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*Issue 173 – March 2, 2006*

*Notes on Political Education  
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In assessing the political right's performance over the last twenty years, different conclusions can be drawn. Based on the most basic facts, the right has failed in every area except one. This single success, however, as the right's continuing dominance attests, is the most important in any struggle for political power: the steady production and dissemination of simply stated, emotionally resonant, and easily remembered philosophic ideas.

In terms of the long catalogue of right-wing failures, we need mention only the most obvious and consequential. The "free trade" agreements have not made U.S. workers more competitive in the world market. They have had the opposite effect, wiping out entire local and regional working classes, such as those in Pittsburgh and Detroit, while conjuring out of thin air at the same time post-industrial (or so-called "New Economy") middle-class simulacrums such as Starbucks Seattle. Indeed, we should never underestimate the symbolic social power of the Super Bowl. Its specific arrangement of two opposing regional teams that are feted obsessively by the corporate media for two straight weeks in one particular place has often a triangular density far weightier than anything Dr. Freud theorized.

Of Dr. Freud, another major failure of the right has been its revival of American Puritanism – the old "errand in the wilderness" and Manifest Destiny. No weapons of mass destruction sealed this errand's fate. And bringing democracy to the heathens of Iraq has been revealed as the most monstrous fraud, on every level, from Colin Powell's thoroughly discredited snake-oil salesmanship at the U.N. to the fact that the Bush administration's "global war on terror" will go down in history as the U.S. foreign policy most enabling of the greatest ascendancy to state power of fanatically antidemocratic religious parties the world has ever seen, beginning with further Israeli expansionism in Palestinian Jerusalem and West Bank, which the U.S. supports unconditionally with \$4 billion annually. Israel is a religious state in which Jewish women are legally prohibited from divorcing their husbands, and where the non-Jewish indigenous population, the Palestinians,

has 3,000 of their homes demolished each year by government authorities.

Here in particular is where the only true success of the U.S. right comes into clear focus. To quote Rev. Jesse Jackson: "Zionism by its soundest definition [is] a liberation movement whose object is to secure a state for its people. It must be seen as that, and not with negative connotations attached to it" (*Newsday*, 7/8/92). One might argue that Rev. Jackson's support in this statement for the racial apartheid politics of Ariel Sharon and Israeli Zionism is simply a case of keeping AIPAC's giant, and ruthless, pro-Israel apparatus off his neck. Perhaps, yet rather than just moving on from here, as if this kind of political reality is forever unchangeable, it's better, I think, to question rigorously how we got to this toxic place, where one of the U.S. left's most creative and recognizable political leaders made himself so easily, on the most elementary principle of justice and emancipation, totally irrelevant. For Rev. Jackson is not alone.

The U.S. left has no ideas. Outside of either calling for Bush's impeachment, to be followed by more politically useless yet extremely costly and labor-intensive mass demos in Washington, or giving all their energies to the blundering Democrats for another ill-fated chance to take back Congress, the left has no serious proposals on the table that could interest Americans.

In contrast, the right has many. More, the right has been consistent, in a systematic way, with their ideas and very well organized in terms of think tanks, policy journals and political magazines, college recruitment, grassroots organizing, the intellectual training of their cadre, and party discipline. Political humorists like Bill Maher and John Stewart never tire of poking fun at the uniformity of opinion advanced by right-wing policy analysts and ideologues, but really the joke is on Maher and Stewart, who clearly know nothing more about politics than their nightly viewing audiences—everyday folk who feel they're getting "the real news" just because people are mocking cleverly on TV the Bushies. Notice that the right does not mock the left: it ruthlessly attacks it, with clear ideas.

