# COMMON PRESERVATION
## in a time of mutual destruction

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# Introduction

You and I may not know each other, but I suspect there are some problems that we share. Perhaps we can do better at solving those problems if we work together.

We live in an era of impending mutual destruction. In 1946, following the first explosion of an atom bomb, Albert Einstein warned, "The unleashed power of the atom has changed everything save our modes of thinking and we thus drift toward unparalleled catastrophe."[1] The rapid acceleration of global warming and other environmental threats in the early 21st century – aggravated by ruinous global economic war of all against all -- intensified fears for human survival. Sixty years after Einstein's prophesy, the astrophysicist Stephen Hawking warned, "Life on Earth is at the ever-increasing risk of being wiped out by a disaster," such as "sudden global warming" and "nuclear war."[2] Yet the drift Einstein warned of continues unabated. The doomsday clock marking the approach of human self-destruction continues to hover close to midnight, now driven not only by the threat of nuclear holocaust but also by new technologies and human-induced climate change.[3]

There is no way we can long save ourselves from that drift as individuals or as separate social groups. Today, self preservation depends on common preservation – cooperation in service of our mutual well-being. To survive ourselves, we must preserve the conditions of each other's existence.

Our impending doom is often met with denial or despair. It seems to be driven by forces beyond human control, and there appears little we can do to avert it. Common preservation seems little more than a distant and impossible dream.

This book is the story of a lifelong search for the means of common preservation. It traces my attempt, over the course of half a century, to discover how to understand, and how to nourish, common preservation. It recounts my own experience, but it does so to illuminate how we might be better able to act in common to address the problems we share in common. It includes a heuristic for understanding and promoting common preservation and a concrete proposal, based on my experience and historical research, for a Human Survival Movement.

As a child I discovered that the world was full of problems that affected my life. In my family's pantry there hung a poster headed "What to Do in the Event of Nuclear Attack,"

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[1] *Telegram,* May 24, 1946.
[2] Jordan Lite, "Earth's days are numbered, Hawking says," *Daily News*, June 14, 2006.
[3] The Doomsday Clock is a symbolic clockface maintained since 1947 by the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. To nuclear war as a source of doom have been added climate-changing technologies and new developments in the life sciences and nanotechnology that could inflict irrevocable harm. The clock was advanced at the start of 2007 to five minutes to midnight. On January 14, 2010 it was set back to six minutes to midnight to reflect worldwide cooperation to reduce nuclear arsenals and limit the effect of climate change. See http://www.thebulletin.org/minutes-to-midnight/.

and I became aware at an early age that I and the rest of the world might be destroyed in a nuclear conflagration. Some members of my family were victims of Nazi anti-Semitism and others were subject to anti-Semitism in the US. Growing up in the McCarthy era I experienced the fear generated by political repression. In the communities in which I lived I discovered, hidden away from public view, the realities of poverty and racial discrimination. I saw, smelled, and breathed the degradation of the natural environment and I heard warnings that human beings were threatening the basic environmental conditions on which human life depends. I saw that many people around me lived lives of quiet desperation, forced in order to survive to spent most of their waking hours in work they found oppressive, that sickened them physically and mentally, and from which they had little chance of escape.

Initially I felt powerless in the face of these problems. They seemed like a cruel fate that I could do nothing to change. But I gradually realized that, just as I experienced these problems, so did many other people. Maybe if we acted together to deal with them we could make changes that we couldn't make alone.

People are often passive and isolated in the face of problems they can't solve. But at times, sometimes quite unexpectedly, they develop new ways to act in concert to advance shared interests. The emergence of a movement for global economic justice – exemplified by the Battle of Seattle that shut down the 1999 global extravaganza of the World Trade Organization – provides a widely noted example of such a development. So does the global struggle to prevent the US attack on Iraq, which, while unsuccessful, produced the largest globally coordinated demonstrations in history and led the *New York Times* to refer to the anti-war alliance as the world's second superpower.

The emergence of a multifaceted worldwide movement to protect the earth's climate from global warming represents such a new form of concerted action for common interest. While its extent and success remain to be seen, it has already produced a global day of action with 5,200 rallies from Mt. Everest to the Great Barrier Reef in what CNN called "the most widespread day of political action on the planet."[4]

People turn to such new strategies when the problems they face prove difficult to solve either through individual action or through the patterns prescribed by established institutions. Those new strategies often take the form of social movements.

Sometimes people who appear powerless and stymied have used social movements to transform the problems they face -- and history and society as well. The US sit-down strikes of the 1930s forced US corporations to recognize and negotiate with the representatives of their employees. The civil disobedience campaigns led by Gandhi won Indians independence from Britain. The civil rights movement of the 1960s gained the abolition of legalized racial segregation in the American South. The Solidarity movement and its general strikes led to the fall of Communism in Poland and helped bring about its demise throughout Eastern Europe and the USSR.

[4] "350.org's Call to Action," *CNN*, October 29, 2009.

For half a century I have been a participant in social movements; for forty years I have been studying and writing about their history and prospects. This book, which I've been working on since the early 1970s, tries to extract from what I've experienced and studied something useful for people trying to solve problems through new common preservations. It takes the form of a personal narrative: the story of my track through the history and experience of such movements and through efforts to understand and nurture them. My hope is to produce something that is useful for countering the threat of mutual destruction today.

## *Common preservation*

While common preservation is as old as or older than our species, it is acquiring a new significance at a time when we are creating the conditions for our own self-extermination, whether through the bang of a nuclear holocaust or the whimper of an expiring ecosphere.

No individual or restricted group can solve such collective problems alone. None of us can count on survival, let alone well-being, for ourselves and those we care about, unless we act together to transform the current patterns of human life. Self preservation for individuals and groups can now only be ensured through common preservation of our species and its environment as a whole.

I use the phrase "common preservation" to denote a strategy in which people try to solve their problems by meeting each others' needs rather than exclusively their own. I borrowed the phrase from the 17th century English Digger Gerrard Winstanley.

In the midst of the English revolution the impoverished Diggers had formed collectives, occupied uncultivated lands, and begun producing food for their communities. Winstanley justified this action on the principle of common preservation, the "principle in every one to seek the good of others, as himself."

Winstanley contrasted common preservation to self preservation, in which officers "seek their own Preservation, Ease, Honor, Riches, and Freedom in the Earth." Such self preservation was "the root of the Tree Tyranny, and the Law of Unrighteousness, and all particular Kingly Laws found out by covetous Policy to enslave one brother to another, whereby bondage, tears, sorrows and poverty are brought upon many men." This tyranny is "the cause of all wars and troubles."[5]

Winstanley interpreted common preservation in the religious idiom of his time. But, as he himself asserted, the need for common preservation, and the means for establishing it, can be found out "by experience." Adam and his family followed the principle of common preservation out of the "the law of necessity": that "the Earth should be planted for the common preservation and peace of his household." Indeed, such necessity was the root of "all particular Laws found out by experience" that provide for common

[5] George H. Sabine, ed, *The Works of Gerrard Winstanley* (New York: Russell & Russell,1965) pp. 536-7.

preservation. Today, whatever our differing beliefs, our own experience is teaching us the necessity for common preservation.

Common preservation is more than coordination, cooperation, or collaboration. Such forms of joint action involve working together, but the result may be to the benefit of some and to the detriment of others. Slaves may cooperate to produce their own fetters; scientists and workers may collaborate to produce the nuclear weapons that threaten to destroy their civilization; corporations may hire workers whose joint labor produces the greenhouse gases that are destroying their biosphere. Common preservation is more than the biological phenomenon of symbiosis, which can take the form of a parasitism that harms one of its partners. Common preservation is not just action in concert, but action in concert for mutual benefit.

Common preservation and self preservation represent alternative strategies. I don't advocate, or expect, that common preservation will entirely supplant self preservation – indeed, both in biology and in human society they are often intertwined and even mutually supporting. But when self preservation generates mutual destruction it is indefensible; it leads to the annihilation rather than the self preservation of those who pursue it.

Common preservation – often intermingled with more antagonistic relationships -- is ubiquitous in human life. From the loving interchanges of parent and child to the international treaties limiting nuclear testing, people use common preservation at many different scales to meet their needs and realize their ends. In an era of mutual destruction, common preservation is not just desirable; it is the condition of our survival.

## *A heuristic for common preservation*

People often persist in ways of acting that are destructive not only to others but to themselves – witness today's ongoing augmentation of weapons of mass destruction and greenhouse gasses. That poses questions: What prevents people from shifting to different, less self-destructive strategies? How do they develop new common preservations? How can they be helped to do so?

The purpose of this book is to contribute to the development of a heuristic for common preservation. "Heuristic" comes from the Greek for "find out"; it comes from the same root as "eureka" – "I found it." A heuristic has been defined as "a method to help solve a problem, commonly informally."[6] It has also been described as the "distillation of the best practices for navigating your way through a complex system or situation."[7] Heuristic strategies "control problem-solving."[8] Heuristics aim to produce solutions that work, whether or not they can be proved.

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[6] Wikipedia.
[7] Mark Morton, Instructional Program Manager, Centre for Learning and Teaching Through Technology, at RateMyHeuristic.Com. http://connect.educause.edu/taxonomy/term/1876/0/feed
[8] Wikipedia

Consider a workshop. It contains tools like hammers, saws, and pliers and machines like presses, lathes, and drills. It also holds old jigs, fixtures, and patterns. It has files of the blueprints from past jobs. It has manuals for the equipment and technical guides covering the procedures used and the products made in the shop. It has stock materials like lumber and metal waiting to be transformed. It has samples from past projects that illustrate ways that past problems have been solved.

The workshop also includes skilled and experienced workers with individual and shared know-how accumulated over the generations. That know-how is encapsulated in rules of thumb and best practices, as well as tacit knowledge that is only revealed in the action of hand and eye. The resources of the workshop are organized to make it easy to find what the workers need. And the workshop has ways to transfer the knowledge it has accumulated to newcomers through a mix of formal instruction, observation, practice, and storytelling.

When a novel job comes in, there is no pre-programmed solution to the problems it presents. The appropriate resources from the workshop have to be located, selected, modified, sequenced, and applied in new ways.

This book offers an assemblage of heuristic strategies and devices analogous to the resources of a workshop. It includes tools; examples of past solutions and stories of how they were arrived at; strategies for problem solving that have worked in the past and are now encapsulated in rules of thumb; and stock elements that can be worked up into the products that are needed. Hopefully these are sorted and labeled in a way that makes it easier to find the right piece at the right time and that facilitates experimenting with different possible ways of solving the problems at hand.

The resources accumulated in such a workshop are very different from a scientific theory or textbook that explains the physics or chemistry of wood or metal. Skilled craftspeople often have studied the science relevant to their work and know it can help them get a deeper understanding of the problems at hand and possible ways to address them. Good craftspeople are grateful for more theoretical scientists who provide knowledge that can make problem solving easier and more precise. But they know that their job is different from a theorist's. Their methods won't produce an elegant theoretical model; but a scientific theory is unlikely to produce a comfortable rocking chair or an efficient machine tool.

The heuristic strategies and devices I've spent my life exploring include very different kinds of stuff – stories about past projects that have happy endings or that went awry; examples of products that solved the problem at hand successfully; rules of thumb that have often worked in the past; even bits of theory that might come in handy.[9] They include questions, models, ideal types, historical case studies, and examples of how all of these have been taken from one problem and applied to another. The result is unlike a deductive theory; usefulness and efficiency, not elegance and certainty, are its goals.

[9] This know-how develops both upward by generalizing concrete experience and downward from more formal, abstract theoretical scientific knowledge.

In writing this book, I have thought of myself as an experienced craftsperson, trying to pass along what I have learned about solving problems and constructing new common preservations in a virtual workshop that spans the globe. I do so by telling stories about past problems and efforts to solve them; presenting solutions that did and didn't work; describing procedures and rules of thumb that frequently seem to produce useful results; presenting some more formal ideas that have helped solve problems in the past; describing strategies that organize the search effectively; and trying to label these heuristic devices in ways that make it easier to reach for the right one at the right time.

The result is what one philosopher of science calls "advisory strategies." These are neither descriptions nor explanations, but rather guides to potentially fruitful ways to proceed. They are the product of "compiled hindsight," useful lessons extracted from the experience of the past.[10]

Such a heuristic approach may be particularly suitable for subjects that are only quasi-regular, so that the best results come from capturing regularities without trying to force the irregularities into recalcitrant theoretical boxes. It provides a way to identify the patterns that do exist, while recognizing that there is a great deal that doesn't fit the pattern or can't be reduced to it. Such quasi-regularity is often typical of human history, and human life. Surely it is typical of the patterns of common preservation.

This book is not intended either as an autobiography or as a work of theory. It's not an autobiography because the real subject is not myself, but what I've learned that might be helpful for constructing new common preservations for the era of mutual destruction. Yet the story is too intertwined with concrete history, experience, and action to provide a conventional theory distinct from practice and making strong claims to universal truth. Think of it rather as the narrative of the old codger who has spent his life in the back corner of the virtual workshop, and who is now trying to pass on as best he can what he's learned about how to use its resources to meet today's urgent problems. I don't claim that my heuristic embodies the truth. I only claim that it has helped me understand and act on concrete situations, and that it might be worthwhile for others to test it and see if the same might be true for them.

## *Loops*

However skilled the workers, they can't be sure the workshop's products will work under real life "combat conditions." Their products have to go out and be tested in the world outside the workshop. Someone has to use them and see how well they perform. Then the results must be reported back to the workshop. If there are problems, the original design must be modified and the resulting product tested again in the world outside. Such a "product improvement cycle" underlies our ability to find new strategies – including new common preservations.

[10] Lindley Darden, "Strategies for Discovering Mechanisms," *Philosophy of Science (Supplement)* 69:S354-365.

The more I have studied the emergence of new common preservations, the more I have come to believe that they cannot be understood within a simple mechanical model of cause and effect; they depend on loops like the circuit of the "product improvement cycle." They are among the many phenomena that require what are variously called holistic or non-linear or non-reductionist or systems or cybernetic ways of thinking.

Such phenomena may not exhibit conventional chains of cause and effect, but they do reveal patterns. Specific examples of common preservation are often instances of such more general patterns.

Such patterns generally seem to include loops in which information about the effects of an individual's or group's action is communicated back in a way that the actors can use to improve their own action in the future. These loops allow the actors, paradoxically, to change themselves in order to preserve themselves. Common preservation often manifests this paradox of conservation through transformation – and often requires such "'loopy" ways of thinking to resolve that paradox.

Such loops have been variously referred to as self-correction, feedback, learning by doing, cybernetic regulation, or equilibration. Whatever they are called, they seem to involve a circular process that goes beyond simple, linear chains of cause and effect to allow the results of past action to be "fed back" to correct and improve subsequent actions. In such a process, an apparently small change in the evaluation of a small bit of information – say, a change in the interpretation of possibilities or motives – may lead to an overwhelming change in the way individuals and groups decide to act.

Unless they use some such loop, it is hard to see how people can identify problems in the world and respond to them by inventing or applying new strategies of common preservation. It is hard to understand why such changes, for example the emergence of social movements, can appear so suddenly and unexpectedly, apparently out of nowhere. And it is hard to see how we can create the new common preservations we need to halt today's mutual destruction. That is why this book delves into the more general "loopy" processes of change that make common preservation possible.

## *A human survival movement?*

If common preservation is today the necessary condition for our self preservation, how do we make it happen? Can the "compiled hindsight" of our heuristic help us envision and realize common preservations that can help us transform today's mutual destruction? There's no way to know without trying.

The obstacles to such a transformation are surely sufficient to evoke despair – and to have until now prevented us from taking the obvious steps to eliminate the threats to our existence. People rarely exercise effective control of their own governments; international institutions are a fragile and often ineffective barrier to actions that threaten survival; superpowers dominate others at will; corporations pollute the environment and

dominate governments with little restraint. Powerful interests oppose effective constraints at local, national, and transnational levels. Different social groups who share an interest in mutual survival are also divided by conflicting interests. People fear that collective action will end up generating disorder and domination.

In Part 7 I use the "compiled hindsight" accumulated in the rest of the book to explore how such obstacles might be overcome through a transnational Human Survival Movement specifically targeted against the threats to human survival. Such a movement could be powerful because it would represent the most profound common interests of individuals and groups. Addressing the apparently disparate issues of nuclear proliferation, global warming, and other threats as part of the broader problem of ensuring human survival could provide a basis to establish and enforce rules to end such threats.

This proposal might be described as a "thought experiment." Its aim is to provide some possibilities to test.

## *My story*

In this book I tell what I've learned about creating new common preservations by telling my own story.

Part 1, "Discovering social problems," starts off the story with my childhood in the US in the 1950s. My awareness of social problems was no doubt influenced by the fact that my parents were concerned with peace, racial justice, and other social issues. But it also reflected the real world I saw around me – the black slums I discovered in my pleasant middle-class hometown, for example, and my father's bouts of depression and migraine headaches that we all associated with work-related stress.

In early adolescence I became active first in the then-burgeoning nuclear disarmament movement, then in the civil rights, student, and other movements. Much of my late adolescence was devoted to Students for a Democratic Society and the movement against the Vietnam war. Part 2, "Discovering social movements," tells what I learned from what are often called the movements of the 1960s.

I found in social movements an alternative to the sense of individual powerlessness in the face of social problems. But I did not feel that the programs and practices of the movements in which I participated were adequate. So I began a still-continuing exploration of the history of social movements and of various ideas about how they do, or should, go about making change.

I spent much of the 1970s and 1980s studying working class movements. I wrote or co-wrote several books including *Strike!*, *Common Sense for Hard Times*, *Root & Branch: The Rise of the Workers Movements*, and *Brass Valley: Workers Lives and Struggles in an American Industrial Region*. Part 3, "Discovering workers power," tells what I learned from the history of working class movements. It illustrates an effort to extract

something from the experience of earlier movements for the use of those in which I was participating.

