist tradition and his personal experience of the war in Vietnam but also of his attempts to speak with the peace movement in the United States in the late 1960s. Sponsored by the Fellowship of Reconciliation to travel to the United States in the mid-1960s, he spoke to public audiences, local and national media, and U.S. government officials. At one meeting, he remembers, "A very angry young American stood up at a meeting and shouted at me, 'Why are you here?! You should be home right now! The war is there, you should be fighting the American imperialists!' He was shouting at me like that. I saw the war in him, as a pacifist—because that kind of anger is war itself." After he had breathed deeply for a few

minutes, Thich Nhat Hanh responded that he was speaking in the United States because the roots of the war were in the United States, and it was the roots of the war that needed attention.

From this moment with an angry peace activist, Thich Nhat Hanh understood how much anger many United States peace and social-change activists at the time were bringing to their activism, and he began to emphasize being peace—developing the willingness and capacity for personal transformation—as an essential element for would-be social change activists, peacemakers and in the peacemaking process. His influence on the American peace movement and especially on Martin Luther King, Jr. was significant. King's decision to speak out against the war in Vietnam required personal struggle and incited controversy in the civil rights movement. King's close associate Andrew Young told an interviewer that it was "clearly Thich Nhat Hanh's visit to Martin" and "King's chance meeting with [Dr. Benjamin] Spock on an airplane that changed King's views on speaking out on Vietnam."

In the emerging tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh, key principles from Buddhist tradition have been renewed to address contemporary needs and challenges. Guiding principles for social change activists, including socialists, which are emerging in this renewal tradition, as in other religions, are:

- both personal transformation and societal transformation are necessary and need attention at the same time
- use nonviolent means if the aspiration is towards a nonviolent "end"
- recognize the power of love and understanding rather than coercion as a means for social change and transformation
- focus on the needs of young people, the younger generation
- organize—one's life, to restore balance, and collectively, for the benefit of society
- be open to continuing learning, from everyone and everything, including nature
- acknowledge many forms—awareness-raising activities, community-building, social service, nonviolent collective action for public policy change, the arts (essay and poetry writing, singing, plays)— as valuable vehicles for consciousness-raising and action for social change and transformation
- create ways for individuals and institutions of every major religious group to observe, honor, celebrate the major religious holiday of every other religious group, in the way that the other group would celebrate it
- organize a day on which nobody on the planet goes hungry

By 1998, about three hundred sanghas in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh had been established in many parts of the Western world. A sangha — community of spiritual practitioners and spiritual support—is essential for socially engaged practice. In *Touching Peace*, Thich Nhat Hanh writes, "Even if we are a skilled mediator and well versed in the sutras, if we don't know how to build a sangha, we cannot help others" The sangha functions as a community of resistance countering and transforming the individualism, isolation and greed fostered in modern Western societies. It is



a base community of spiritual friends who are living in ways that nourish a culture of mindfulness, compassion, and understanding. For Thich Nhat Hanh, the development of communities of mindfulness and mindful living grounded in the teachings of the Buddha and that do not succumb to unwholesome individual and societal practices is itself socially engaged Buddhism.

Critics of Thich Nhat Hanh's form of socially engaged Buddhism, however, suggest that his teachings are either too engaged with the world and do not give enough emphasis to traditional notions in Buddhist practice such as "Enlightenment" or that he is not enough engaged with "Buddhist" collective action in the public arena or does not address fundamental issues of class and power, institutional and structural violence. Several people we heard from and interviewed suggested (and lamented) what they see as a shift in emphasis in Thich Nhat Hanh's teachings in the later 1990s from a more politically engaged and collective Buddhist activism in the 1960s in Vietnam to a more individual- and sangha-based engaged practice in the West. The assumption that individual transformation and even small sanghas functioning as base communities can effect real social transformation is naive and idealistic, say these critics.