The overwhelming success of the right at the level of ideas makes it unnecessary to elaborate them here in any detail. Their ideas have become common sense. Big government is bad because it promotes corruption, incompetence, laziness and inefficiency. An undeterred capitalist "free market" is the best of all possible worlds not just because it regulates itself but, more importantly, because it rewards labor productivity, creative innovation, and good team work. The tougher the criminal laws and punishments, the less likely it is people will commit crimes. Sex education is a mistake because it encourages young people to have sex; abstinence is the only solution. The women's movement has destroyed the moral integrity of the American family. Taxing corporations is actually a civil rights violation because it discriminates against rich people. Multiculturalism is bad because it divides Americans along ethnic lines, tearing to shreds our society's wholesome national fabric. Hollywood and the mass media are controlled by liberals who are probably Satan-worshippers, since their movies, music, and television programming constantly advocate sexual immorality and disrespectful and irresponsible behavior towards adult authority, especially parents and religious figures.

It's true that most of these ideas are identical to the Nazi Party's ideological program of the 1930s. Just read Wilhelm Reich's book, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, a systematic study of Nazi ideology. Reich coined an important concept in this work: "conservative structuralization." To briefly summarize his argument, Reich shows that the Nazi Party came to power in Germany precisely by seizing on the labor movement's historic success

"...in winning socio-political improvements...shorter working hours, franchise, social security...this had the effect of strengthening the working class; but at the same time a contrary process set in: With the raising of the standard of living, there was a structural assimilation to the middle class. With the elevation of one's social position, 'one's eyes turned upward.' In times of prosperity this adaptation of middle-class habits was intensified, but the

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subsequent effect of this adaptation, in times of economic crisis, was to obstruct the full unfolding of revolutionary sentiments" (72).

Reich's main thesis is that the rise of Nazism in Germany "was not to be explained on purely political grounds." Its "basic elements," he argued, are "the emotional tie to the führer, that is to say, the unshakableness of the faith in the infallibility of the political leadership... and the sex–moralistic assimilation to the conservatism of the lower middle class. This assimilation to the middle class was energetically encouraged by the upper middle class everywhere."

Some of Bill Cosby's speeches come to mind here, as well as all the "personal responsibility" rhetoric from both political parties, expressed most lucidly a few weeks ago when Hilary Clinton declared on Meet the Press that she now favors a new national healthcare policy under which overweight Americans are forced to pay higher premiums. Idiotic on its face, yet underlying Clinton's proposal is her handlers' sense that this idea will strike a strong emotional chord with most Americans, who are easily bullied into blaming the victims, including often themselves.

What's striking, if you look closely at the polls, is that the majority of Americans sound like revolutionary socialists when it comes to healthcare, education, and jobs – not to mention the war in Iraq as well as Affirmative Action, which most white Americans support when the question is dissociated from the red herring of "racial quotas." But when asked about moral and sexual matters, it's like listening to one of James Dobson's lectures on the evils of the 1960s free love movement.

The right's "conservative structuralization" of the American people has been conscious and deliberate and has been working at the deepest emotional levels – on people's dreams, fears, desires, and anxieties. To put it more specifically, even though each and every right–wing social and foreign policy program of the past twenty years has been, in empirically verifiable ways, either a total fraud (from the war on drugs and "Star Wars" to school vouchers and tax cuts) or a complete disaster (from welfare reform, the Crime Bill, and managed healthcare to NAFTA, campaign finance reform, and deregulation), their philosophic ideas have been geared perfectly to the real, everyday conditions of U.S. society.

To take one salient example, on a daily basis most Americans interact with city and state workers whose relatively good standard of living, compared to their own, is due directly to a long history of strong labor union organizing and activism as well as effective political lobbying in Washington. After the great fiscal crises of the late 1970s, in which state and federal funding for public education, healthcare, housing, job training, and mass transportation was slashed, a brutally austere and stressed–out social environment quickly developed. And it became ripe for all kinds of popular resentment, bitterness and contempt, such as adversarial relationships between parents, students and teachers, riders and bus drivers, and patients and healthcare workers. From public hospital emergency rooms and the post office to public school classrooms and subway stations, anything bad can happen and, when one emerges unscathed from such places, a sense of euphoria can be felt.