Meanwhile, I sensed that social movements could benefit from an understanding of more general processes of stasis and change. I began exploring broader frameworks for thinking about such abstract matters. My quest took me into realms far beyond the concrete world of social movements. Conventional social theory often seemed to take the status quo for granted, implicitly denying the possibility of real social change. But a view of history as the inevitable march of progress hardly fitted a world I perceived as plunging toward catastrophe. Could I find something better than either?

Part 4, "Discovering ways of thinking about change," describes how such meta-questions led me to intellectual raiding parties into rarified discourses on the nature of entities, relationships, and change. I explored the methodology of history, the dialectics of Karl Marx, the pragmatism of John Dewey. I plunged into the then-emerging paradigms of cybernetics and systems theory, especially the transformation-oriented version developed by Jean Piaget. I adapted ways of applying such paradigms to human society from historical sociologist Michael Mann. I used the ideas of mathematician G. Polya, pioneer of modern heuristics, to develop a strategy for problem solving that could be applied to the social problems we face. Part 4 tries to extract something for the use of social movements from thinkers and traditions that might seem remote from contemporary social problems.

Starting in the 1980s I became increasingly preoccupied with what is now known as economic globalization and the movements that developed to counter it. I collaborated on three books on the subject: *Global Visions*, *Global Village or Global Pillage*, and *Globalization from Below*. Part 5, "Thinking about change: Globalization," shows how I used the heuristic strategies and devices I was developing to grapple with the emerging phenomenon of economic globalization and the countering movements I called "globalization from below."

Part 6, "Social experiments," recounts ways my emerging heuristic for common preservation contributed to creating and interpreting a variety of concrete projects with which I've been involved. Some of these projects were local, like a participatory workers history project, an interethnic music festival, and a community coalition to address plant closings. Some created alternative economic structures, like a worker buyout of a threatened factory, a home care cooperative, and a public agency to support community economic development. Some were vision projects, intended to encourage discussion and nurture imagination regarding political institutions, the labor movement, and global governance. Some were attempts to link different people and institutions around the world to impose global norms to counter economic and imperial domination. These experiments represent an effort to link the world of the heuristic workshop with the world outside where its products must be tested in practice.

In Part 7, "Save the humans?" I use my emerging heuristic and my experience and study of social movements and social change to sketch what a "human survival movement" to counter today's threats of mutual destruction might be like and how it might emerge.

A brief "Conclusion" sums up what I think this story means.

The book ends with a sort of guide to the workshop called "Interim report: Heuristics for common preservation." It summarizes more schematically the ideas that are presented in more concrete and experiential form in the rest of the book. Simulating computer hypertext, the main text includes links to relevant parts of the "Interim report" throughout.[11]

While this book provides a guided tour of the workshop, you don't have to follow the tour guide. Different Parts present different aspects of the workshop and therefore require different approaches, some more personal, some more historical, some more theoretical. No harm will come from poking around the different Parts in an order that suits your own inclinations.

Today those concerned about social questions often appear divided between theorists and activists. This book deliberately weaves back and forth between concrete experiences and more abstract reflections on them. It may appear at first too practical for the theorists and too theoretical for the activists. My hope is that it will challenge each to explore beyond their familiar terrain, and that it will provide some bridges to help them do so.

* * * * *

There are few human experiences more satisfying than to participate with others who have been divided and oppressed when they break out into action to change their conditions of life. There are few things more exciting than to see people rise up and liberate themselves from outrageous oppression. There are few things more joyous than overcoming that which divides you from other people and forging new bonds of mutual support. There can be few things as sustaining as a life of participation with others in the effort to make a better world.

I have had the privilege of experiencing all of these. Together they gave rise to another passion, one that has driven and sustained me all of my life. That is a passion to find, improve, and share ways of thinking that people can use to act in concert to improve the world for themselves and each other. While I hope anyone who is interested in social movements and social change will find this book of interest, it is written especially for those who share that passion. For those hunger and thirst after alternatives to human self-destruction, this book aims to provide food and drink.

*Common Preservation* is a personal narrative of how I learned how people change the world. Of course, embedded within that story is an account of *what* I learned about how

[11] Edit note: These links will be inserted in a later draft.

people change the world. I present *how* my own thinking changed as an instance of the patterns of change *that* I discovered. This book is thus what Gregory Bateson calls a "metalogue," in which the form of an account illustrates what the account is about.[12] I hope you'll enjoy the story, while extracting what you find useful in the content.

In Bateson's immortal words, there is no trial-and-error learning without error. My story is driven forward by the problems I found in my own ways of looking at the world and by my efforts to overcome them. I'm sure the ideas I propose in this book are still flawed. I'm equally certain that you and others can take what I've done, find the flaws, and correct them.

I'm asking you to try.

[12] Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballantine, 1972), p. 1.

# PART 1: DISCOVERING SOCIAL PROBLEMS

## Introduction to Part 1: Discovering social problems

Social problems are by definition shared, but each of us approaches shared problems from an idiosyncratic personal starting point. As a child I became aware of some of the problems of society through my own and my family's experiences with war, genocide, political repression, racism, environmental degradation, and oppressive labor.

I grew up in a family of educated professionals, first in a pleasant suburb of New York City, then in a rural area in northwestern Connecticut. My parents were writers who often worked together as a team. My father was a very secular Jew; my mother came from old stock American Lutherans and herself became a Quaker. My father had been a low-level staffer in the New Deal and had the politics of a left New Dealer; my mother was a pacifist and shared the social concerns for which Quakers are known. I had a loving family and a childhood filled with many joys.

But I was also born into a terrible time in history. The years immediately before my birth saw the Great Depression, the Second World War, the Holocaust, and Hiroshima.

As I see it now, these years marked the beginning of an era in which the efforts of individuals and groups for a better life were bound to be futile, indeed, likely to accelerate human self-destruction, unless they were part of a broader effort for common preservation. Consciousness of the necessity for common preservation has grown throughout that era, but it has come only fitfully and in fragments and is far from being implemented. Many of the problems I was discovering half a century ago not only remain with us today, but have become more threatening to our individual and common survival.

While I became aware of social problems at a tender age, I had little idea of what to do about them. I experienced the threat of nuclear war, or my father's terrible job-related migraine headaches, as something that affected me as an individual, but that I had no way as an individual to affect.

The story I tell in Part 1 represents a selection from among the immensely wider range of experiences of my childhood. Were I writing an autobiography, I would tell about my joy in running free in the world of nature, living in the bosom of a tiny community, and being encouraged by my family in all manner of exploration and inquiry. This is instead the story of how I became aware of problems requiring common preservation.

## Kiss your ass goodbye

In the pantry of my childhood home hung a poster headed "What to Do in the Event of Nuclear Attack," and that's how I first became aware of "social problems." It was around 1952 and I was probably six. It was the height of the cold war and we lived near New York City; nuclear war was a palpable threat. I remember my family planning what we would do in the event of nuclear attack: We had friends with a farm in Canada, and my parents said that if we were separated from each other we should all try to reassemble there.

At school in the early 1950s we had air raid drills. Sirens would sound and we would "duck and cover" under our desks. There were plenty of jokes among the kids about our instructions: "In the event of nuclear attack bend over, put your head between your legs, and kiss your ass goodbye."

Such a blasé attitude concealed the fact that I and my friends, like many of our contemporaries, took it for granted that we were likely to die in a nuclear war.[13] I certainly never expected to live beyond twenty or at most thirty if nuclear overkill continued to grow unabated.

In the mid-1950s,[14] Norman Cousins and others brought a group of victims of Hiroshima to the US for plastic surgery. They were dubbed the "Hiroshima Maidens." Two of them lived with my family one summer. Aka and Toyo's faces and hands were hideously scared from burns – no, more than scared; it was as if the flesh had melted and then recongealed. It was difficult for a child to look at or accept, and they were very shy, but we found the magic to transcend it all – ping-pong – and we became palls. The horror of nuclear war was not an abstraction for me, but something I had seen burned into human flesh.

I loved Picasso's painting "Guernica," but I had no idea what it was about. When I asked my father, he explained that Guernica was a Spanish city that had been bombed by German airplanes during the Spanish Civil War, in the time leading up to World War II, and that the German military had used it as an opportunity to test their air force and bombing techniques.[15] He explained how utterly horrified and outraged people around the world had been at the idea of bombing civilian populations from the air. Then he added, by 1944 the US was doing the same thing on a massive scale over Dresden and

[13] Historical research indicates that the world indeed came close to nuclear war during the Cold War, notably in the Cuban missile crisis. See for example, Michael Dobbs, *One Minute to Midnight: Kennedy, Khrushchev, and Castro on the Brink of Nuclear War* (New York: Knopf, 2008).
[14] The story is told in Norman Cousins, *Present Tense: An American Editor's Odyssey* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967) and Rodney Barker, *The Hiroshima Maidens* (New York: Viking, 1985).
[15] When President George W. Bush addressed the UN General Assembly in 2002 in the lead up to the attack on Iraq, the US insisted that a reproduction of "Guernica" be removed from the hall.

other German cities.[16] It was but a step from that to dropping atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

For me and my contemporaries, the threat of nuclear war was not something imaginary or distant. It was something you heard about on newscasts about Washington and Moscow and Bikini, but it was also as close as the family pantry and your desk at school. No doubt my own reaction to it was deeply influenced by my parents' attitudes, but it was also a result of my own response to what I experienced. The threat of nuclear war was part of my reality. It led me to be aware of myself as someone directly affected by what went on in the larger world beyond my own home and community.

Nobody wanted a nuclear war. Yet the forces leading to it seemed inexorable. A few protested, but the cold war nuclear arms race felt like a self-perpetuating process that was leading to human self-destruction without human intent. Each "side" armed itself out of fear of the other, but each arms buildup only increased the other side's fear and made it act in ways that provoked still more fear. Such an out-of-control process produced fear, but above all, despair. Although human beings set the policies and made the weapons, it was as if they were acting only as the puppets of inhuman forces that no one could control.

[16] In the 1990s, my Japanese friend Muto took me to the place where 100,000 people were killed in one day by the "conventional" Allied bombing of Tokyo – about as many as in Hiroshima. See Howard W. French, "100,000 People Perished, but Who Remembers?" *New York Times*, March 14, 2002.

## This way for the gas

One of my earliest memories is hearing my mother tell me the story of two relatives of my father's who agreed to kill each other rather than be taken to a concentration camp by the Nazis. The two elderly sisters shot each other as the Nazis were coming to their town to round up the Jews.[17]

My parents were close to my father's cousin Dr. George Brecher and his family, who had only managed to escape from Czechoslovakia as the Nazis marched in. They had fled to London. I was told that during the Blitz their daughter, my cousin, had regressed from the shock of the bombing to the point where she would only lie curled up in a fetal position.

I also heard about anti-Semitic bigotry closer to home. My father had been an honors student at Swarthmore and went to graduate school at Brown University. After a year or so of study, his senior professor asked him what his plans were. My father replied that he intended to get a Ph. D and become a professor of philosophy. His professor replied that he could pursue that course if he wished, but there was something he should know first. He then named the only three Jews in the entire United States who had appointments as professors of philosophy. My father dropped out of school that spring, never to return.

When my mother's first husband died in a car crash, she decided to marry my father, who had been her lover in college. Her decision to marry a Jew caused an uproar. Her deceased husband's family hired a lawyer and threatened to challenge her custody of her two children if she went through with the marriage. When she visited the distinguished professor who had been her mentor at Harvard, he advised her not to marry a Jew.

The extermination of six million Jews shaped my consciousness from an early age. I felt personally connected to tragedy and horror. I can still see the piles of bones in the *Life* magazine photos from the concentration camps. And I have never been able to see the world as stable and secure. The notorious horrors of the 20th century shaped my expectations of what was normal. When millions of Americans appeared to go into shock over the assassination of John F. Kennedy and a generation later over the attacks on the World Trade Center, to me they seemed like part of the normal way of the world.

The Nazis' killing of six million Jews represented the deliberate enactment of evil on an awe-inspiring scale. But it also represented the acquiescence of a seemingly indifferent nation and people in that evil. You could imagine the ease with which apparently mild bigotry like that my parents had been subjected to in the US could provide an atmosphere that might indulge the greatest of crimes. I sensed that without some kind of conscience or moral compass, apparently innocent people could become complicit in unimaginable crimes.

[17] I later confirmed this story through family oral histories I conducted.

## McCarthyism

It must have been the early 1950s. I was perhaps six or eight, and was with my mother, who was doing chores in the attic. The particular chore was covering a bright red album of 78rpm records with a thick adhesive material called contact paper. The album was called *Songs of the Red Army*. I asked her why she was doing it. She told me that at one time the Russians, who had the Red Army, were fighting side by side with the Americans and were regarded as their friends. But right now things were different, and if people saw *Songs of the Red Army* when they came to our house they might get the wrong impression.

When I was a bit older, she told me that after her first husband, a rather conventional Harvard political science professor, had died and she had remarried, she had had their old collection of academic books shipped to her new home near Washington, DC. When she started to put Karl Marx' *Capital* on the shelf, her new husband, who worked for the Federal Communications Commission, had looked at her in alarm. "You can't put that out there!" "Why not?" "What if an FBI man walked in and saw it?" My mother told me that she had felt at the time, "Oh, my God, I've married a raving paranoid." The next week, sure enough, an FBI man showed up at the door for a surprise visit.

My parents were never Communists, but they moved in a left-wing milieu where some of their friends and associates were, and where many more were likely targets for charges of "disloyalty" in an era when dissent was often equated with treason. My father regarded it as a principle and a point of pride that he would not cut acquaintances when they came under attack or became dangerous to associate with. My mother believed that we children should be exposed to people who did not share mainstream opinions. I grew up knowing many people who had been victims of the red scare. Clifford Durr, a white Alabama lawyer who had been my father's mentor at the FCC and later known as a hero of the civil rights movement, was red-baited out of one job after another. Ann and Maynard Gertler evacuated the US to Maynard's native Canada. The great Central Asian scholar Owen Lattimore coached me in my desperate attempt to pass high school French while describing how he had been taken in and celebrated by scholars at the Sorbonne after being hounded out of government and academic positions in the US. I'd rarely seen my father madder than when a neighbor refused to shake hands with a visiting Alger Hiss after his release from prison.

I remember everyone gathered around the TV – not only in our home but in many others – watching the Army-McCarthy hearings. In the midst of the to-me-incomprehensible proceedings, I remember my mother watching someone refuse to testify against acquaintances and saying, "That's a very brave man." I remember my parents coming home from a community forum arguing with neighbors about whether it was a violation of the right to freedom of association for someone to be compelled by a Congressional committee to testify against associates.

We lived very much in an atmosphere of fear. After leaving Washington, my father had gone to work at the United Nations. A congressional committee headed by Senator William Jenner had started investigating "Communist infiltration" of the UN staff, and several associates of my father had been fingered in some way. I was never told the whole story, but I know my parents were waiting for the next shoe to drop. (I learned long after that the parents of my life partner, Jill Cutler, had been under the shadow of the same Congressional investigation.) When my brother John for a joke listed *The Daily Worker* (which we had never seen) on a school questionnaire as the newspaper that his family read, my parents' conflicting feelings of fear and a desire not to overreact were apparent to me, even though I didn't have a clue what it was all about. Even in high school, I concealed copies of the *Nation* magazine under another publication when I read them in school.

Anti-communism was part of an amalgam that also included nationalism, patriotism, militarism, religion, and paranoia. The pressures for political and cultural conformity were palpable. Every day in school we recited the Pledge of Allegiance. In school and Boy Scouts we sang patriotic songs with titles like "I Like It Here." (The implied message: If you don't like it here, go back to Russia.) My Scoutmaster explained that they didn't have Boy Scouts in Russia because they didn't believe in God.

Growing up under McCarthyism taught me something of what it is like to be part of a despised and persecuted group. I was aware of society because we were under attack by society. While our lives were never in danger, my parents could easily have lost their livelihood and, had my father been called by the Jenner Committee and refused to testify, he might well have been sent to jail. Political repression and tyranny were not distant evils, but ones that I experienced directly.

But fear was not the only thing I experienced under McCarthyism. I also learned something about what it means to resist pressures for conformity and to remain loyal to one's values and commitments in the face of public opprobrium. I took pride in being part of a denigrated group and in asserting my identity as part of it.

## Race relations

In the pleasant suburb of Leonia, New Jersey, just across the George Washington Bridge from New York City, Grand Avenue marked the boundary of my childhood neighborhood. Somewhere beyond it lay the great swamps of the Hackensack River – politely referred to as the "salt meadows." One day when I was perhaps eight or nine I decided I was old enough to cross Grand Avenue and see what was on the other side. What I discovered was a neighborhood of run-down housing, barely more than shacks really, inhabited by black people. I was frightened, and I raced home and said to my parents, "I didn't know Leonia had slums!"

We moved away soon after that and I never learned anything more about Leonia's slums. But meanwhile I was learning something about "race relations" in another part of New Jersey. My mother's Friends Meeting in the prosperous town of Ridgewood became involved in a small community development project with a community known to themselves as "the Mountain People" and to their Mahwah neighbors, derisively, as the "Jackson's whites."[18]

I remember driving through beautiful woods along a narrow, winding road up into the Ramapo Mountains, past homes surrounded by broken-down cars and small garden patches, till we came to the community center that was being built by an American Friends Service Committee volunteer work camp. I was thrilled because I was just starting to play guitar and some of the Mountain People were real guitarists.