As we have surveyed the teachings and practices of Thich Nhat Hanh both historically and in the most recent period, and from our interviews with practitioners who have been inspired by these teachings and practices, it appears to us that Thich Nhat Hanh is on the right track. We believe that changes in public policy can indeed be advanced as socially engaged activists strengthen their individual and collective practice of mindfulness as a foundation for their activism. Peacemaking from this perspective is an all-inclusive, living activity that enters all levels of existence from the so-called internal, to family interactions, to movement-building to forge beneficial public policy and transform consciousness.

The perception among some that Thich Nhat Hanh's current emphasis on nonviolent communication in sanghas, families, and workplaces encourages a "quietism" with respect to socially engaged practice in the public arena appears not to be borne out by our (admittedly limited) sampling.

He has consistently encouraged the establishment of mindfulness practice centers. These centers are to be places where mindfulness practice can be widely shared in a nonreligious, nonsectarian form, without the iconography of Buddhism, and from which the teaching of mindfulness practice in public institutions could be supported.

Perhaps the key is, in his words, that "Mindfulness must be engaged. Once there is seeing, there must be acting. Otherwise, what is the use of seeing? We must be aware of the real problems of the world. Then, with mindfulness, we will know what to do, and what not to do, to be of help." ▀

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*This article is adapted from a chapter that will appear in the forthcoming book *Engaged Buddhism in the West*, edited by Christopher Queen and published by Wisdom Publications,*

*Somerville, Mass.. Lyn Fine is a Dharma teacher in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh and leads mindfulness retreats in New York and around the country. She is co-founder of the Community of Mindfulness in New York City. Patricia Hunt Perry is professor of social thought at Ramapo College, Mahwah, N.J. and an ordained member of the Order of Interbeing.*

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## Wage Peace, Not War

*cont'd from page 12*

percentage of the military budgets of UN members states. Others suggest the creation of such a fund through the imposition of a modest tax on international financial transactions. And, of course, the United States could pay its outstanding dues to the UN for just the price of one B-2 bomber—\$2.1 billion!

The Institute for Defense and Disarmament Studies, the World Order Models Project, the Union of Concerned Scientists and other organizations are promoting a long-term project called Global Action to Prevent War. Hartung again:

This project proposes a series of four linked treaties to be phased in over a period of 20-to-40 years, with the goal of eliminating nuclear weapons, radically reducing conventional arms and sales, and establishing regional and international mechanisms for conflict prevention and peacekeeping that would be internationally financed and universally recognized. Taken together, these initiatives would provide the U.S. with other tools for dealing with future conflicts like those in Rwanda and Kosovo besides sitting on our hands in the face of ethnic slaughter or dropping bombs on the parties to a civil war.

I still feel the hope for peace that was felt almost 55 years ago when the United Nations was born. But the so-called practical people of the world knew that real peace was impossible and that great financial profits were to be made from armaments—for the practical few. And so we have waged war rather than peace.

But the people who have been maimed by war, the people who have had their children and other loved ones killed by war, have not profited from this practicality. Neither have the people who have been deprived of a decent living because of the huge proportion of resources that have gone into waging war.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt assuaged the fears of millions of Americans during World War II by proclaiming, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." I think the time has come to stop fearing peace and to start waging it. ▀

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*Judy Deutsch is a Unitarian Universalist pastor and a Contributing Editor of Religious Socialism.*

# Cornel West Talks to *RS*

*cont'd from cover page*

RS: And you never had any temptation to disbelief?

CW: No. Of course, I come out of a different intellectual orientation from most of my fellow Baptists or family. I read a lot of Montaigne, and early on, Kierkegaard. Writers like them have always been the fundamental sources of my understanding the faith. Therefore I could never be fundamentalist, foundationist or cheaply evangelical. There has always been a strong critical consciousness inscribed within my Christian faith.

RS: When did this critical consciousness start?

CW: I first read Kierkegaard about the age of 14. We lived in a segregated part of Sacramento and it was difficult to get access to a library, but we had a Bookmobile that came around. [At this point Cornel came over to the book-lined wall beside me and picked out the original copy of a Kierkegaard book he had read at that early age. Inside the front cover there were some scribbled notes, one of which was "Nietzsche fits". The question of how a devout anti-Christian like Nietzsche could fit with a devout Christian like Kierkegaard intrigued me, but uncertain how many RS readers would want to pursue this tortuous road, I let it pass. We got into Pascal, whom Cornel thinks is "an even greater Christian writer than Newman" and T.S. Eliot on Pascal and Eliot's reference, "which I love" to "the demon of doubt, which is inseparable from the spirit of faith".]