All this is the fault of the richest Americans and their lobbyists and cheaply purchased prostitutes in Congress, who have succeeded in making working Americans pay the very heavy price of their ceaseless, shameless, and massively destructive pursuit of present profit, financed by reckless Wall Street gambling rackets.

The thing the right realized correctly, though, is that Americans are not French or German. We are not a people who spend two or three hours each night debating politics. We are not a multilingual people either, nor are we in the habit of reading four or five different independent newspapers each day. Here the left keeps pointing to a depoliticized American public as the reason the right is able to keep pushing through its minority agenda, despite all the indictments and convictions and the mountains of incriminating evidence of everyday

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ethics violations, government malfeasance, violations of international law, the obstruction of justice, and patently illegal activities and unconstitutional practices of almost every sort.

Yet this theory doesn't hold water. Americans have never been political, so how could they have been depoliticized? As the right has understood sharply, politics is the business of statesmen, intellectuals, publishers and publicists, policy analysts, theorists, scientists, scholars, critics, organizers, and researchers. The right has never imagined an American populace eager to sit down every morning to C-Span, which is why they leave C-Span alone. But they'll attack Spike Lee, Oliver Stone, and Michael Moore relentlessly and with the greatest passion.

This is where the answer lies, in my opinion. The right is winning the battle of ideas because they produce ideas directly for the masses of Americans, not each other. This is why they'll savagely attack Michael Moore but not say a word against George Clooney, whose *Syriana* film is far more politically nuanced and critical of U.S. foreign policy in the Arab world than *Fahrenheit 911*. Why is that? Because most Americans have not been trained in literary theory and thus have a hard time trying to sort out *Syriana*'s intricate narrative as they follow the visual images. But they're very interested in political education, which can be seen clearly in the enormous popularity of Lee's *X*, Stone's *JFK*, and Moore's *Fahrenheit 911*. Each film is more than three hours long, and each narrative is richly complex, politically anticapitalist, and, most significantly, deeply emotional.

If the right has been pushing all the right emotional buttons, such as patriotism, anti-elitism and family values, then why can't the left do the same? This is not an argument for watering down the message, or "reaching out" to the heartland. It is the opposite. The left needs to do nothing but produce revolutionary ideas for the broad masses of Americans. Right now they're still talking to each other at academic conferences about the hybridity of transnational subject positions and the undecideability of all truth claims in language, or conducting workshops on how a person can become more sensitive to other cultures and traditions.

What they're not doing is "revolutionary structuralization," which has been, historically, the left's principal work in civil society and, paradoxically, precisely what the right has copied, to the letter, in their recent "march through the institutions." Take Rush Limbaugh's prescriptive analysis in his 1994 book, *See, I Told You So*:

"In the early 1900s, an obscure Italian communist by the name of Antonio Gramsci theorized that it would take a 'long march through the institutions' before socialism and relativism would be victorious... Gramsci theorized that by capturing these key institutions and using their power, cultural values would be changed, traditional morals would be broken down, and the stage would be set for the political and economic power of the West to fall... Gramsci succeeded in defining a strategy for waging cultural warfare... Why don't we simply get in game and start competing for control of these key cultural institutions?"

Today the right controls a majority of seats in 36 percent of all Republican Party state committees (or 18 of 50 states), plus large minorities in 81 percent of the rest, double their power from a decade before. They are small in just 6 states. James Dobson's radio program *Focus on the Family* reaches 4 million people every day and is carried by 4,000 radio and TV stations in forty countries. Ted Haggard's *New Life Church* community in Colorado Springs, which is based on the Bolshevik model of political organizing, has 1,300 cell groups, where local leaders report to section heads who answer to zone leaders who report directly to district officials, all under Haggard as head of *New Life*. *New Life* argues that public schools must be abandoned for home schools and that the Bible is the ultimate test of scientific truth. (For more details about the right's ideological program, see Carl Davidson and Jerry Harris's excellent new article, "Globalisation, theocracy and the new fascism: the U.S. Right's rise to power," in *Race & Class*, January–March 2006.)