The Mountain People, with mixed colors and physical features, were what historians would call a maroon community. Their ancestors were known to have included waves of Native Americans and African Americans who had retreated into the Ramapo Mountains over the centuries. But the local term "Jackson's Whites" was about as derogatory an attribution of ancestry as one could imagine. According to the local legend, when Hessian mercenaries were encamped on the New York side of the Hudson River during the American Revolution, a sea captain named Jackson contracted to bring a shipload of prostitutes to service them. To do it on the cheap, he obtained a shipload of black women from the West Indies. When he arrived with them in New York, they were derisively dubbed "Jackson's Whites."

The women were placed in a stockade. That winter was so cold the Hudson River froze over. The women escaped the stockade, fled across the ice, and hid in the Ramapos. So the ancestors of the Mountain People were allegedly the runaway prostitutes of mercenaries.

Whatever the mix of truth and slander in this story, the Mountain People were subject to intensive prejudice and discrimination. Only the most menial jobs were open to them.

[18] For a recent journalistic account of the Mountain People, see Ben McGrath, "Strangers on the Mountain," *The New Yorker*, March 1, 2010, p. 50.

New Jersey supposedly did not allow racial segregation in education, so the children of the Mountain People went to the regular local public schools, but they were "tracked" into separate classes within the purportedly integrated schools.

I lost touch with the Mountain People after we left New Jersey, but I read a few years ago that they had organized themselves as an Indian tribe and appealed for Federal recognition. Challenged on why they were only now claiming to be Indians, one of the elders replied that they had always known that they were Indians, but hid their identity; had they been regarded as Indians, the discrimination and opprobrium they faced would have been even worse.

As news of the civil rights struggles in the South splashed across northern newspapers, an Episcopal bishop asked his parishioners in Connecticut to meet with their neighbors to discuss their role in race relations. In the small towns of northwestern Connecticut, where my family had moved, a committee of respectables was duly formed and its first public meeting announced in the local newspaper.

My parents went to the meeting and came home disturbed. The hope had been that it would be an interracial affair, but only one person came from the Northwest Corner's tiny black (then Negro) communities. While the participants had expected to discuss the terrible things happening in the South, the lone Negro attending asked them what they were going to do about discrimination in the Northwest Corner. They were flabbergasted that anyone could even suggest that such a thing existed. He proceeded to lay out the particulars. The one barber in one of the few towns that had a barbershop refused to cut "Negro hair"; local Negroes had to go all the way to the city of Torrington for a haircut. The local bank discriminated racially in its conditions for mortgages. And, while Negroes could play golf at the local country club, they were banned from getting a drink at the country club bar.

The editor of the local newspaper, my parents told me, had said, "I simply don't believe it." Not knowing what else to do, the "interracial committee" agreed to investigate the charges. To their shock they discovered that the local barber did indeed refuse to cut Negro hair; the country club bar did refuse to serve Negroes; and the local bank was at best unhelpful to Negroes seeking a mortgage.

To its credit, the group, which adopted the name "Concern," did more than just investigate. Delegations visited the barber, country club, and bank, and all three situations were corrected. Word spread, and soon people from the local Negro communities not only joined Concern, but took over much of its formal and informal leadership.

These experiences revealed how invisible discrimination and prejudice can be to those who are not subjected to them. They taught me that, whether or not I was aware of it, I could be part of a group that oppressed and discriminated against others.

## Quiet desperation

When I was little my father hated his job. I remember him coming home full of frustration and anger every night. He had migraine headaches that lasted for days; neither he nor we doubted that they were associated with his work. I was too young to understand what the problem was, but I do remember being told, "Edward doesn't like having to work for a boss." He moved to a new job, where he and my mother worked together, but the problem continued.

My parents had always done freelance writing on the side, and finally in the early 1950s they quit their jobs and became fulltime freelancers. My mother quipped, "We'd rather worry than commute."

Worry they did. They sold about one article a month, and paying that month's bills depended on selling that month's article. They actually became reasonably successful, but their financial insecurity remained. The year my father tried to quit smoking their income fell by half. Financial anxieties drove family tensions. My brother Earl, a fine writer, recently wrote a short story based on our family in which the tensions passed over into violence. In reality they didn't, but the edge he was trying to evoke was definitely there.

My parents wrote as a team for the major popular magazines of the era, publications like the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Collier's*, *Redbook*, and the *Reader's Digest*. (When asked how they could bear to write for the often loopily reactionary *Digest*, my mother replied, "Think what we keep out!") Every article had to be carefully tailored to the wishes and whims of the editors, with just the right mix of human interest, authoritative information, alarm, and reassurance. Nothing too threatening or controversial, please!

Uncharitably, I saw their work as driven by the commercial forces of the market. I saw them as forced to write what their editors wanted, rather than being able to express their own convictions, which I knew were far more radical. (In retrospect my judgment is less harsh: In the context of McCarthyite reaction they "infiltrated" articles on air and water pollution, consumer protection, and even the dangers of nuclear fallout into mass media from which such concerns were normally excluded.)

Worse still, I saw the same fate looming for myself. I knew that their situation gave them far more freedom than most people who had to work for a living. I envisioned the basic problem for my future as how to avoid a life of unfreedom – chained to the drudgery of a normal worklife. And I saw this as a problem that was shared – even if only dimly recognized – by almost everyone who had to work for a living. I resonated with Thoreau's line, "Most men live lives of quiet desperation."

Similar themes were appearing in the popular social criticism of the day. I found my own thinking congenially expressed in Paul Goodman's *Growing Up Absurd* and Jules Henry's *Culture against Man*, which portrayed in different ways the conflict between

young people's aspirations for personally meaningful, creative, and socially useful work and the constraints imposed on them by a commercially-driven economy and culture.

In a book by the psychoanalyst Erich Fromm I came upon the idea of "alienated labor" which he had taken from Karl Marx' early *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts.*[19] Fromm said that under capitalist production relations, the worker was alienated from his own activity because it was controlled not by him but by his boss. He was alienated from the production process because it was conducted for somebody else's purpose not his own. And he was alienated from other people, because his relations were based on the domination of the boss, competition with other workers, and lack of a direct relationship with the consumers who used the products of his labor. The idea of alienated labor made intuitive sense to me as a description of the world I saw around me.

I saw myself connected to this problem both through the experience of my family and through my own likely future. I did not at that time think of the problem in terms of class, because it seemed to affect people whose social class positions were very diverse. It appeared to result from an almost inescapable institutional structure that was stonily indifferent to the needs of individuals for self-expression.

[19] Eric Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1961). I later learned that Fromm's book is an object of derision for some subsequent scholars of Marxism.

## The web of life

At the age of three I fell in love with the woods. Not just any woods, but those I visited in a place called Yelping Hill in northwestern Connecticut. That winter when I was sick in the hospital I played that I was in a tree house in Yelping Hill. We started spending summers in Yelping Hill, and when I was seven my parents built a tree house in a great spreading oak and I thenceforth lived in a tree in the middle of the forest. (Yes, I did visit my family from time to time.)

I remember driving on the highway and hearing my parents mutter imprecations at diesel trucks that poured thick black exhaust into the air. (This was long before environmental laws required emission control devices on trucks and cars.) So far as I know the term "environmentalism" had not even been invented, but my parents wrote early articles for popular magazines like *Redbook* on air pollution and other issues that would soon be defined as "environmental."

Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* caused a local sensation when it appeared serially in the *New Yorker*. Towns in our region frequently sprayed DDT from airplanes to fight gypsy moths. Everyone hated the gypsy moths, which defoliated whole forests (including my treehouse tree), but we were also a community of bird lovers who were horrified at the idea that DDT was wiping out the songbirds. Neighborhoods and towns battled over the question: to spray or not to spray.

My father, a science writer and a firm believer in reason and science, considered *Silent Spring* unbalanced. "It reads like a lawyer's brief," he complained.

But *Silent Spring* really used the impact of DDT on songbirds as a metaphor for something more profound. It is hard to realize it now, but at that time ecology was a novelty. The idea expressed in the title of an introductory book on ecology I was given by my mother, *The Web of Life*, conflicted with the common sense of the time that organisms and species were separate entities related to each other only as predators and prey. If mosquitoes treated us as prey, it was only reasonable for us to fight back with DDT. (A neighbor who was by no means a shill for the pesticide corporations wrote a humorous book defending pesticide use called *Bugs or People?*) The idea that such action had to be seen within a set of complex and often hidden interconnections was radical.

That idea was radical in another way, too. There was an oft-forgotten tie between the nascent environmental movement and the movement against nuclear weapons.

In 1959, just about the time I was too old to have any baby teeth left, a group called the St. Louis Committee for Nuclear Information put out a call for people all over the US to send in their babies' teeth (after they had fallen out, presumably) for radiation testing. Their theory was that, just as DDT entering the food chain eventually ended up poisoning songbirds, so radioactive isotopes of strontium-90 released by nuclear weapons testing

could enter the milk supply and be permanently deposited in children's teeth and bones. Their fears proved all too true: Levels of strontium-90 in American babies' teeth had increased 50-fold in the era of nuclear testing.[20] Soon a newspaper advertisement showing the famous baby doctor Benjamin Spock with a bottle of milk marked with a big X for "poison" kicked off the mass movement to ban nuclear testing.

I was exposed early to the relationship between environmental protection and economics. Much of the town of Cornwall was covered by zoning that required three to five acres for a building lot. The ostensible purpose was to preserve the rural character of the environment, but the effect, not surprisingly, was to make the price of a building lot unaffordable for all but the well-to-do. It was particularly a source of resentment among those who had grown up in the town and wanted to live there but found building a home financially out of reach. My father was active on town boards at the time and tried to introduce some avant-garde ideas of cluster zoning, but to no avail.[21]

In my youth, environmentalism had an intensely local focus. But in my teens I discovered the work of the "social ecologist" Murray Bookchin, who maintained that industrial society might be disrupting the water cycle, the carbon-oxygen cycle, and the other great natural cycles on which life on earth depends. This was generally regarded as absurd – in fact, it was not even seriously discussed outside of fringe circles. But I took even the possibility as a sign that we had to radically change the way we conducted our life on earth. Today we know that the fossil fuels that drive industrial society are almost certainly producing global warming and catastrophic climate change.

Ecology's focus on interaction of parts within a whole became an underlying constituent of the way I think. So did the idea of unintended side-effects and interaction effects (what economists sometimes call "externalities.") I discovered such an "ecological perspective" expressed in many different forms, ranging from the traditional Chinese idea of the unity of nature embodied in the "Tao," to systems theory, to the dialectic. It provided me a general frame for the many more particular forms of relatedness I was discovering between myself and the wider world.

[20] Andy Newman, "In Baby Teeth, a Test of Fallout," *New York Times*, November 11, 2003.

[21] I'm happy to report that about thirty years later a state senator named Juan Figueroa, who later became a good friend of mine, pushed legislation through the Connecticut legislature requiring towns to allow smaller lots for affordable housing. Cornwall now has a volunteer-based non-profit development organization that has built many homes in clusters on smaller lots, with broad support from the community and appreciation from those who have finally been able to afford a home in town.

## Conclusion to Part 1: Discovering social problems

Experiences like those recounted in Part 1 are common. Most young people discover aspects of their lives that connect them with social problems of one kind or another. Most are part of families and social groups whose historical experience provides them with initial frames for interpreting their relationship to those problems.

We are all born into and enmeshed with history. But becoming aware of those connections is a process. It is part of the exploration of one's world that we all engage in from birth. Learning about the world's problems is part of learning about the world. Like any learning, it can be interfered with and repressed by concealment and social taboo. Or, as in my case, it can be encouraged.

The social problems of which I became aware as a child were diverse. I certainly had no sense of an underlying social or political or economic structure that they might all reflect. At most, I perceived them as all revealing that something was wrong with society.

The diversity of these problems reveals the complexity and multiplicity of identity. My developing awareness of each problem reflected a different aspect of who I was. The threat of nuclear annihilation was a shared experience of my generation. My personal relation to the holocaust and to anti-Semitism resulted from the fact that part of my family was Jewish. My experience of McCarthyism as a personal threat was due to my parents' political views and associations. My experience of race was determined by the fact that under the US caste system I was inescapably defined as a white person. My father's misery at work and my fear of a life of alienated labor resulted from the broad structure of modern economies. My awareness of threats to the environment reflected both my own identification with nature and a growing global consciousness of the environment's importance and vulnerability.

While my concern with all of these problems was rooted in concrete life experiences and conditions, my relation to each of them was different. Nuclear war posed both a threat to my personal existence and a global threat to human life and all that seemed to make it worthwhile. The Holocaust was already history when I was born; its significance for me lay in the potentials for social evil it revealed. McCarthyism represented a direct threat to my family's well-being, but also an atmosphere of fear that encompassed our daily lives. Regarding racial discrimination, by contrast, we were not its object but rather part of the group that was perpetrating it. The miseries and insecurities of the work world were part of my family's daily experience, but caused by an institutional structure that was difficult to escape. The natural environment was something I lived in and cherished; the threats to it were present everywhere, but it required an environmental perspective and knowledge to perceive them.

I had little clear sense of how these problems were caused. Were they the result of bad people doing bad things? Or were they the result of out-of-control forces which led to bad results that nobody wanted? I had no tools for sorting out the answers.

Although these were social problems, I experienced them as an individual, not as part of a group that was dealing with them collectively. For a long time after I became aware of these problems I had no idea of acting on them. Indeed, along with social problems I discovered my powerlessness as an individual to do anything about them. The result was often a painful sense of despair. The only choices seemed to be acquiescence in the conditions that prevailed or individual existential revolt. I certainly inclined toward existential revolt, but I also found it inadequate. My despair led me in quest of solutions based on common preservation.

# PART 2: DISCOVERING SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

## Introduction to Part 2: Discovering social movements

The conditions of life often make people feel powerless. Certainly I felt powerless in the face of my father's headaches or the threat of nuclear war or the prospect of a lifetime of drudgery.

When many people confront the same problem, new possibilities open up. What is impossible for one may be possible for many acting in concert.

Part 2 tells how I became aware of social movements as a means through which people can respond jointly to problems they cannot solve as individuals. I witnessed people, by virtue of their participation in social movements, identify problems, construct new solutions, cross social barriers, form new groups, coordinate their activity with other people in new ways, and change the world and their relationship to it. I witnessed the emergence of what I would later come to call common preservation.

I had become became an "activist" even before I entered high school in 1959. It was still the McCarthy era. The Socialist, Communist, and other shattered remnants of the "old left" appeared doctrinaire, sectarian, and minuscule. The labor movement seemed to be stagnant and largely integrated into corporate America. The embryonic peace and civil rights movements were still small, weak, and isolated. A national peace demonstration was considered a great success if it drew 500 people.

I continued to be an activist as a college student in Portland, Oregon and then as a student at the Institute for Policy Studies, a left/liberal think tank in Washington, D.C. I participated one way or another in the cascade of social movements that people now refer to as "the sixties," which didn't really take off until the mid-1960s and only subsided in the mid-1970s.

Growing out of my personal awareness of the threat of nuclear war and my family's temporarily quiescent social concerns, I made contact with and became active in the peace movement that was just emerging to challenge the nuclear arms race. I became part of the vast hinterland of support that the civil rights movement drew on for its nation-transforming confrontations. I was a devoted activist in the "New Left" Students for a Democratic Society. I witnessed and tried to support the Women's Liberation Movement that grew in the womb of the New Left before becoming a global movement that far transcended those origins. Between 1965 and 1975 my life was absorbed by the movement to end the war in Vietnam.

I came to feel that being active, even being an "activist," was an essential part of being fully human. I came to see it as natural for people to be active constructors and

reconstructors of their world. This view was reinforced by an early reading of the psychoanalyst Ernest Schachtel, who gently but firmly criticized Sigmund Freud for missing the inherently active character of humans from birth, and instead seeing them as simply trying to return to a state of inactivity.[22]

I gradually came to view the propensity to action as more than a capacity of human individuals per se. Rather, the move from passivity to action went hand in hand with the move from individual isolation to social interaction coordinated for common purposes. I was already struggling to understand what I later came to call common preservation. But my initial understanding of common preservation was shaped, not by any general ideas about social movements, but by the particular movements in which I participated.

The first three chapters of Part 2 deal with the peace movement of the late 1950s and early 1960s. "Doctor Spock is worried" describes how, growing out of my own and my family's concerns about nuclear war, I was drawn into the then-burgeoning movement against nuclear testing and for nuclear disarmament. "Peace how?" tells how I became aware of the varied ways peace movement participants defined the problem and the solutions. "Social roots of war" describes the limited but still significant ways parts of the peace movement tried to understand the social and economic context of war, cold war, and militarism.

While the labor movement had been perhaps the most significant American social movement of the preceding hundred years, by the 1960s it was in many ways a bastion of conservatism. "Solidarity – ever?" describes the legacy I and other 1960s activists drew from the labor movement, the ambiguities of the actually existing labor movement of that era, and the ambivalent relation between movement activists and organized labor.

The 1960s in the US are inescapably associated with the civil rights, student, women's liberation, and anti-Vietnam war movements; my participation in each of them formed an important chapter in my education. "Eyes on the prize" describes the impact of the civil rights struggle, and particularly of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee – "Snick" – on me and other activists. The idea of a "New Left," and the massive student movement of the 1960s, were centered in Students for a Democratic Society; "SDS" describes the history of the organization as I experienced it. "Participatory democracy" considers the strengths, limitations, and impact of SDS's central political idea. "Women's liberation" describes the emergence of the modern women's movement within the New Left. "'Nam" gives an account of the movement against the Vietnam war and the efforts to develop a strategy to bring the war to an end.

My experience in the movements of the 1960s gave me a sense of the tremendous potential power of concerted action. But it also left me with a sense that such power could be abused or frittered away. I came out of the experience with a burning desire to understand where that power comes from and how it can best be used.