RS: So you were a brilliant student in high school and came here on scholarship.

CW: Class of '74. [He made it in three years.] I went on to Princeton for a Masters and PhD in Philosophy, then taught at Union Theological Seminary, Yale Divinity School, Princeton and now here, teaching mostly philosophy, but nearly everything, including a course on the Tragic, the Comic and the Political, and here now an Introduction to Afro-American Studies.

RS: You were ordained?

CW: No, never. Every periodical, including the *New York Times*, insists that I'm an ordained minister, but I never was.

RS: When were you first attracted to socialism?

CW: When I was about 16 I started reading the Black Panthers' newspaper. I was strongly influenced by what they were saying about capitalism. They had a chapter right next to our church and I used to dialogue with the brothers and sisters. I never joined the Panthers because they trashed religion. You had to be an atheist to join. But my understanding of the Christian gospel embraced many of their insights about social misery and how we understand it. I was never convinced that they had any solutions. It was

more their courage, their willingness to think seriously about the rule of capital, the commodification of labor and all those things we associate with Marxist discourse. I remember reading Capital and I couldn't figure out what was going on, but I knew he was saying something about the nature of evil in modern society, how workers were being exploited and how capital was a major idol of our time. Similarly I concluded that money was not inherently idolatrous but could become idolatrous if it were elevated and lifted in place of God. Eventually I read Tillich and *The Socialist Decision* and I thought, "This is it. Tillich has got exactly what I have been trying to think through. It was Tillich, it was R.H. Tawney, it was Reinhold Niebuhr.

RS: I like Tawney and Niebuhr, but I was never crazy about Tillich and his *God as the Ground of our Being*. [I told Cornel the Jim Adams story about the apocryphal Gospel—see Fall/98 issue of RS — and Jesus reacting to the Tillichian language with the question, "What the hell is that?" This reduced Cornel to a gratifying fit of laughter.]

CW: Tillich's theology was problematic, and he had his own lingo, but he had an existentialist sense, a feeling for the depth that lies beneath the surface appearance. We all have our special lingo, and the beauty of the Gospel is that it cuts through the lingo to the reality behind them.

RS: In your book *Prophesy Deliverance!* you have the following passage: "Racial status contributes greatly to black oppression...but class position contributes more than racial status to the basic form of powerlessness in America." Do you still believe that?

CW: I was saying that in terms of immediate lived experience — on the bus, on the job and so on — race is felt to be more fundamental, but in terms of life chances of black people class is more important. More and more African-Americans are coming to realize that, but unfortunately, class is still not accented as much as it ought to be.

RS: Have you read Ron Aronson's book, *After Marxism?* The opening line is "Marxism is over, and we are on our own." What do you think of that?

Marxism Indispensable but Inadequate

CW: I think that on the one hand we have always been on our own. The notion that we are now on our own because Marxism is over is itself an illusion. Marxism was always to be viewed critically. We accept what insights we can incorporate and we hold at arms length the nonsense. I have never, ever been a Marxist. It's too narrow, too impoverished a conception of what it is to be human. It provides some essential intellectual weaponry to fight evil in the world, but only certain kinds of evil, mainly class inequality. It doesn't help us fight homophobia, it doesn't help us fight heterosexism, it doesn't help us fight even racism to a certain degree. It helps us fight the class oppression of working people, but race is not reducible to class. And so Marxism is

both indispensable, but inadequate, insufficient. And it certainly doesn't help us understand death, dread, despair, disillusionment, demoralization. On all these fundamental features of the human condition Marxism has nothing to say. That's what I mean by being impoverished, even though it may be crucial in many ways. But I do agree with Aronson that we have to think critically, independently. And in the end we have to become radical democrats.