I have two proposals for the "revolutionary structuralization" of Americans.

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The first is an attack on corporate profits. Notice that the critics hated Jim Carrey's new movie *Fun with Dick and Jane*. This film is exactly the kind of anticapitalist structuralization of Americans that the left needs to do a lot more of, and the huge hit it's been at the box office is proof of this. The message of the movie is simply stated and emotionally powerful: U.S. corporate profits are completely conditional on an expendable American labor force and, moreover, that without highly stressed-out workers there cannot exist happy capitalists. The two are absolutely inseparable.

This attack on corporate profits should have an emotional lightning rod, such as the issue of anti-Americanism. To fire thousands of American workers in order to employ Chinese workers at fifty cents an hour is the height of anti-Americanism. CEOs responsible for moving their plants offshore should have their passports seized, their assets frozen, and declared traitors to the nation. The left should also be pointing out that corporate profits have nothing to do with American workers. More than 80 percent of Americans own not a single share of stock and thus whether or not profits rise makes no difference whatever to the majority of Americans. In fact, the higher the profits, the more insecure workers become. Once these ideas become common sense, huge taxes on corporate profits can be carried out.

Yet it doesn't matter if these ideas will immediately work or not, and that's the main point: the right's ideas are not based on any political pragmatism either. They're based on a unity of thinking and feeling.

The second proposal is to attack racial resegregation. Jonathan Kozol says we need to have "a revolution of the heart," and in this statement is precisely Reich's concept of structuralization. Racial apartheid in the U.S. has become invisible again, as Kozol exposes in his new book *Shame of the Nation*. People need to see what it's like today living in Detroit, Baltimore, or Milwaukee. We could use a new "Black Like Me." The emotional lightning rod here is also simple: we have disgraced our greatest American of the past fifty years, the one American that all but the worst ingrates and sociopaths agree is the truest embodiment and ultimate fulfillment of the American democratic ideal. If Dr. King were alive today, he would vomit in the street.

The solution to resegregation is a national public education system financed entirely by the federal government, in which every school receives exactly the same funding. If white middle-class parents don't like it, they can send their children to private Catholic schools, or home school them, which is what the right advocates anyway. These schools will have plenty of vacancies once the new national program goes into effect.

Accompanying the new national program will be a new addition to city limits signs, in which every U.S. town and city must, by law, indicate their racial demographic composition – for example: "Welcome to Dearborn, Michigan, home of Henry Ford: 98 percent White."

An emotional point of high affect with resegregation, which can be easily linked to the attack on corporate profits, is that all American workers are being treated "black" by the U.S. ruling elite. The right's war against civil rights, labor unions and state regulation of the economy has brought white American workers, for the first time, into direct competition with 2 billion of the world's poorest people, against which they have no chance at all.

Their only hope is to reinvest in the cities they abandoned irrationally twenty and thirty years ago when they took the baited hook of white-only neighborhoods and school districts. This new form of white affirmative action, which was offered to counter the sweeping force of the African American civil rights movement and that featured zero interest rate mortgages and automatic acceptance for their children into local colleges and universities, has produced the triple disasters of the housing bubble, ecologically and socially toxic suburban sprawl, and a massive overproduction of college degrees, the majority of which are today not worth the paper they're printed on. The last national job report indicates that of the roughly 300,000 new jobs created in the previous quarter, none requires a college degree. Moreover, all the new IT jobs have been outsourced to Asia

and are never coming back.

I've yet to have heard this proposed by any Democrat, or in Harpers or the Nation, but there are several simple, emotionally appealing solutions to this problem. The first is for the state to immediately declare eminent domain on all abandoned manufacturing plants and factories and then re-tool these local plants and factories for the production of high-speed light-rail mass transit systems. All labor must, by law, be union and local citizens with the longest residency will be the first candidates for every position offered, also by law. And, since the state will own the factories as well as the whole mass transit system to be laid, the financing of the project will be free of all private corporations. American workers will pay for it with the pay they receive for working on it.