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[22] Ernest Schachtel, *Metamorphosis: On the Development of Affect, Perception, Attention, and Memory* (New York: Basic Books, 1959).

## Doctor Spock is worried

My mother's brother was a flyer who died in the last days of World War II. She had responded by becoming a pacifist, something she expressed by becoming a Quaker. Like Tom Paine, I got "a good education from the Quakers." When I asked her about her beliefs, my mother told me she believed in nonviolence as exemplified by Gandhi. I considered myself a pacifist from an early age. (When other schoolboys announced whether they were going to join the Army, or the Air Force, or the Marines, I said I would join the presumably less militaristic Coast Guard.)

Our annual Christmas letter to friends and family one year included a poem (written by the jailed Turkish poet Nazim Hikmet and set by Pete Seeger to the haunting Scottish melody *The Great Silkie*) about a little girl who had died in Hiroshima. I still remember some of the lines:

I come and stand at every door
but none can hear my silent tread;
I knock and yet remain unseen
for I am dead, for I am dead.

I'm only seven, though I died
In Hiroshima long ago.
I'm seven now, as I was then
When children die, they do not grow. . .

All that I ask is that for peace
You fight today, you fight today
So that the children of the world
May laugh and dance and sing and play.

I didn't know then and I don't know today whether I consider them overwhelmingly moving or embarrassingly maudlin or both.

My father subscribed to the *New Statesman*, a British "journal of opinion" that was more or less comparable to the American journal of opinion *The Nation*, on the grounds that it was important to have a source of news and opinion from outside the United States. I insisted that he read and discuss it with me, and from it I learned about the annual Aldermaston marches in which at first a handful but eventually hundreds of thousands protested nuclear war. Then we read the appeal by Bertrand Russell (always a favorite of my father's anyway) for mass civil disobedience to halt the arms race, the lively debates that followed, and accounts of the sit-down Lord Russell led in Trafalgar and the mass arrests that ensued.

I, too, feared nuclear war and I was in a state of readiness to transform my concern into action. One day a peace march with a few dozen people, headed for Washington, D.C.

and perhaps inspired by the Aldermaston marches, stopped by at my mother's Friends Meeting in Ridgewood, New Jersey. One cold weekend later that winter, largely at my instigation, my parents and I drove down to the little town of Frederick, Maryland and joined a protest at Fort Detrick, the home of the US germ warfare program.[23] It was the big national peace demonstration for that year. I doubt that there were more than 400 participants.

By the age of eleven I was writing my own anti-nuclear leaflets and printing them on an antique device called a hectograph. They provided information on nuclear overkill and the dangers of radiation. One I remember was headed, "Is This How You'll Die?" I passed them out at school without visible response.

Groton, Connecticut, in the opposite corner of the state from us, was where America's nuclear submarines were built. Militant pacifists, led by the aged and legendary radical minister A.J. Muste, tried to block the launchings with a flotilla of small boats. In New York, a coalition of radical pacifists and bohemians, exemplified by the Catholic Workers and Judith Malina of the Living Theater, organized concerted refusals to take cover during official civil defense drills. I thought of joining one of these, but in reality I never even had the courage to refuse to participate in the air raid drills in my own school.

The advocates of peace were subject to harassment and repression. The farm near Groton where the submarine-jumpers organized their activities was attacked by the Minutemen, an armed, right-wing vigilante group – what today we might call paramilitaries. On a visit to Washington, D.C., my father took me to observe a Congressional hearing in which the world-famous chemist Linus Pauling was threatened with a contempt citation for refusing to provide the names of young colleagues who had helped circulate peace petitions.

When John F. Kennedy was inaugurated President in 1961, he announced a massive program to build fallout shelters across America. My parents went to a meeting to organize a community forum about it for the little rural towns of northwestern Connecticut. They came home and reported that the psychiatrist for the local child guidance clinic (an admirer of Harry Truman whom I visited in his professional role at a time of family stress and spent most of the sessions arguing politics with) had started the meeting by saying, "Now let's not have a debate about whether to build fallout shelters; what we need is to instruct people in how to build them."

After some dialogue, it was decided that different viewpoints should indeed be heard. Adam Yarmolinsky, a well-known liberal and Kennedy's point-person for the fallout shelter program, agreed to represent the Administration, no doubt seeing it as a great chance to promote his wares. Stewart Meecham, peace education secretary of the American Friends Service Committee, spoke on behalf of peace. Tom Stonier, a professor of physics who had recently issued a study of the effect of a nuclear bomb on New York City, was to present the viewpoint of a scientist.

[23] The Fort Detrick biological warfare program is widely believed to have been the original source of the anthrax that killed postal workers and contaminated the U.S. Capitol in 2001.

At the last minute, one of the networks asked to broadcast the forum over nationwide radio, so our little local forum acquired a large national audience. The event turned into a debate between Yarmolinsky and Stonier, who demolished the idea that fallout shelters and other civil defense measures could provide meaningful protection in the event of nuclear attack, even in our rural area a hundred miles from New York City.[24]

The forum had a big impact on local opinion and seemed to have helped discredit the civil defense campaign nationally. Within a few months the Kennedy administration grew reticent about bomb shelters, and our wealthy neighbors who had actually built them began surreptitiously and somewhat shamefacedly converting them into root cellars and swimming pools.

I learned from the experience that sometimes a real public discussion could actually sway public opinion and affect public policy, and that objective, scientific information could sometimes contribute to that effect. (The psychiatrist later told a friend of mine that the political discussions we had in my therapy sessions had contributed to making him less of a warmonger – revealing another though perhaps less efficient way to influence opinion.)

One of the first breaks in the "Cold War consensus" of the 1950s came with the election in 1958 of a half-dozen "peace congressmen." (I knew about them from *I.F. Stone's Weekly*, an independent newsletter that I also insisted my father read with me.) One of them was Colonel Frank Kowalski, a career Army officer who had used his credibility as a military man to get away with some peace shenanigans for which any other politician would have been brutally red baited. My father acceded to my request to take me to hear him speak at a nearby city, I was put in touch with his youth coordinator, and soon I was organizing Youth for Kowalski in my high school.

I was a miserable failure as a political organizer. (I wasn't helped by instructions from the campaign that were appropriate to a personally ambitious budding young politician rather than a social activist.) But a bit later a "peace movement political operative" came into the state to organize support for Kowalski. I became his "gofer" and got my first taste of electoral politics. At the following election Kowalski challenged the rule of Connecticut Democratic boss John Bailey (soon to become chairman of the Democratic National Committee for John F. Kennedy) and was instantly replaced by Bailey's new choice, a dentist named Grabowski whose only apparent qualification was his ability to speak Polish. The experience taught me a healthy skepticism about how political parties are controlled.

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[24] Long afterward I discovered in the Connecticut State Library a once-secret 1954 Civil Defense document titled "Mass Burial Annex" revealing that Hartford, only fifty miles from my home and then a center of military industry, was regarded by the Defense Department as a probable target for any nuclear attack. It predicted 125,000 fatalities for Hartford and East Hartford – equal to almost the entire population. "Mass Burial Annex," Connecticut Office of Civil Defense, May 1, 1954. "Plan A: Hartford Is Attacked," Connecticut State Library. See Remembering Connecticut #13: \radio\cdbury1.

The issue that turned the long-marginalized peace movement into a mass movement was nuclear testing. After studies found radioactive isotopes of strontium-90 in American children's baby teeth, a newly-formed National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (soon known simply as SANE) ran full-page newspaper ads headlined, "Dr. Spock is Worried." A large picture showed the famous pediatrician Dr. Benjamin Spock, whose books were the childrearing bible for tens of millions of Americans, with a bottle of milk labeled X for poison. The ad explained that fallout from nuclear tests was landing on the crops eaten by cows and entering their milk. Children drinking the milk would experience radiation poisoning, cancer, and birth defects. The seemingly abstract, remote threat of nuclear war suddenly became a very concrete and immediate threat to the health of Americans' children. Our own government became the perpetrator of that threat, rather than our protector against enemy attack.

Thousands responded to SANE's ads, and soon tens of thousands were participating in rallies, marches, and local committees. By 1963, a nuclear test ban treaty became national policy, and a halt to nuclear testing, which had been widely excoriated as "unilateral disarmament," was in place.

I was one of those who sent back the coupon attached to the SANE ads; I became a member, wrote letters, went to meetings, and participated in marches. The sudden emergence of the peace movement from the margins to the masses was startling. It resulted not from the concerns that had long preoccupied movement activists, but from one that was a side issue for most of them. But it was one that millions of people, seeing the immediate self-interest of protecting their families from nuclear fallout, found compelling.

For many of those who became active in the campaign against nuclear testing, however, their concern didn't end there. Awareness of the dangers of fallout from nuclear testing opened many to concern about the broader dangers of nuclear war. Many came to see a halt to nuclear testing and a test ban treaty as just the first step toward more general disarmament. They moved from a small concrete concern to a wider shift in worldview. And they learned to question what was said by those in authority.

The peace movement redefined the framework of national and global discourse. As both the US and the Soviet Union pledged to pursue "general and complete disarmament," it almost appeared for a time as if Eisenhower's prophecy -- that some day the people of the world would want peace so much that the governments would have to get out of their way and let them have it -- might be coming true. Whatever their real objectives, governments responded to international public opinion by trying to portray themselves as seeking disarmament and peace. (They also tried to manipulate that opinion to their own advantage.) The peace movement had become a power in its own right, able to challenge and affect even the nuclear superpowers.[25]

[25] The history of these struggles is recounted based on massive research in the three volumes of Lawrence S. Wittner, *The Struggle Against the Bomb* (Stamford: Stamford University Press, 1993-2003).

There was little centralized leadership or organization in which this power was concentrated. The peace movement included a variety of organizations ranging from traditional peace groups and left sects to mass mobilizing campaign organizations like SANE that were little more than coalitions with a list of endorsers and an office that could issue an advertisement or set the date for a rally. Membership and organizational forms were highly fluid. When a few years later a large sector of SANE's New York supporters found the organization reluctant to march against the Vietnam war, they simply organized to do so through an improvised coalition called the Fifth Avenue Peace Parade Committee. The impact on the movement was barely noticeable – the same people kept doing the same things under a different organizational name. People wanted to act, and they treated organizations primarily as vehicles to facilitate their doing so.

The peace movement illustrates how movements' fluidity can also render them evanescent. As the US plunged into large-scale war in Indochina, the peace movement's attention – as well as the country's – shifted from nuclear war to Vietnam. US détente with the Soviet Union made the issues of the Cold War seem less pressing. The anti-nuclear movement wained. Then in the mid-1980s, Ronald Reagan's nuclear buildup, particularly the development of a nuclear first strike capacity, generated renewed fears of nuclear war and a revived peace movement in the US and even more in Europe. It too dissipated as Gorbachev's "new thinking" and then the crumbling of European Communism brought the Cold War as we knew it to an end. But the legacy of that peace movement provided many of the buried roots from which the largest global peace movement in history sprang in 2002 when fifteen million people worldwide demonstrated against the impending US attack on Iraq.

The most important thing I learned from the peace movement was a sense of how, by means of a movement, people transform themselves from isolated, powerless atoms into part of something larger that gives them the power to affect their conditions of life. I saw how self-activating people could become once they felt themselves part of a movement. Whatever the tactics, strategy, organization, and objectives, movement formation itself might be the most important dimension of change. The experience launched me on a lifetime of participation in and study of social movements.

## Peace how?

A sociologist might classify much of my activity – and the peace movement's – as more "expressive" than "functional." Protests and propaganda were largely intended to express our fears, wishes, and hopes. We appealed to other people to share our aspirations, but we rarely had an adequate sense of what changes would realize those aspirations, let alone of a strategy for how our actions could bring those changes about.

For some in the peace movement, protest was really an act of faith. If we spoke out about what we believed and feared, others would somehow awaken from their slumbers, "get it," and – and what? For me, protest gradually became insufficient. I wanted some idea of how we were going to bring peace about. I felt a need to underpin my activism with some kind of intellectual understanding.

Even how to define the problem the peace movement was addressing was not self-evident. The peace movement – and I along with it -- struggled to orient itself within a multi-layered historical context of which many of us were only vaguely aware.

Nukes made war catastrophic, but did the problem go beyond nukes? No one knows for certain whether our earliest human ancestors engaged in war; but we do know that by the time of the first Mesopotamian city-states, armies with specialized military technologies, hierarchical command structure, authoritarian discipline, and a claim on social resources battled each other and imposed their rule on neighboring peoples. Imperial conflict between Russia and other countries in Europe dates not from the Cold War but from the Middle Ages. World war between a revolutionary movement turned militaristic dictatorship and anti-revolutionary powers seeking to stamp it out and restore their own dominion dates to the Napoleonic era. Communist/anti-Communist conflict was rampant by the 1870s. Arms races leading to new and threatening military technologies were evident before the First World War. The struggle between Soviet Communism and its enemies went back, notwithstanding occasional truces and alliances-of-convenience, to the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. What was the origin of the "war problem" and what would solve it?

I was reading. I got the radical pacifist *Liberation Magazine* and the independent but anti-anti-Communist *National Guardian* – no doubt gift subscriptions from friends of my parents who saw me as a likely prospect. I discovered and subscribed to the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, which published peace research of a highly theoretical character, and wrote away for early issues of the *New Reasoner* and the *New Left Review*, which reflected the ferment of the emerging British New Left.

For an eighth-grade school project I clipped (with help from the steady scissors of my mother) every newspaper story I could find that showed any positive steps toward peace and pasted them in a scrapbook. I went to the convention of the Student Peace Union. As training to be part of an American Friends Service Committee "Student Peace Caravan," I spent a week at a big national peace convocation/summer camp in Cape May,

New Jersey, where I got to hear and sit at the feet of David Dellenger and many other leading peace movement spokespeople of the day. The movement was my school.

It's difficult to evoke today how much the issues of the Cold War dominated the discourse of that era. (That difficulty indicates how much paradigms have shifted since the "fall of Communism.") The conflict between the US and the USSR, between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, between "Communism" and "democracy" provided the main interpretive frameworks for both the peace movement and its opponents. Within the peace movement there was debate on what the Cold War was really about. Was it really about ideology -- Communism versus democracy, for example? Or was that just a pretext for geopolitical power politics?

Some peace movement activists saw the US as basically democratic, peace-loving, and good, Communism as evil and the Soviet Union as aggressive and expansionist. But they argued that using aggressive militarism to oppose Communism was counter-productive. They presented a peace offensive as, in effect, a better strategy against Communism. They believed that their anti-Communism, in addition to being valid in its own right, would help legitimate peace advocacy within the political mainstream.

Others saw such militant anti-Communism as promoting hatred among adversaries, undermining mutual understanding, and impeding peaceful reconciliation. Notwithstanding accusations by red-baiting congressmen, very few peace activists actually supported the Soviet Union or Communism, as far as I could see. But a substantial proportion saw the US as highly aggressive and the Soviets as essentially defensive. For them the basic problem was to block US warmongering. They were criticized by anti-Communists for "reactive politics" – a tendency to make excuses for Communist behavior not from an analysis of reality but from their negative reaction to supposed US aggressiveness.

"A plague on both your houses" – that was the sentiment of the "Third Camp" position. Its advocates, drawn largely from certain tendencies within the miniscule Socialist Party and the Young People's Socialist League (known as the "yipsels"), argued for a movement that took a critical stance toward both sides in the Cold War. For reasons I still don't understand, such an approach had only the narrowest support; perhaps that is testimony to the overwhelming polarizing effect of the Cold War itself.

But another way of thinking about the Cold War was catching on: the idea of conflict as a vicious circle. The threat to peace came not from the actions of one or the other party acting on its evil intentions, but rather from their interactions. The result was what we would today call a "cycle of fear" in which the defensive actions of each party provoke fear in the other, which in turn takes defensive actions that provoke still more fear in the other.

In the *Journal of Conflict Resolution* Kenneth Boulding, Anatol Rappaport, and other authors applied game theory and other sophisticated approaches to examine the dynamics of war and peace. There I learned about the Quaker mathematician Lewis F. Richardson

and his book *The Statistics of Deadly Quarrels.*[26] He constructed mathematical models for what came to be known as "Richardson processes," in which out-of-control interactions led to results that were not intended by any of the participants. Arms races provided a classic example, in which a very simple rule like "just stockpile one more weapon than your opponent" led to ruinous military escalation.

This approach required a radical shift in paradigm, from analyzing the contestants in isolation to seeing them as part of a larger pattern or system of interaction. The behavior of each could only be understood as part of that interaction. This shift was somewhat akin to that made by the science of ecology, which tried to understand the interactions and interdependencies among organisms and species, rather than studying them in isolation. Trying to understand this shift would eventually lead me to Norman Wiener's "cybernetics," Ludvig von Bertalanffy's "general systems theory," and Jean Piaget's "equilibration," but such formulations were rarely part of the peace movement's discourse at the time.

This shift to what would later be called a "systems perspective" made it possible to go beyond simply trying to identify "who are the good guys and who are the bad guys." The real question couldn't be reduced to who initiated the Cold War or who could or couldn't be trusted. It was necessary to see how the parties to conflict interacted to reproduce that conflict.

From such thinking developed a strategy that came to be known as "unilateral initiatives for peace." The idea was that, regardless of who was responsible for past conflict, one party could take steps to end the cycle. Such initiatives did not – as critics charged – imply "unilateral disarmament." They were more like the "confidence-building measures" that have become a staple of today's diplomacy.[27] The hoped for result was to replace the arms race with a "peace race" in which the direction of interaction would be reversed.

At the start of the Kennedy administration, peace organizations took out full-page newspaper ads calling for such "unilateral initiatives for peace," in particular a unilateral halt to nuclear testing, which was seen as a prime factor escalating the arms race. Students in Boston organized a peace group called Tocsin which, along with the Student Peace Union and others, called for a national student peace demonstration in Washington, DC to promote such unilateral initiatives.