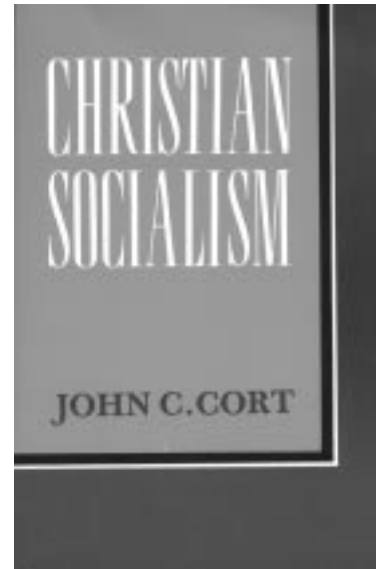
RS: In a speech you gave at the Black Radicals meeting in Old Cambridge Baptist Church a year ago you said that child poverty in Japan was 2 percent, Germany, Sweden and Norway 4 percent, Canada 9 percent, the U.S. 21 percent overall and for black children 51 percent. You convinced me then that the key statistic in judging the health and morality of an economy, or a country, is child poverty, not unemployment, essential as good jobs may be and are. Germany then had double-digit unemployment compared to our marvelous alleged four-something, but their child poverty was one fifth of ours. Our claim to having the best, most successful economy in the world is nonsense in light of our miserable record on child poverty. Do you agree?

CW: Yes, I agree. Children are the most vulnerable citizens, especially the poor children. I commend to you the book I published with Sylvia Ann Hewlett last year, *The War Against Parents*. It's all in there. ▀

*[About this time the recorder broke down and time ran out. We didn't have a chance to ask about his support of Bill Bradley for president or about his wife Elleni, who is organizing an International Conference on AIDS in her native land of Ethiopia, but we had enough to provide a portrait of a fascinating man, wide-ranging in intellect and interests, but focused on one thing above all, the vision of a just society where all God's children — and especially God's poor children — might have an equal chance. We most warmly welcome Cornel West to the advisory board of Religious Socialism.]*

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# Marxism Is Not Quite Dead

*cont'd from page 11*

the world, we become "religious" in the sense that Marx condemned. Our theology and ethics become ideology. Only by living out the reality of God's justice, forgiveness and grace for all people against, at times, the prosperity and security of our own social group, can we show convincingly that, in the words of John Calvin, "we are not our own, but God's". Marxism has forcefully reminded us of this. We should be grateful.

Third, Marx, especially in his early writings, has challenged both Judaism and Christianity with an honest, atheistic, humanist faith. Species humanity, which every individual embodies as participant in a whole, creates itself by its labor, conquers nature and universalizes itself by productive work to the end that all that is may reflect the human image. No relity is greater than this. Therefore God, especially as creator of all things and lord of the covenant, is an intolerable limitation, an alienation of human selfhood, freedom and power.

This is simply the open logic of the dissembled humanism that dominates the science, technology and economics of our increasingly globalized society today. Individual enterprise, private property and freedom of choice are progressively circumscribed by the market forces that,

mythologically, express them. Technology becomes, like Marx's productive labor, the means to master nature and to solve all problems, even the problems of ecology and human welfare. The unlimited expansion of human power and prosperity becomes the goal and meaning of life.

Christian humanism proclaims a different reality. It begins with the creation of human beings both blessed and limited by relationships of love and dependence on God the Creator, and on other human beings with whom we are called to live. It is expressed in justice and community with the poor. It finds fulfilment in the servanthood and the sacrifice of Christ, in the stewardship of God's gifts in creation, and in the justice, grace and peace of a new age already at work in the risen Christ.

This is the reality that a Christian social ethic serves and proclaims for the coming century. Marx has presented to us, in clear bold outlines, the opposing vision at work among us today, disguised as the laws of the market and the science of technology. Our task is to remove the disguise and confront that vision with a social analysis and a social program that embodies the humanity in which we believe. ▀

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*Charles C. West is Professor of Christian Ethics Emeritus at Princeton Theological Seminary.*



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