Finally, as thousands of American workers continue to get fired each month now, with no chance of ever getting their outsourced jobs back, the conditions are ripe for another new proposal: that nobody works more than thirty hours a week so that everyone can have a job. The precondition for this full-employment policy is a national single-payer healthcare system in which everyone is insured from cradle to grave. In this way, people are free to leave jobs they hate, because of the long hours, for jobs that are more suitable to their needs and interests, without ever having to worry again about the health insurance issue.

The thrust of everything said here is that the right keeps winning, despite their colossal policy failures, because they keep pushing the same set of coherent, emotionally striking ideas, no matter how ridiculous they in fact are. After all, what could be more preposterous than the right's policy on drugs, which is to bomb to death dirt-poor coca growers while locking up at home other poor people selling dime bags on the corner? Or the right's policy on cancer, which is to keep pouring billions of dollars a year of public money into researching privately a social problem that has a very simple solution: a universal healthcare system based on comprehensive, everyday preventive care? Or their gem about "growing the economy" – to give away \$60,000 tax rebate checks to every U.S. millionaire? Or to fight terrorism by calling one of the world's most despised terrorists, Ariel Sharon, a man of peace?

The objection will be made that the right's ideas are popular because they own the media; not owning any major media, the left is severely disadvantaged in the struggle over ideas. But if this is true – not about media ownership but about winning the war of ideas – how does one explain the great success of the nineteenth-century abolitionist movement, which put the slavery issue on the national agenda without owning any media? How would one explain the civil rights movement, which won the battle of ideas with just a fraction of the media ownership and access enjoyed today by the American left?

The left is not structurally disadvantaged; it's living in la-la land. All the talk about neo-con cabals and neo-liberal imperialist world hegemonism, war crime tribunals, and the dialectics of transnational globalization means nothing to most Americans. These are abstractions they won't be looking up in the dictionary any time soon. They simply aren't listening, because their heads are filled with right-wing ideas that have been successfully structuring their brains.

In my view, the left can never "deconstruct" the pervasive effects of right-wing propaganda on the minds of Americans. The only option, which is the most rational and logical anyway, is to begin restructuring the brains of Americans with a new core of clear and fresh ideas.

In this respect, it seems clear that one of the main reasons the left is so impoverished when it comes to producing ideas is due not only to its abstract idealism but also because of its constantly negative political defensiveness. As Reich demonstrated in *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, the criticisms of Hitler and the Nazi Party in Germany during the 1930s were brilliant, forceful, and ubiquitous, yet they never made any difference at all. While the left in Germany produced one scathing critique of Nazism after another, the right meanwhile went directly along structuring the brains of the German masses, providing them with a whole

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unified system of philosophic ideas that could answer their most basic questions about life and how they might live it with a purpose.

It probably goes without saying, but the staying power of anticommunist ideology in the U.S. is the biggest reason why the left has failed in the last twenty years to produce its own march through the institutions. That is, the left is often more anti-socialist than the right. For example, whereas the right has perceived in the intellectual authorities of the Marxist tradition great visionaries and important writers and critics whose work must be read and studied closely, the left tends to see them as vulgarizers and reductionists – as totalitarian, Eurocentric, sexist, and "top-down" theorists who were trying to impute their agenda on to the self-determining masses. In this sense, the greatest of all ironies is that the familiar left-wing charge against the right of anti-intellectualism is really a self-reproach, for nothing could be more the opposite. It has been precisely the right's organic intellectualism that's paved the way for its tremendous political successes.

In the end, though, the virtue always of left-wing ideas is that they, unlike right-wing ideas, are consistent with the founding myths and archetypes of America: they are strongly anti-authoritarian and popular democratic. The right's ideas are all authoritarian, which is why they work on only 20 or 30 percent of the population.

It's safe to say, then, that the U.S. today is actually a left-wing paradise, where the majority of Americans are simply waiting for a new system of popular ideas fit for their head.

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