The Kennedy administration sent out hot coffee to the demonstrators in front of the White House, but in fact it had far different plans. On coming into office it initiated a historic fifty percent increase in military spending and launched a campaign to build fallout

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[26] L.F. Richardson, *Statistics of Deadly Quarrels* (Pacific Grove, CA: Boxwood Press, 1960.)

[27] Today they might also be related to the most effective solutions to games theory's "Prisoner's Dilemma," in which moves are used to encourage other players to adopt cooperative rather than apparently self-interested but actually self-defeating behavior. See Robert Alexrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

shelters – perhaps the measure best calculated to induce the fear that the US was preparing to engage in nuclear war for real. But in less than three years Kennedy changed direction, declaring a unilateral halt to nuclear testing – rapidly reciprocated by Khrushchev -- and starting negotiations for a test ban treaty. This was the starting point for what in the 1970s became Soviet-American "détente."

British historian and activist E.P. Thompson, whom I was reading in the *New Left Review*, argued for another kind of unilateral initiative, which won support among the more radical wing of Britain's Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. His proposal was that Britain should renounce nuclear weapons, withdraw from NATO, and become neutral in the Cold War. This initiative would encourage Eastern Europeans to detach themselves from the Warsaw Pact. The result would be another kind of "peace race," as other countries progressively disengaged from the deadly antagonistic embrace of the superpowers and formed their own neutralist peace bloc.[28]

While this dismantling of the blocs was not widely supported at the time, Thompson reemerged in the mid-1980s as a leading spokesperson for the European Nuclear Disarmament [END] campaign that for the first time in generations organized a common movement in both Western and Eastern Europe. Since the Soviet Union and Eastern European Communist governments were eager to encourage a peace movement in Western Europe, END was able in effect to establish a protective mantle over Eastern European opposition groups. END helped create the context for the overthrow of Communism in Eastern Europe and for Gorbachev's "New Thinking," which ultimately brought about the end of the Cold War. Unfortunately, it turned out that ending the Cold War was not tantamount to getting rid of nuclear weapons, let alone getting rid of war.

The most important thing I learned from the peace movement was a sense of how, by means of a movement, people transform themselves from isolated, powerless atoms into part of something larger that gives them the power to affect their conditions of life. I saw how self-activating people could become once they felt themselves part of a movement. Whatever the tactics, strategy, organization, and objectives, movement formation itself might be the most important dimension of change. The experience launched me on a lifetime of participation in and study of social movements.

[28] E.P. Thompson, ed., *Out of Apathy* (London: Stevens, 1960).

## Social roots of war

The Cold War and the danger of nuclear holocaust exercised an almost hypnotic hold on the minds of peace activists and – when they weren't in denial – on people at large. But such a focus left the social roots of war out of the picture. I gradually began to wonder whether including them in the picture might clarify how the war system was perpetuated -- and where the potential to change it might lie.

Despite their preoccupation with nuclear weapons and the Cold War, some peace activists recognized some social and economic barriers to peace. They noted, for example, that the culture of war pervaded TV, comic books, movies, and virtually every other aspect of popular culture.[29]

Nearly all American boys and many girls had toy guns with which they played – what else? -- war. Toy guns were a troublesome issue for Quaker families. My older brother was forbidden to have a toy gun; he wanted one so badly that on a school trip he stole one from a store, then lied that it had been given to him. Both the theft and the lie were so entirely out of character that my parents relented and bought him a toy gun. Their resistance was broken by the time I came along and I killed and conquered with my Daisy rifle right along with the other neighborhood kids.

Notwithstanding its billboards proclaiming "Peace Is Our Profession," the military itself was also perceived as a source of militarism. When at the age of six I asked my parents why (in contrast to my schoolmates' parents) they were voting against Eisenhower for President, they replied, "We don't want to have a general in the White House." (They later came to believe that Eisenhower had done a better job of restraining the military than his civilian opponent Adlai Stevenson could have done.)

It wasn't just the brass who evoked concern, either. Military veterans formed a large proportion of the counter-demonstrators at peace demonstrations, and veterans organizations like the American Legion provided the most reliable support for belligerent talk and expanded military budgets. (I didn't learn until much later that the American Legion had been set up at the close of World War I in part to rally veterans to oppose strikes and radicalism in the name of patriotic Americanism.)

*The Causes of World War III*[30] by radical sociologist C. Wright Mills identified political roots for what he saw as a socially-determined drift toward nuclear catastrophe. Mills portrayed American society as increasingly dominated by a "power elite" of top corporate, government, and military leaders, who were not responsible or accountable in meaningful ways to anyone except their own bureaucracies. Safe from public control, they were able to follow "balance of terror" policies that he dubbed "crackpot realism."

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[29] See Michael S. Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States since the 1930s (*New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).
[30] C. Wright Mills, *The Causes of World War III* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1958).

Mills proposed a political strategy to counter the resulting drift toward war. He called on intellectuals to promulgate programs, not only regarding war and peace, but on a wide range of issues, and to begin constructing publics around them. He saw this as a means to begin to hold elites accountable.

I recall little peace movement discussion of nationalism as a source of militarism or war. Mutual hatred was recognized as a force, but it was generally seen more as a function of "ideology" – Communism and anti-Communism – than of nationality.

There was also little emphasis placed on imperialism as a cause of war – a topic that would be widely discussed a few years later in the context of the Vietnam War. I rarely if ever heard reference to Lenin's *Imperialism* or Rosa Luxemburg's theoretical alternative. The struggle to dominate the Third World was generally seen as a function of the ideological and geopolitical conflict between the US and the USSR, not as a desire to control the new post-colonial countries for economic gain.

But the peace movement did identify economic dimensions to American militarism. Most obviously, there was the sectoral economic interest of corporations – and of their workers and unions – who produced for the Pentagon. This included a high proportion of America's largest manufacturing companies and unions. Peace activists loved to quote Eisenhower's warning about the "military-industrial complex."

They also noted a "military Keynesianism" in which expanding military budgets were used to "prime the pump" when the national economy faltered. (The preeminent British economist John Maynard Keynes himself had opined that building battleships and sinking them in the middle of the ocean would have the same economic effect as public works projects.)

To relieve such economic dependence on military production, the peace movement urged planning for conversion to a peacetime economy. The first time I remember lobbying was hitching a ride to the Connecticut state capitol with our local legislator (a Republican farmer whose wife was a Christian peace activist) to support a bill for economic conversion planning.[31]

The idea that "military Keynesianism" was actually beneficial for the economy was challenged by maverick Columbia University engineering professor and peace advocate Seymour Melman in his book *Our Depleted Economy*.[32] In Melman's view, military production might stimulate hot-house economic growth, but at the same time it was depleting the real resources needed for successful economic development. The diversion of resources to military production was like a ruinous tax on the rest of the economy. Europe and Japan understood this and devoted a far smaller proportion of their economies to the military. For that reason, they had far faster growth in real assets like

[31] Connecticut was one of the states most dependent on military production, most affected by its fluctuations, and perhaps the one most devastated by the arms cutbacks that followed the end of the Cold War.

[32] Seymour Melman, *Our Depleted Society* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965).

factories and houses. Their high rate of investment led to higher productivity and a growing challenge to US domination of world markets. (This would prove to be one starting point of the historical process we now call "globalization.")

The possibility that military spending might have bad economic effects posed the possibility of a broad social alliance to challenge excessive military spending. Such social needs as education, healthcare, urban infrastructure, and economic development in poor communities were prime victims of the diversion of resources to the military. Why not build a coalition between the peace movement and those adversely affected by military spending? This idea became embodied in proposals for a "Freedom Budget" that would reallocate government spending from the military to domestic needs.

While many social movements, particularly African American ones, were highly receptive to such an approach, it proved very difficult to promote in the national political arena. Even the handful of Congressional representatives who were outspoken peace advocates were unwilling to vote for any but token cuts in military budgets, lest they be accused of rendering the country defenseless.

My rudimentary exploration of the social roots of war started me looking beneath the obvious surface of events to seek the social structures of power that shape them – and that might be used to change them. It led me to think in terms of common interests and alliances among groups that might at first glance seem to have little in common, like the peace movement and the civil rights and labor movements. And it began to orient me toward indirect strategies for change that might make use of the potential power of such social groups.

With the fall of the Soviet Union, the Cold War with which the peace movement had been preoccupied was no longer an issue. But the deeper structures of the war system, dating back to the ancient empires of Mesopotamia but now wielding weapons of mass destruction, continue to threaten the future of human life.

## Solidarity – ever?

I was more or less born into the labor movement. My parents were union members at *Consumer Reports* magazine where they worked. We held family meetings that were referred to as "the grievance committee" and if someone wanted to raise an issue they would announce, "I have a grievance!"

There was a lot of conflict between labor and management at *Consumer Reports*, and finally my parents quit. When I asked why, they said there had been many issues, but the most important was the firing of a secretary who happened also to be the mother of my best friend almost from birth. I asked why she had been fired. They told me the charges: She brought her own coffee to her desk in a thermos bottle rather than using the coffee provided by the company and she sometimes wrote down her work times on slips of paper rather than punching the time clock.

Many years later, after I started writing about labor history, I realized that I had been witness at an early age to an elemental act of labor solidarity. Still later I put two and two together and surmised that the firing of Will's mother's probably had something to do with her sexual orientation – an act of discrimination that only would have intensified my parents' outrage.

My parents had a 78-RPM album of union songs called *Talking Union* sung by the Almanac Singers, a Depression-era group that included Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger. My mother told me that the Almanac Singers used to go out and sing on union picket lines. (I remember wondering what a picket line was.) I played the songs incessantly and still can remember almost every word. Many of the themes I would later write about were already present in those songs.

From the "talking blues" *Talking Union* I learned about strikes:

"Now you know you're underpaid but the boss says you ain't
He speeds up the work till you're about to faint.
You may be down and out, but you ain't beaten
You can pass out a leaflet and call a meeting.
Talk it over . . . Speak your mind . . . decide to do something about it.

"Now suppose they're working you so hard that it's just outrageous
And they're paying you all starvation wages;
You go to the boss and the boss will yell
"Before I raise your pay I'll see you all in Hell!"
Well he's smoking a big cigar, feeling mighty slick
'Cause he thinks he's got your union licked
When he looks out the window and what does he see

But a thousand pickets and they all agree:
He's a bastard . . . Slavedriver . . . Bet he beats his wife."

(My first book, published in 1972, was titled *Strike!*)

I learned about solidarity from *Solidarity Forever*, sung to the stirring tune of *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*:

"They have taken untold millions that they never toiled to earn
But without our brain and muscle not a single wheel can turn.
We can break their haughty power, gain our freedom when we learn
That the union makes us strong.

"In our hands is placed a power greater than their hoarded gold
Greater than the might of armies magnified a thousand-fold.
We can bring to light a new world from the ashes of the old
For the union makes us strong."

(My second book, *Common Sense for Hard Times*, published in 1976, included the phrase "The Power of the Powerless" in its subtitle. I subtitled *Globalization from Below*, published in 2000, "The Power of Solidarity.")

As I was growing up there was only a tenuous link between this inspiring, even romantic idea of workers joining together to fight oppressive bosses and the reality of the American labor movement. I first became aware of this gap in relation to issues of war and peace. Unions in military industries lobbied hand in hand with their employers for weapons programs that would provide contracts for their employers and jobs for their members. Organized labor was a major supporter of expanded military spending and promoter of hawkish foreign policies. As we would later learn, the AFL-CIO International Affairs Department served as a partner to the CIA in overthrowing democratically elected governments in Iran and Guatemala.

Labor's commitment to militarism and nationalism was a barrier to forging a coalition to challenge military spending in the interest of meeting human needs. But I could see no obvious way to change it.

Racism in the labor movement, especially in the trades, provided another barrier to cooperation between labor and other social movements. At a meeting of the Student Peace Union I met a young socialist printer who proudly showed me his card in the radical but nearly defunct Industrial Workers of the World and explained that he did not consider himself a scab even though he was not a member of the official printers union because the union let its locals exclude Negroes. When Hispanic and black workers who had been excluded from national AFL-CIO president George Meany's home plumbers union local were hired by New York City, white union members walked off the job; instead of demanding that the local be opened up to blacks and Hispanics, Meany

defended the walkout. "As far as I'm concerned . . . this union won't work with non-union men." If they did, "I'd resign from the union and join some other union."[33]

At Reed College, where I was a student from 1963 to 1965, a few of us tried to help a UAW local president organize small auto industry shops. Left wing trade union officials occasionally showed up at a peace or civil rights meeting or demonstration. But in general I had little contact with unions or even with union members.

Labor historian David Montgomery would later describe the AFL-CIO in the era of George Meany as a "great snapping turtle" trying to contain the working class within its shell and snapping its jaws at anyone who might cross the border between inside and outside. I experienced the consequences. There was a sort of cultural apartheid that separated working and middle class worlds in any case. But that in turn was in part an effect of the political and institutional isolationism of the snapping turtle.

In *The New Men of Power* by C. Wright Mills[34] I found an account of how American labor leaders had acquired significant power, but had also become allied with the companies whose workers they represented and junior partners within the national "power elite." Unions had become less expressions of workers' self-organization than bureaucracies controlled by self-perpetuating political elites.

What this meant in terms of the experience of ordinary working people was a book that was not open to me. But it posed troubling questions for social movements in general. How could a movement that once exemplified struggle against the status quo end up so much its defender? How could a movement dedicated to democracy and solidarity become so bureaucratic and authoritarian? How could a movement that had once seen corporate America as its deadly antagonist become a "junior partner" with management? And how could a movement that once expressed the needs and interests of the dispossessed come in many instances to be a willing vehicle for their further exclusion?

These questions haunted the social movement activists of the 1960s. Was there anything that could reverse the labor movement's evolution to conservatism and rigidity? Could the same thing happen to our movements, too? Was there anything we could do to prevent it?

[33] Paul Buhle, *Taking Care of Business* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1999), p. 172.
[34] C. Wright Mills, *The New Men of Power* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1948).

## Eyes on the prize

In the mid-1950s, my father visited his old New Deal mentor Clifford Durr to write an article for *Harper's* on some lawsuits he had brought in his home town of Montgomery, Alabama. When my father got to Montgomery, or so he told the story, Cliff told him to forget the intended article because there was a far more important story in Montgomery: a boycott of city busses by the Negro community. "Aw, Cliff," my father claims to have replied, "The magazines I write for have deadlines months ahead of publication, and by the time they published an article everyone will have forgotten about your little old bus boycott."

No doubt the story was intended to point out how lacking in sense of historical significance even the self-nominated cognoscenti can be. But it also indicates how limited an impact the Southern civil rights struggle was making in the North, even for those on the left. Even though the Durrs' adolescent daughter Lulabelle came to stay with us to escape the escalating pressures in Montgomery (Cliff was the only white civil rights lawyer in Alabama and and his wife Virginia had encouraged Rosa Parks to attend a civil rights training workshop at the Highlander School), I didn't get my first real understanding of the Montgomery bus boycott until I read a comic book about it put out by the Fellowship of Reconciliation.

It was a different story in the spring of 1960 when small groups of black college students began walking into segregated Southern lunch counters, sitting down, and waiting in vain to be served. They became an immediate target of violence -- and an electrifying cause célèbre for young people all over the country.

My oldest brother, Earl, a freshman at Oberlin and as far as I knew entirely non-political, phoned home to warn our parents that he had taken part in a demonstration that was going to be broadcast on national TV. (Political demonstrations had been almost unknown on college campuses for at least a generation.) I met friends of his who had attended a meeting that had brought together the "sit-inners" and their supporters from different cities. Soon we were hearing about the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC or "Snick") that was spreading the movement through the black colleges of the South. A support group called the Northern Student Movement began picketing Woolworth's stores in Boston and elsewhere in the North demanding that they integrate the lunch counters of their stores in the South.

The impact of the "Snick kids" on my generation was intense. The most obvious reason was their courage, standing up (or rather sitting down) non-violently in the face of harassment, physical assault, and the ever-present threat of lynching-style mob violence. Their sense of militancy and determination was expressed in songs like *Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Round*. Their assertion of leadership in the freedom struggle, in spite of their youth, constituted a challenge to adult pomposity and compromise. The directness with which their action addressed the problem, the way it presented a straightforward

moral challenge to the immorality of segregation, made ideological debate and elaborate political justification superfluous.

SNCC rapidly developed a unique collective spirit embodied in their freedom songs and their sense of community. It became ritualized in clothing (sharecropper's overalls) and gestures (an index finger circling in tandem with the emphasis of the sentence). In a sense SNCC constituted an elite, but one whose primary requirement for membership was self-sacrifice. While what started as a "Coordinating Committee" evolved into a staff organization, it remained one that was profoundly hostile to structure and hierarchy. Their commitment to a spirit of inclusion, to the "beloved community," was sung as

> The only chain that we can stand
> is the chain of hand in hand.

Underlying everything that has come to be referred to as "the sixties" lies the spirit of the "Snick kids."

The sit-ins were rapidly followed by the Freedom Rides, organized by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), in which integrated groups boarded South-bound busses and refused to leave whites-only seating on the busses and in restaurants along the way. They were met with intense mob violence -- decades later I spoke with Freedom Rider Jim Peck, who was still suffering from the head injuries he received.

When I proposed to raise money for the Freedom Rides in my high school, the principal -- well-known locally as a liberal -- threatened to throw me out of school. "I know many advocates of civil rights" he told me "who have no use whatsoever for the Freedom Riders."

Both SNCC and CORE began recruiting northern students for summer projects in the South, and I visited the CORE office in New York when I was 16 to see if I was old enough to “go South.” They didn’t discourage me, but I was too chicken to follow through. A friend and I did drive through the South, visit the Durrs in Montgomery, and go to the courthouse in Loundes County – “bloody Loundes” – with Bob Zelner, at the time the only Southern white SNCC fieldworker. The notorious local sheriff came up to us somewhat menacingly and asked, “You boys having a good time?”

At Reed College there was a Students for Civil Rights group that functioned as part of the vast hinterland of support for the more direct confrontations of the civil rights movement. We participated in what would now be called a rapid response network to mobilize support for the Southern campaigns, helped with voter registration in Portland’s black community, supported a local black political candidate, and hosted John Lewis and other SNCC staffers on their fundraising swings.

While the sit-ins and freedom rides challenged the most visible symbols of Southern racism, they left the edifice of segregation intact. No one really knew for sure how to overcome it.

With encouragement and funding from people associated with the Kennedy wing of the Democratic Party, SNCC turned to a strategy of trying to register voters in the rural areas of the deep South. Some SNCC supporters feared that it would end up as a pawn of the Democratic Party.

Some in and around SNCC thought the strategic objective of the movement should be to provoke large-scale Federal intervention in the South – a "second Reconstruction." (Something like that actually happened when the 1965 Voting Rights Act sent Federal registrars backed by US Marshals into the South to protect the right to vote.) Others questioned this objective, given the close ties between Federal agencies like the FBI and the most vicious exemplars of Southern "law enforcement."

There was always tension between SNCC's supporters and the highly publicized campaigns led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. King was regarded by some as pompous and somewhat bumbling – he was sometimes referred to sarcastically as "de Lawd." More seriously, his Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) was accused of being a top-down operation that moved in on local struggles, taking over control, publicity, and fund-raising appeal. Its domination by one charismatic leader contrasted sharply with SNCC's ultra-participatory, anti-leadership spirit and ideology.

In retrospect, I can see that I had a limited understanding of the history and dynamics of the black struggle in the South. Recent historical research has shown the deep roots of the local movements in places like Selma, Albany, and Greensboro; local leaders were able to use King for their own purposes at least as much as he was able to use them for his. Studies of King's oratory have shown how powerfully it drew on and evoked centuries of black struggle of which we were not aware. Nor were we aware of the tremendous pressures that the Justice Department and the FBI were bringing on King and the sub rosa but titanic resistance he was putting up to them. Our perceptions were not necessarily false, but they were lacking the full picture.[35]

Beyond the tensions between SNCC and King's SCLC swarmed other questions of relations between the movement and more established forces like the mainstream civil rights organizations, organized labor, the liberal wing of the Democratic Party, and the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations. These tensions came to the fore at the 1963 March on Washington, when the civil rights leadership, under pressure from the Kennedy Administration, tried to cut out parts of SNCC chairman John Lewis' speech that criticized Federal complicity in the repression of civil rights activism in the South. They came to a passionate breach when liberal Democrats, led by Vice President Hubert Humphrey and UAW president Walter Reuther, blocked the seating of the SNCC-organized Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party at the 1964 Democratic Convention. These divisions in turn fed into the emerging conflicts over the war in Vietnam.

[35] See, for instance, the three volumes of Taylor Branch's series on *America in the King Years* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998-2006).

Meanwhile, civil rights militancy was spreading into the North. But here the issue was not so much legally-enforced segregation as economic and social discrimination. Groups like CORE began to disrupt construction sites where blacks were excluded from employment, often with collusion from building trades unions. Martin Luther King organized marches for open housing in northern cities. Such campaigns made the movement directly relevant to poor blacks in the North, but also brought it into conflict with much of the white working class.

Passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act marked the end of one phase in the unending struggle of African Americans for equality in America. So did the emergence of the vague but resonant slogan "black power." SNCC renounced nonviolence and asked whites to leave. I heard the last chairman of SNCC, H. Rap Brown, famous for referring to whites as "honkeys" and for the slogan, "Violence is as American as cherry pie," electrifying a well-frisked crowd in a Washington, D.C. church in the late 1960s. "We may not be able to make the people on Wall Street or in the government do what we want," I recall him saying, "but that doesn't mean we can't kick a honkey up and down Fourteenth Street." I remember thinking that this was not an expression of black power but of black powerlessness.

SNCC, CORE, and the SCLC had all been devoted to the philosophy and strategy of nonviolence. I lacked an understanding of the real dynamics of nonviolent social change -- something I didn't get until decades later I read Gene Sharp's presentation of Gandhi's strategic ideas in *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*.[36] I assumed that nonviolence worked either through an appeal to conscience or through the direct disruption caused by filling lunch counter seats or county jails. And indeed, that was how its efficacy was usually portrayed at the time.

But much of the effectiveness of the civil rights campaigns came from a different source. As Sharp points out, any power structure depends on a range of forces that support it; nonviolence works indirectly to undermine those bases of support. That was an important part of how the Southern civil rights struggle actually made the changes it did. For example, many Southern businessmen swung from "massive resistance" to encouraging acquiescence in desegregation because they feared the reactions of Northern business to racist violence. The Kennedy Administration moved to support civil rights, albeit tepidly, in part from its fear of foreign disapproval of US racism, especially in newly independent African countries courted by the Soviet Union. Democratic Party politicians were highly dependent on large black voting blocs in Northern cities like Detroit and Chicago, but such support was undermined when Democrats in the South perpetrated and Democrats in the White House and Congress tolerated highly visible racial oppression. What seemed on the surface a direct confrontation with the evil of segregation in fact drew much of its power from the "indirect strategy" of putting pressure on the forces whose acquiescence made it possible for segregation to persist.

Far from going from triumph to triumph, much of the time the civil rights movement seemed to be going from defeat to defeat. But it practiced a kind of political jujitsu in

[36] Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, Volumes 1-3 (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973).

which a defeat at the hands of Bull Connor's fire hoses and police dogs was transformed into a new consciousness of the evils of segregation in the minds of millions of Americans. Call it winning by losing.

The civil rights movement revealed a kind of social change that is neither the result of established democratic procedures nor a revolutionary seizure of power. It certainly did not eliminate racism or black poverty, but it radically changed the terrorist subjugation of blacks in the deep South. It eliminated the legal segregation against which the sit-ins and Freedom Rides were aimed. The right to vote led to the election of local mayors and sheriffs dependent on black votes. There is surely a direct line between the challenge to the status of African Americans in the boycotts and sit-ins of the civil rights movement and the astonishing election of an African American as President of the United States.

The movement also left a legacy whose ripples know no boundary. Catholic protestors in Northern Ireland called their struggle the civil rights movement and modeled it on that of American blacks. Human rights demonstrators from Eastern Europe to the Philippines sing *We Shall Overcome*; in 2004 I heard it sung by Indian activists at the World Social Forum in Mumbai/Bombay. The movements for women's rights and gay rights extended the principle of non-discrimination that the civil rights movement had established in American law and culture. An organizer in Waterbury, Connecticut in the 1980s told me that it was still much easier to organize in the poor black community than in the poor white community because the civil rights movement had made the basic idea of getting together to affect your conditions something that people in the black community took for granted.

In the months before his assassination, Martin Luther King was developing a plan for a Poor People's Campaign that would use an encampment in Washington, DC as the base for an on-going interracial movement to challenge the distribution of power in America. After King's death, a "rainbow coalition" of African Americans, Latinos, and poor whites came to Washington by mule train and established a Freedom City in the muddy flats. Without King's charismatic leadership (and fundraising capacity), the movement never took off -- an example of the problems that arise when a movement depends on such individual leadership. But I loved to visit there, and I've often felt that someday we'd be back.

## SDS

At the February, 1962 student peace march in Washington, DC there were people passing out flyers for an organization I had never heard of, Students for a Democratic Society. I was familiar with single issue organizations like the Student Peace Union and the Congress of Racial Equality. I knew from a greater distance a variety of socialist organizations like the Young People's Socialist League, the Communist Party, the Socialist Workers Party, and the like. But this was something different. It was multi-issue, involved with peace, civil rights, and various other concerns, but it didn't address them in the ideological form of the old left. I wrote away to their Peace Research and Education Project and rapidly involved myself with their activities.

SDS expressed a rejection of much that I associated with the "Old Left" – whether Communist, Socialist, Trotskyite, or other. While such groups often seemed marked by a sectarian mentality that saw the organization as the source of wisdom and goodness and outsiders as a menacing evil, the SDS kids had an attractive openness to new ideas and new people. In place of ideological hairsplitting and propagation of the correct line they seemed to embody open dialogue and on-going resynthesis.

SDS had an ancient lineage that was unknown to most of its members, but that I researched with fascination. In 1905, Jack London and Upton Sinclair among others had founded the Intercollegiate Socialist Society. (Their largest chapter, I believe, was at the Brooklyn College of Dentistry – perhaps the basis for Leon Trotsky's disparaging remark that the American Socialist Party was "a party of dentists.") When the first generation became too old to pass as student activists, they established a sort of alumni society for themselves, the very moderate socialist League for Industrial Democracy. The LID in turn sponsored a Student League for Industrial Democracy.[37]

In the late 1950s, the LID hired as student organizer a studious, diligent, and visionary young activist named Alan Haber, who changed the archaic-sounding Student League for Industrial Democracy to Students for a Democratic Society. He haunted organizations from the National Student Association to the University of Michigan political party SLATE where he might find progressive student activists to recruit one by one to SDS and, more importantly, to his vision of a New Left.

Then-famous sociologist Daniel Bell, one of America's foremost public intellectuals, wrote a then-famous book called *The End of Ideology*, and SDS distributed a pamphlet, "The End of Ideology as Ideology," with Al Haber's critique and alternative vision. Bell came out of a socialist tradition and still claimed to express it. But he maintained that the basic goals of that tradition had been realized in the liberal democratic state and society as they existed in the US and Western Europe. Therefore "ideological" challenge to the existing system, based on rejection and replacement of its central features, was not and

[37] See Kirkpatrick Sale, *SDS* (New York: Random House, 1973), for the history of the Intercollegiate Socialist Society and its successors.

should not be on the political agenda. Change was still necessary, but only change whose goal was better adjustment of the present system, a process that required not mass political mobilization but rather the application of technical social knowledge.[38] (*The End of Ideology* reached conclusions eerily similar to those of Frances Fukuyama's *The End of History* four decades later, even though the latter purported to base its approach on the recent collapse of Communism. Bell's stifling of even the conceivability of radical change provided a 1950s equivalent to Margaret Thatcher's "There is no alternative.")

Haber argued that this view was itself an ideology in the sense that Marx had originally used the word: a set of ideas used to justify a status quo dominated by the interests of a narrow group. In actuality, the world was full of problems – from racial oppression to militarism to poverty to colonialism – that were far from solved, and that required far more than "technical adjustment." New movements were emerging to address these problems. Realizing their goals required a fundamental reorganization of power.

SDS's early vision was articulated in the once-famous *Port Huron Statement*, based on a draft by Tom Hayden. This long manifesto opened not with a general theoretical pronouncement or abstract principle but with an existential situation: "We are people of this generation, bred in at least modest comfort, housed now in universities, looking uncomfortably to the world we inherit." Its starting viewpoint was defined as that of one segment of humanity, not as some intellectual, political, or class elite with a unique overview of the whole. It sought to point out connections among different issues and concerns without deriving those connections from some pre-assumed ideology.

Even more completely forgotten now but also impressive to me then was the next year's statement, *America and the New Era*, drafted by Richard Flacks shortly before I joined SDS. It identified changes that were bringing about a "new era" beneath the apparent immobility of Cold War stasis and sketched a strategy for social movements to respond. It envisioned an escalating trajectory that might start with very limited demands but would expand to challenge more central features of the system, anticipating what was to become a widespread discussion on the left of "non-reformist reforms." And it saw the potential linking and convergence of such movements as a means to challenge the complicity of liberalism and the Democratic Party in segregation and militarism.

I was dedicated to SDS as an organization in a way I never have been before or since. I started a chapter at Reed College and, as Northwest Regional Organizer, traveled from Seattle to Spokane to Moscow, Idaho trying to start chapters.

SDS was a school, and a demanding one. Al Haber was known to go up to people and ask a challenging question like "What's the relationship between the military budget and civil rights?" You were expected to present a good analytical response. Debates often combined fresh thinking with immediacy of political concern. (I remember contributing

[38] Bell was on the Board of Directors of the LID. Sale, *SDS*, p. 30. Similar stifling views were embodied in the structural functionalism of Talcott Parsons, which dominated the sociology of the era. Many of SDS's early leaders were sociology students who cut their teeth on the critique of its dominant trend.

from the floor to one debate only to have Doug Ireland, my closest SDS buddy, say "Why did you have to interrupt a great political discussion with that?")

But SDS was also an organization of activists. The "Snick kids" had a huge influence on both its ideas and its style. (It was not unusual to see a speaker in an SDS meeting rotating an index finger for emphasis in the characteristic manner of the SNCC fieldworkers.) The idea of acting directly on a problem, not just studying it or urging politicians to do something about it, was always implicit.

The tension between intellect and activism came out in a pivotal National Council debate between Al Haber and Tom Hayden over the future of SDS's Economic Research and Action Project. Al saw the project as a long-term effort to analyze afresh and in detail why the American economic system failed to meet the needs – social and psychological, as well as material -- of its people. Tom had co-authored a position paper called "An Interracial Movement of the Poor?" and he argued that ERAP should establish local projects to create such movements, roughly following the SNCC model of using college students as volunteer organizers. (A number of such projects were indeed initiated, and while few if any proved successful in creating an "interracial movement of the poor," they did provide a means by which older SDS activists managed to move beyond the campus and the role of superannuated "student leaders.") Skeptics and Haber supporters characterized it as "ghetto-jumping."

My friend Doug Ireland and I used to call ourselves the youngest of the Old Guard. We were aligned with yet another position in SDS, referred to jocularly as the "Max faction." Steve Max's father had been a long-time Communist who along with many others left the Party around the time of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. Steve was one of the more anti-Communist of SDS's leaders, but he brought to SDS the CP's "popular front" tradition of working in labor and other mass organizations and in the left wing of the Democratic Party, something that was anathema at that time to someone like Tom Hayden. (Tom ultimately spent decades as a California state legislator and perennial candidate for higher office.) As a campus-based activist, I valued Steve's genuine interest in building student chapters at a time when other SDS elders were more interested in moving beyond the university personally and politically.

Steve propounded the strategy of "political realignment," which he shared with Michael Harrington and other leaders of the LID. They argued that American politics was dominated by a "Republican-Dixiecrat Coalition" made up of conservative Republicans from the North and racist Democrats from the South. (Such views were influenced by Southern historian C. Vann Woodward's book *Reunion and Reaction*, which showed how this alliance had been established by a corrupt deal to end Reconstruction and fix the outcome of the 1876 election.[39]) The alliance provided anti-labor, anti-social welfare policies to benefit Republican employers and national complicity in Southern racial domination.

[39] C. Vann Woodward, *Reunion and Reaction* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1951).

The strategy of realignment was in essence to drive the Dixiecrats out of the Democratic Party. If the Democrats were forced to adopt strong civil rights positions, Dixiecrats would choose to leave the party; blacks organizing to vote in the South could then be protected by the power of Democratic politicians in the national government, thereby undermining the base of Dixiecrat power. Such a strategy would be in the common interest of labor, blacks in both North and South, and liberals pursuing a welfare state agenda. This analysis taught me how to think about strategy not just in a general, abstract way, but in a concrete historical power configuration. Something like this actually happened in the mid-1960s, albeit with many ambiguities, as a result of the civil rights movement.

The Maxites were strange bedfellows for me, illustrating that political alignments can have more to do with social ties that political positions.[40] I valued Steve's ideas because they represented a concrete strategy based on existing social forces rather than ones we hoped to conjure up. But my heart was not in electoral politics. As SDS radicalized, and especially as the Vietnam War escalated, the Max faction became increasingly isolated; by 1965 people were posting signs outside Steve's office saying "Support the War in Vietnam: Register Voters for Johnson."

In the spring of 1965, more interested in politics than school and happier pursuing my own intellectual agenda than one laid out for me, I dropped out of college and became a student at the Institute for Policy Studies, a left-liberal think tank in Washington, D.C. While I continued to participate in some SDS national meetings, like most of the Old Guard I became increasingly alienated from what was happening in the national organization.

Notwithstanding all the debates, the development of SDS after 1963 was shaped by forces that its leaders didn't and probably couldn't have anticipated. The civil rights and black power movement and the Vietnam War turned American campuses into hothouses of radicalism, especially after young people began to feel the heat of the draft. Factors ranging from the coming of age of the "baby boom" generation to the commercial promotion of themes of revolt led to the emergence of a youth "counterculture" with overtones of cultural and sometimes political radicalism. Dramatic confrontations at Berkeley, Columbia, and elsewhere gave student revolt a high national profile.

SDS became a vehicle for all these forces. Radicalized students formed SDS chapters, often with no connection whatsoever with the national organization. Anyone who called themselves SDS was SDS. By the late 1960s there were an estimated 50-100,000 people who considered themselves SDS members – a growing proportion from working class campuses and high schools. They increasingly acted on their own without direction from the national organization.

[40] Steve loved to quote Lenin's pamphlet *Leftwing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, a polemic aimed against Anton Pannekoek and others who opposed Bolshevism from the left, whose followers I would later become somewhat associated with.

The first effect on national SDS was a flood of new members experiencing their first taste of radical politics who found themselves instantly alienated from the political, organizational, and personal style of the existing leaders. As a result there was a breakdown of communication and continuity; national meetings became largely incoherent. Second, a facile leftist rhetoric and a competition to be "more radical than thou" increasingly shaped the life of the organization. Third, national SDS became a target for takeover by a series of left sects, such as the Maoist group Progressive Labor. The national leadership, from which the "Old Guard" had largely fled, responded by turning itself into a sect or rather a series of sects with names like the Revolutionary Youth Movement I, the Revolutionary Youth Movement II, and, ultimately, the famous Weatherman.

By the time of its demise, SDS was more a parody of the Old Left's rigidity and sectarianism than a realization of the idea of a New Left. But I got a good political education from SDS, and I've tried to continue what it helped to begin.

## Participatory democracy

SDS's big idea was "participatory democracy." Participatory democracy asserted that ordinary people should be able to participate in making the decisions that affect their lives. Being for it was easy. But figuring out what it meant was another story.

Participatory democracy was based on the idea that people could, should, and in fact were capable of shaping their world, and that they needed to do so not just through individual but also through collective decision making. The right to participate implied a responsibility to be more than a passive consumer of political results. It called for what older democratic theorists had called "civic virtue," an active taking of responsibility for the social rather than merely the individual realm.

Participatory democracy has sometimes been conflated (even within SDS) with "direct democracy" in which people make decisions themselves not through representatives, but it's not quite that simple. It did not advocate replacing representative with direct democracy, but it rejected a sham representation that left people without genuine power. Participation in decision making didn't mean that everyone had to attend every meeting; it meant that decision making processes had to give people effective rather than merely nominal control over the outcome.

In conventional democratic theory, representatives nominated by competing political parties provide the chief means for ordinary citizens to influence the political system. Early SDSers generally advocated some kind of involvement in and reform of the party system – the purpose of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party challenge, after all, was to undermine the racist oligarchy by winning fair representation for Mississippi blacks in the national Democratic Party.

But there were problems with conventional electoral politics as the solution to the problems of modern democracy. As C. Wright Mills taught us in *The Power Elite* – and as those with eyes to see could easily confirm -- elites based in large modern bureaucracies like corporations, the military, and government agencies controlled the real levers of power. They dominated both their own huge institutions, which lay outside effective democratic control by those they affected, and the ostensibly democratic institutions of government. Even political party leaders functioned only at the middle levels of power, rarely able to sway or control the real power elite. And the parties themselves were largely undemocratic institutions, with little means to hold their leaders accountable to the rank and file.

The political system prevailing in North America and Western Europe celebrated itself as democratic. But in fact democratic participation of ordinary people was largely limited to voting for one or another candidate. Such voting merely ratified the system; it provided no way to change it. It provided a mantle of legitimacy for power that had little genuine democratic accountability. The actual will of the people was not represented, notwithstanding a system that deemed government officials their virtual representatives.

The absence of active citizenship was celebrated by mainstream political and social scientists: It demonstrated that the people gave their consent to the status quo. The role of the good citizen was to vote, pay taxes, and obey the law. Democracy was to vote for your leaders and then do what they tell you. To oppose this system was allegedly to be anti-democratic.

Such a viewpoint was anathema to participatory democrats. The founding broadside of the British New Left was a book called *Out of Apathy*, and the desire to move from apathy to activism motivated participatory democracy's rejection of virtual representation and passive citizenship. Non-participatory democracy was a kind of alienation, in which people act out social roles they have no real power in shaping. Like alienated labor, alienated politics means engaging in activity pre-programmed by others over whom you have no control. Democracy should mean more than performing your social function; it should mean playing a creative part in defining social roles.

Participatory democracy also implied a critique of the theory and practice of both Communism and social democracy – indeed, that critique was a big part of what was "new" about the "New Left." Leninist "democratic centralism" was almost the opposite of participatory democracy. The claims of the Communist Party and the Soviet state to represent the people without any effective means for the people to participate in decision making was another fraudulent form of sham representation.

Conventional socialism, as seen in the social democratic parties of Europe, offered far more personal and political liberty than actually-existing Communism, but its vision was still far from that of participatory democracy. A famous sociological study of the German Social Democratic Party had shown that from early in its life it had become centralized and bureaucratically controlled, with the membership only passive objects of the party leadership.[41] And a nationalization that merely transferred corporations from private ownership to government ownership, while leaving social relationships in the workplace and the rest of society unchanged, did little to increase the power of ordinary people to make the decisions that affect their lives. I don't recall anyone in SDS ever referring to Rosa Luxemburg's radical democratic critiques of Leninism and reformist socialism, but participatory democracy represented a renewal of some of the same concerns.

In its own organization, SDS sought to combine direct and representative democracy. In principle, SDS was composed of chapters that sent representatives to a National Council. But its ultimate governing body was a Convention in which all members could and many hundreds did participate. There was a tiny national office, but most of the work of the organization was actually conducted through projects like the Peace Research and Education Project and the Economic Research and Action Project, which functioned essentially as self-coordinated activist networks with an occasional paid staffer. There was a strong informal leadership group – what came to be referred to as "the Old Guard." But new leaders were easily co-opted onto the National Council, and a new member like

[41] Robert Michels, *Political Parties* (London: Jarrold and Sons, 1915).

Carl Oglesby could arrive at a National Convention and leave at the end as President.[42] It was a far cry from either Bolshevik centralism or the active staff and passive membership typical of most issue organizations.

Participatory democracy called for a kind of responsibility, reliability, and self-discipline – of civic virtue -- that borders on the puritanical. But a very different, rather antinomian spirit also grew within SDS. It was a celebration of spontaneity expressed in the SNCC spiritual *You Got to Do When the Spirit Say Do*. If activity was unspontaneous, it might be alienated even though it was being carried out by the same people who had decided to do it. Conversely, if people spontaneously felt like doing something they should do it, even if something else had been democratically decided before. Down with rules, even ones we democratically established ourselves! Such a tendency grew within SDS as a reflection both of a burgeoning youth counter-culture urging "be here now" and "do your own thing" and of a growing leftism which viewed the niceties of democratic values and democratic procedure as a sham.

I remember these forces coming together at the SDS national convention in 1965.[43] It was a beautiful sunny day and the never-ending meeting had flowed to an open area outside. SDS had always had a clause in its constitution excluding from membership "advocates or apologists" for "any totalitarian principle." A resolution was made to remove it. The motivation for the change was never clear to me; I was told that it was just to get rid of an old anti-Communist holdover from the past, and perhaps to thumb our noses at the LID elders who still firmly believed in such anti-Communist shibboleths. I had no position on the membership clause, but I did believe we stood for something very different from Communism, and I opposed the change without first finding some other way to say so. When the meeting started to vote, I pointed out that the SDS constitution provided that only elected delegates (a small minority of those attending the convention) could vote on a constitutional change, and said we should have a roll call vote of delegates. I was shouted down; someone yelled, "that will just make it easy for the FBI to know who voted for it." The resolution passed overwhelmingly on a show of hands. Participatory democracy or mob rule: You be the judge.

Even at its best, participatory democracy never produced a worked-out alternative to more conventional political forms. It never developed a clear idea of the process by which a participatory democracy might be established. And it never solved or even fully addressed many problems implicit in the theory, like how to deal with parties and sects that themselves are hostile to democracy, or what to do when there is irreconcilable division over fundamental issues.

SDS's use of the term "ordinary people" ducked questions of class. Indeed, like much of modern democratic theory, participatory democracy rarely addressed the underlying problem of economic dependence among different social groups. Thomas Jefferson believed that a democratic government could only be based on independent property owners, because those without property were inescapably dependent on and therefore

[42] This in fact happened with Carl Oglesby.
[43] For a detailed account, see Sale, *SDS*, p. 210ff.

subject to the domination of those who had it. Socialists made a related critique of democracy: Concentrated private property will always find a way to dominate the institutions of government, whatever system of formal democracy may obtain. But this argument also presents a fundamental problem for socialism: If all property is controlled by the state, or even by some kind of system like workers councils or soviets, doesn't that make ordinary citizens still more dependent on those who control the unified political and economic power? This relation between economic power and political freedom is a question SDS never got to.

I was always puzzled that the discussion of participatory democracy so rarely focused on the workplace. To me, that was the sphere where democracy and participation were most blatantly denied. Challenging the alienation of labor in the name of participatory democracy seemed an obvious way to reach out to workers – especially young workers – and include them in the discourse of radical democratization. There was indeed such a dialogue in the British New Left. (I had pored over a special issue of the *New Left Review* on "workers control.") It's hard to come up with an explanation other than the middle class perspective of the SDSers. (I remember visiting Tom Hayden in his apartment in the midst of the 1967 Newark riot, with police shooting into the windows of the apartment house across the street, and hearing him declare, "There is going to be a revolution in America, and it is going to be made over the opposition of the white working class.")

Despite the limitations of participatory democracy in theory and practice, many subsequent expansions of democracy have reflected its ideals. Some modern environmental laws, for example, provide procedures through which those affected by decisions can participate in them. Such laws require those wishing to initiate a major project, whether private or governmental, to prepare an environmental impact statement laying out possible hazards to the environment. Environmental and community groups have standing to challenge such statements. In some cases the proponents must even pay for critical research. The public participation under such laws is often far more extensive than in conventional procedures where government agencies simply hold a public hearing and then make what they consider appropriate decisions.

The neighborhood councils and participatory budgets developed by Porto Alegre and other cities in Brazil provide another example. Under this system, a substantial part of the city budget is determined by neighborhood meetings, which set priorities for the spending in their communities. This approach is now being imitated in many parts of the world.

The principle that people should be able to participate in making the decisions that affect their lives is extremely radical. It is incompatible with absolute property rights, for example; it implies that when you use your property in ways that affect me I have a right to a say in how it is used. It is similarly incompatible with absolute national sovereignty, for if your nation does things that affect me, I have a right to participate in its decisions

even though I am not a citizen. Such implications of participatory democracy are only beginning to be worked out in the era of globalization.[44]

[44] See, for example, the discussion of cross-border participatory democracy in Muto Ichiyo, "For an Alliance of Hope," in Jeremy Brecher, John Brown Childs, and Jill Cutler, ed., *Global Visions* (Boston, South End Press, 1993).

## Women's liberation

SDS espoused an ideology of radical equality. But certain disturbing phenomena were visible if you didn't avert your eyes. While women always played an important part in SDS leadership, the top leadership roles were taken disproportionately by men.[45] When male leaders spoke in a meeting, people listened attentively. But when women spoke, a buzz of whispered side conversations often arose around the room. When there was "shitwork" to be done – running the mimeograph machine or doing the dishes – it often turned out that the guys were busy writing position papers or "out organizing," so the women ended up doing the shitwork. Certain male leaders treated their girlfriends as admiring camp followers who could be counted on to do their shitwork and provide them political support. Many of these practices are described in an article by Marge Piercy called "The Grand Coolie Dam."[46]

For a while, these problems were rarely more than the subject of informal complaining about particularly flagrant abuses. But gradually the discussion became more focused. A group of women in SNCC (some of whom were also active in SDS) circulated a discussion paper about the role of women in the movement.[47] Small groups of women began meeting to discuss it. The last SDS National Council meeting I attended, in December, 1965, had the first workshop on "Women in the movement," which called for greater "initiative and participation by women" in SDS and a greater understanding of the "woman question" by men in the organization.[48]

Initially SDS women sought to draw movement men into dialogue. But it proved to be tough going. They were often met with the disparaging comment that their concerns were "merely personal," lacking the dignity and importance presumably due to the "political." To this they developed the rejoinder that "the personal is political." Indeed, their approach exemplified the fundamental SDS idea of connecting private, fragmented discontents with their social sources in order to make them into "political" issues.

I responded positively to the emergence of women's liberation within the movement. No doubt this response had roots in my own background. While the historic feminist movements and their traditions were largely forgotten as I was growing up, my parents were surely feminists of a sort. My mother read Simone deBouvoir's *Second Sex*, approving its critique of the oppression of women but also considering it offensively contemptuous toward actual living women. I knew that she had had an illegal abortion in the early 1930s, though I didn't really understand that as a feminist issue yet. My father

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[45] Sale, p. 357, gives a partial list of women in the formal leadership of SDS.

[46] Marge Piercy, "Grand Coolie Dam." In Robin Morgan, ed., *Sisterhood is Powerful* (New York: Random House, 1970).

[47] "Sex and Caste: A Kind of Memo from Casey Hayden and Mary King to a number of other women in the peace and freedom movements," by Casey Hayden and Mary King, 1965, at www.cwluherestory.com/CWLUArchive/memo.html. A version appeared in the April, 1966 edition of *Liberation*.

[48] Kirkpatrick Sale, 252. According to Sale, it was the first workshop on this topic by any left organization in the 1960s.

identified with Bertrand Russell's critiques of the oppression of women and endorsed the idea embodied in the title of Ashley Montague's book *The Natural Superiority of Women*.

My parents wrote together as a team. Within the team my mother was more the researcher, editor, and typist while the original writing was more my father's work. But for the fact-oriented writing they did, her role may well have been equally important; in any case, every word and every sentence they debated and revised together. They wrote under the by-line Ruth and Edward Brecher; when the *Reader's Digest* tried to reverse it to Edward and Ruth Brecher, they refused. The *Digest* editors insisted, saying "At the *Reader's Digest* the man comes first." My parents finally won the battle by trumping male chauvinism with property rights: "Ruth and Edward Brecher," they explained, is "like a trademark."

Domestic responsibilities were far more conventional – my father could boil an egg, and his domestic contributions stopped just about there. But he certainly didn't regard my mother as anything less than an equal.

I myself was uncomfortable with conventional male roles. I refused to watch westerns on TV. Although I was not particularly unathletic, I despised competitive sports and, when possible, would sneak off into the hinterland or try to escape them through some kind of medical excuse.

I was offended by the antagonism young boys felt – and were encouraged to feel – toward girls. I remember the way I was teased in sixth grade because I actually spent time talking with a girl in our class, and how resentful I felt about it. My favorite children's books, Arthur Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons* series, featured boys and girls who played together in a group in which the girls were often the strongest leaders. In the Yelping Hill community where I spent my childhood summers, boys and girls routinely played together; girls were just as much the leaders as boys of the group of a dozen or so kids of whom my brothers were the eldest and I the youngest.

When I was seven, I acquired a treehouse, and sometime thereafter the *Saturday Evening Post* appeared with a painting of a treehouse – obviously based on a photograph of mine – on its cover. Painted in was a sign reading, "No Girls Allowed." I thought it was disgusting. I had friends who were girls, and in fact they played with me in the treehouse.

That didn't mean I couldn't participate in gender oppression. When I was a teenager in the early 1960s, my parents used to turn our house over to me and a dozen or so of my friends over Christmas vacation. We boys were obsessed at that point with trying to master traditional folk music instrumental styles. I paid little attention to what the girls were up to. Then one afternoon they marched in and demanded a meeting. "We don't do anything but cook and clean and you don't do anything but sit around playing your guitars and we're sick of it." One of them recalled more than forty years later, "You all called me 'grandmother' – not, in fact, what a fifteen year old wants to be called!"[49] I

[49] Personal communication, July 14, 2004.

realize now that I had witnessed a spontaneous precursor of what would later burgeon as the women's liberation movement.

I felt that the inequality of women in SDS – what would soon be dubbed sexism – conflicted with the values that led me to be in the movement in the first place. I felt the same about the leadership style exercised by what came to be known as "male heavies." I also saw challenge to oppression of women as a means to spread the movement to a new constituency. I thought it was a good thing when women associated with SDS who were around the Institute for Policy Studies formed a women's liberation group. I remember going around as a supporter to labor and other meetings with Marilyn Salzman Webb and other pioneers who were spreading the gospel of women's liberation.

None of this prevented me from acts of insensitivity that still bring a blush of shame. I remember running across a pornographic paperback that purported to be about rebellious women and their "liberated" sexuality. I thought it was amusing and pinned the cover on the bulletin board at the Institute for Policy Studies, where I was a student, as a joke. When I mentioned it to a feminist friend she simply said she had seen it and taken it down – but her scornful look was sufficient to ensure I would never do such a thing again.

I was particularly interested in trying to create a way for men to relate positively to the movement. I tried to write an essay titled "The Obsolescence of the Male Ego" making the argument that male roles were oppressive to men as well as to women. I circulated it informally around the IPS environment, but never got much positive response. The movement scene was rapidly polarizing on gender lines. Women were pulling out of SDS and other mixed-gender groups and forming organizations for women exclusively. Many movement men were responding with rage. The conflict was often very personal: A lot of marriages were breaking up around me.

The great organizational innovation of the women's liberation movement was what came to be known as the "consciousness-raising group." This was a group of women, often from the same neighborhood, occupation, or social milieu, who met regularly for the explicit purpose of identifying how gender inequality affected and was manifested in their personal lives. They focused on the realities of everyday life and the actual content of social relationships: who did the dishes and who was listened to at meetings. While these discussion groups largely originated within SDS and its alumnae, they quickly drew in women who were part of a broader left culture, then an even larger group beyond. By the end of the 1960s, women's liberation had completed its parturition and became a separate movement.

The consciousness-raising groups were an expression of participatory democracy, and indeed one of the purest. They contributed to the women's movement's incredibly rapid spread. They soon moved beyond gender issues within the New Left to those in the broader society. Within a couple of years the women's movement was raising economic issues like hiring discrimination, the wage gap, and the glass ceiling; questions of the portrayal of women like sexist advertising and the Miss America contest; the role of

social rituals like men opening doors for women and women making coffee for men in offices; domestic violence and rape; the right of women to control their own bodies through access to contraception and abortion; the domestic division of labor and the "double shift" for working women; the roles of men and women in family, home, and childcare; the absence of women in leadership roles in politics; discrimination against women in the military; the need for solidarity among women in their personal lives and worldwide; and other concerns covering every aspect of society.

The growing awareness of the oppression of women opened significant questions for understanding society. The dominant traditions on the left had seen class as the basic division in society and the working class as the basic agent for social change. Could gender oppression somehow be fitted into the mold of class – with the exploitation of women seen as in essence an aspect of capitalism and the liberation of women depending on that of the working class? Or were the labor movement and the male-led left really vehicles to perpetuate the oppression of women? Or were class and gender, perhaps alongside race, categories for understanding society and oppression that could not be reduced to each other but that together provided the necessary framework for analysis and change? I gradually came to believe that the search for the "essential" elements of society and oppression was the product of a reductionist paradigm that was intellectually misleading and politically counterproductive, but it took a long time before I had even a glimmering of an alternative.

The women's liberation movement has had a huge global impact. It would be difficult today to find a locality or a sphere of life in which gender inequality is not being contested. The challenge to traditional gender roles has also helped fuel a global backlash, often represented by religious fundamentalism and its projection into the political arena. But so far that backlash has failed to return women to their position before the women's liberation movement.

## ‘Nam

In the summer of 1961, I took part in a youth "Peace Caravan" sponsored by the American Friends Service Committee. There was a young woman in my training group who was from Vietnam. I overheard another trainee saying she must be upset because the Vietcong were only 20 miles from Saigon and were shelling the city. I didn't know who the Viet Cong were, or where Vietnam was, or that there was a war going on there.

Over the next several years, Democratic Administrations intervened militarily in third world settings worldwide. The CIA organized the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba. U.S. "advisors" picked sides in the civil war in Laos. U.S. troops invaded and occupied the Dominican Republic. Initially the involvement in Vietnam seemed to be merely one more example of this pattern, one that extended such Eisenhower-era interventions as CIA "regime change" in Iran and Guatemala and the landing of US troops in Lebanon, if on a bloated scale. But the US intervention in Vietnam grew larger, and larger, and larger, until ultimately it involved more than half-a-million US troops, more tons of bombs than were dropped on all of Europe during World War II, and the death of 50,000 Americans and as many as two million Indochinese.

At the end of 1964, not many people had Vietnam at the center of their radar screens, but to SDS it seemed like a good target for raising broader issues about US foreign policy. Anyone could see that, for whatever reasons, the US was propping up corrupt dictatorships all over the world. When their people rebelled, US military intervention seemed bound to follow. Even many liberals were critical of this pattern.

The US-backed Diem regime in South Vietnam seemed a perfect case in point. After a long debate (I tried futilely to remove the word "imperialism" from the resolution on the grounds that it would alienate newly-active students and that we had never discussed what it meant), SDS decided not to engage in immediate action, but rather to call for a demonstration in Washington the next spring.

Unbeknownst to SDS, the Johnson Administration was about to launch a huge expansion of US participation in the war -- a policy that came to be known as "escalation." "Advisors" were redefined as combat soldiers. US planes began bombing Vietnam, first sporadically, then daily. Draft calls escalated in anticipation of what was to be an eight-fold increase in US troops in Vietnam over the coming year. In response to escalation, and without any outside prompting, students on US campuses began organizing meetings and protests about the war.

Except for such scattered protests, public opinion and the Congress supported American policy overwhelmingly. Anti-war demonstrations were forbidden in some places and elsewhere demonstrators were freuently beaten up. When the US charged that North Vietnamese boats had attacked a US ship in the Gulf of Tonkin (an attack that released phone taps show even Lyndon Johnson believed probably never happened), the Senate passed the "Gulf of Tonkin resolution," giving the President a free hand to do anything he

chose in Vietnam. The vote was 98-2, with only Senators Wayne Morse and Earnest Gruening opposed.

The first mainstream questioning of US policy came in 1965, after the Johnson Administration issued a "white paper" justifying the escalation as a response to a North Vietnamese invasion of South Vietnam. Senator Mike Mansfield held hearings with independent experts on Vietnam who demolished this account. Then teachers and students at the University of Michigan organized an all-night public educational event that they dubbed a "teach-in" after the civil rights sit-ins. They were hoping for 500 participants; instead 3,000 showed up. Within two months teach-ins had been held on more than 100 campuses, probably the most widespread campus political activity since the 1930s. An estimated 35,000 joined a teach-in at Berkeley.[50]

The spring, 1965 SDS Vietnam demonstration, expected at best to double the previous peak for Washington peace demonstrations of about 3,000, instead drew an estimated 25,000. A lot of people, especially young people, suddenly wanted to act against the war. It was, up to that time, the largest peace march in US history.[51] I was staggered -- I had never expected to live to see such a thing.

At that point, SDS was universally recognized as the leader of the anti-war movement. But, astonishingly, it decided to renounce the crown. SDS national leaders had their own agenda, focused on building an "interracial movement of the poor" or perhaps a revolution. As one leader put it, "Our goal is to build a movement that can stop the seventh war from now." Tens of thousands of students, however, wanted to protest the war, and they often called the groups they formed to do so SDS chapters, even though they had virtually no support or encouragement from SDS as a national organization.

In this vacuum, national anti-war leadership passed to an ever-chaotic, ever-changing ad hoc coordinating body successively known as the Committee to End the War in Vietnam, the National Mobilization Committee, and the New Mobe. There's a saying among Appalachian coal miners: All you have to do is hang a picket sign on a yellow dog and no miner will pass it to go to work. Fortunately, leading the anti-Vietnam war movement didn't take a lot more than setting a date for the next demonstration and waiting for a few hundred thousand people to show up.

In the early stages of escalation, opposition was almost entirely confined to students. Liberals overwhelmingly supported Lyndon Johnson and the war. Even the established peace movement was wary of the anti-war students, sometimes joining in red-baiting attacks on them. The anti-war movement, which started primarily with small groups on elite campuses, became in less than two years a mass movement of students of all kinds – no doubt kindled in substantial part by the draft. But for several years the movement remained largely isolated on campuses, with little off-campus support. It functioned primarily in a generational ghetto, resulting in slogans like, “Don’t trust anybody over thirty.”

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[50] Kirkpatrick Sale, *SDS*, pp. 183-4.
[51] Sale, p. 185-6.

Military service -- and casualties -- were disproportionately concentrated among African Americans in 1965 and 1966, and protest emerged next within the black community. A SNCC leader, coming out against the war, declared, "No Viet Cong ever called me a nigger." Martin Luther King, Jr. began campaigning against the war -- to the dismay of liberals, who feared dissention between the civil rights movement and the Johnson administration.

Middle-class opinion gradually swung against the war. In 1965 it was hard to find a liberal who opposed the war; by 1970 it was hard to find one who had ever supported it.

The AFL-CIO remained a pillar of support for the war to the bitter end -- trashing not only the student demonstrators but also war critic and 1972 Democratic presidential candidate George McGovern. But as working class young men began returning from Vietnam and telling their families and communities what was really going on there, as the burdens of paying for the war increasingly fell on working class shoulders, and as working class communities began seeing more and more of their young men coming home in body bags, opinion began to shift. By the early 1970s, opinion polls showed that the lower your income, the less likely you were to support the war. This was matched by a rapid expansion of activism at working class colleges and even high schools.

In 1965 I dropped out of college, became less active in SDS, and started a five year stint in Washington, DC. I was based at the Institute for Policy Studies, a think tank that was variously described as the Washington outpost of the radical movement or as the vanguard of the status quo. As a student I had Arthur Waskow and then Marcus Raskin as my mentors. It was a thrilling place to experience what we now think of as "the sixties."

When I first registered for the draft at 18 I applied for recognition as a conscientious objector, and when my claim was finally accepted on appeal I performed alternative service with the Friends Committee on National Legislation, a Quaker lobby. I wrote anti-war pamphlets, articles, testimony, and speeches for members of Congress. I styled myself a "Quaker military expert."

My memory of the Vietnam war era is one of unending pain -- a pain that floods back to me even as I write about it decades later. (Yes, it was nothing compared to the pain of those, on all sides, who experienced the war directly.) Every morning for a decade I woke up anticipating news reports on the bombing of villages. Part of my job with the FCNL involved regularly calling a colonel at the Pentagon public information service. He would give me the official statistics on American casualties, the number of bombing sorties, and the enemy "body count." Then I would try to get information on topics like civilian casualties, which he always stonewalled. One day the newspapers reported that the Pentagon had admitted accidentally bombing a "friendly" village, and even provided statistics on the casualties. I called the colonel and, after getting the usual statistics, asked him "how many people have been killed in the accidental bombing of friendly villages?" He replied, "Oh, I'm not going to tell you that -- but it was a good try!"

The unending pain led thousands of us to devote our lives to the anti-war movement. But the pain was redoubled because we felt ourselves largely powerless. No matter how strong our arguments, how thoroughly we demolished the indefensible lies told to support the war, how effectively we elaborated alternatives, or how many hundreds of thousands of demonstrators we brought to Washington, the government kept on escalating and escalating. We were told that one powerful anti-war member of Congress, warned that President Johnson might be tapping his phone, replied, "I hope to hell he is -- I don't seem to be able to get through to him any other way."

SDS, the student movement, and indeed an entire generation went through a rapid radicalization. "US imperialism," from little more than a Communist epithet, became a palpable reality for many. The struggle against US imperialism increasingly became the frame that defined the anti-war movement's worldview. In that context there was an increasing identification with the Vietnamese Communist resistance to US imperialism, and to the struggle of Communist insurgents around the world generally. Che Guevara became an icon and some anti-war demonstrators began carrying Vietcong flags. I remained opposed to Communism as an authoritarian system antithetical to participatory democracy, but such niceties became less and less salient to the movement as a whole.

Meanwhile, we searched desperately for ways to stop the war, or at least to escalate the opposition. From the first draft calls, a small but growing number of young men became draft resistors. Some publicly burned draft cards or refused to show up for induction. Others went underground, many of them eventually making their way to Canada or Sweden. I had little appreciation at that time of the significance of draft resistance. I thought it was too individualistic to develop collective power and too radical to appeal to a mass constituency; even though I was a conscientious objector myself, I thought more in terms of lobbying and electoral politics or mass confrontation. I failed to grasp how such individual moral acts can lead other people to confront their own responsibilities. I also had no idea that, as opposition to the war intensified, what was regarded as treasonous one year might be considered moderate or even patriotic the next.

My blindness is even more striking because I was close to a good example of the power of conscience-based resistance. Marc Raskin at IPS was talking about the Committee of 121, a group of French intellectuals who had caused a sensation in the 1950s by publicly -- and illegally -- supporting draftees who refused to serve in Algeria. I rummaged through my old box of *New Left Reviews* and found an English translation of the original statement. It became a model for a *Call to Resist Illegitimate Authority*, which, by endorsing the criminal act of draft resistance, put its signers at risk of prosecution. (The US government eventually prosecuted Marc and other *Call to Resist* supporters Dr. Benjamin Spock, Rev. William Sloan Coffin, Jr., and Mitchell Goodman, along with draft resistor Michael Ferber, in a highly-publicized Boston show trial.) Marc argued that threatening the legitimacy of the government's authority might make US leaders decide the war was not worth the cost. It was an argument that I would make myself today, but that I didn't even understand at the time.

In 1967, I helped set up "Vietnam Summer," a campaign designed to break out of the campus ghetto by sending students to canvass door-to-door against the war in the way that students had gone door-to-door to register voters in 1964 for "Mississippi Summer." More than 20,000 students participated nationwide.

By that time, GIs and especially veterans returning from Vietnam were turning against the war. Two fingers held up in a V had recently become established as a peace sign, and I remember the thrill and astonishment I felt the first time I saw uniformed soldiers stationed on rooftops during a big antiwar demonstration in Washington give V signs to the protestors marching below. Activists, often with women in the lead, began opening up "GI coffee houses" near military bases so that alienated soldiers would have some place to come, talk, and learn something about their options. Meanwhile, disgruntled vets organized Vietnam Veterans Against the War. The unanticipated emergence of anti-war veterans played a crucial role in undermining the sentiment that peace was unpatriotic.

The most visible expressions of the antiwar movement were annual or semi-annual demonstrations. They grew to fifty thousand, a hundred thousand, and eventually uncountable numbers that may have exceeded a million. They targeted institutions like the Pentagon and the Watergate complex and often involved day-long street battles with police and military. The strategy underlying these confrontations -- represented by the slogan "bring the war home" -- was to create so much domestic disruption that ruling circles would decide to curtail the war to protect their own interests.

In the spring of 1967, local activists around the country organized a "moratorium" to go along with the big national demonstrations. Large numbers of people shut down schools and quite a few left work as part of the proto-general strike.

As public opinion shifted against the war and the millions who participated in the moratoriums became visible as a potential constituency, politicians began to challenge the war in the electoral arena. First a few movement activists ran as peace candidates, mostly as independents or on third party tickets. In 1967 liberal Senator Eugene McCarthy ran for the Democratic presidential nomination as a peace candidate of a sort, followed by the soon-to-be-assassinated Senator Robert Kennedy. But these efforts, and even the capture of the Democratic Party in 1972 for George McGovern, seemed to have little impact on the war.

Ultimately, though with excruciating slowness, the antiwar movement did help bring the war to an end. Growing social tensions did lead those in power to decide the cost of continuing the war was too high. Perhaps the first indication of this came when President Johnson replaced Defense Secretary Robert McNamara with Washington superlawyer Clark Clifford. Clifford made the rounds of his corporate buddies and told Johnson to de-escalate the war. As substantial numbers of soldiers began refusing to fight and even "fragging" officers who ordered them on patrol, the military itself came to fear demoralization of the troops. Above all, the unending stream of body bags led a lot of people to ask the questions – moral and pragmatic – they should have asked to start with.

As Vietnamese General Vo Nguyen Giap had predicted years before in his brilliant analyses of the strategic situation (excerpted periodically in the *New York Times*), the American people, like the French before them, eventually grew unwilling to carry the burden of the war.

At a meeting decades after the US withdrew from Vietnam, US military officers told one of their Vietnamese counterparts, "You never defeated us militarily." The Vietnamese officer replied, "That is true. It is also irrelevant." It could similarly be said that it is true but irrelevant that the peace movement never forced the government to end the war. In the end, it was the opposition of the American people, expressed both in the anti-war movement and myriad other forms, that brought the war to an end.

The end of the war presented an opportunity that anti-war activists were too divided, too disoriented, and too tired to seize. Militarism and anti-Communism were weak and discredited. Major Congressional hearings by the Church committee exposed decades of military and security agency malfeasance. With little help from the left, Congress put significant limits on the FBI, the CIA, the Pentagon, and the imperial presidency.

The antiwar movement left a big legacy, nonetheless. It taught the American people that even for the US there can be such things as unwise wars and unjust wars. It left a residue of skepticism about patriotism and militarism -- what its opponents decried as the "Vietnam syndrome." And it showed that the people can stop a war.

Despite the Vietnam syndrome, since Vietnam the US has been in wars in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Yugoslavia, Somalia, twice in Afghanistan, Kuwait, and Iraq. We have yet to build that movement that can “stop the seventh war from now."

## Conclusion to Part 2: Discovering social movements

Out of my experiences as an activist I began trying to construct an understanding of social movements. I learned that the seemingly romantic idea of isolated, passive people joining together to act in concert is not just a fantasy; I saw it happen over and over again. I learned that when they do they enter a realm of new possibilities. They have a potential power that they lack as individuals. But I found that it is not always obvious how to realize those possibilities and make use of that potential power. And I learned that movements can create new forms of domination and new, sometimes monstrous, problems.

The movements in which I participated in the 1960s were responses to the threat of nuclear war, the injustice of racism, the stultification of democracy, the oppression of women, and the US war against Vietnam. I concluded that it is when people experience some kind of problem that they are likely to form or join social movements. Without such problems, no amount of brilliant strategy or dedicated organizing is likely to create a movement.

Yet I knew all too well that, even when faced with the most devastating problems, people do not automatically or inevitably organize or join social movements. They may try to ignore or deny the problems – as many did with the threat of nuclear war. They may seek individual solutions, for example by acquiescing in racial or gender domination in order to "stay out of trouble." Or – like apathetic "stay-at-home voters" -- they may reject the status quo but simply see no way to challenge it. Such responses reflect the power of existing institutions. They also reflect the extent to which people are separated, isolated, and divided.

As discontents accumulate, however, such acquiescence may become less and less bearable. People may start to articulate their discontent in the milieus in which they live and to discover that others are having similar feelings. I think of my mother in the depths of the Cold War sending out a Christmas letter with a poem about a child who died in Hiroshima.

The accumulation of dissatisfaction can create in individuals a state of readiness – not necessarily conscious -- to join a movement. As in religious conversion as analyzed by William James, the elements of a new approach may already be assembled by an individual internally well before they are expressed overtly.[52] Personal experience and cultural traditions may facilitate or impede such responses; in my case, I'm sure that seeing my family's involvement in the community development effort of the Mountain People in Mahwah, N.J. contributed to my readiness to respond to social problems by joining in concerted action.

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[52] William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1905). See also Francesco Alberoni, *Movement and Institution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984) regarding the "nascent state" that often precedes joining or forming a movement.

I saw the initial coming together of people to form a social movement take diverse forms. Sometimes it crystallized out of a milieu: SNCC and the 1960 student sit-ins emerged from the growing discontent among students at Southern black colleges, for example. Sometimes it arose in response to the behavior of other actors: The movement against the Vietnam war began as a direct response to the military escalation initiated by the Johnson administration.

A movement can also originate as an offshoot of or revolt against an existing group or institution. The National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy was largely formed by peace activists from existing organizations to take advantage of the emerging public concern about nuclear testing. SDS represented both a continuation of and a revolt against its parent the League for Industrial Democracy. The Women's Liberation Movement arose within but also as a protest against SDS and other New Left organizations.

Individuals who are in a state of readiness can rapidly link up with emerging social movements.[53] I "found" the peace movement in a group of marchers on their way to Washington, DC; I found SDS through a leaflet passed out at a demonstration. Thousands "joined" the peace, student, anti-war, and other movements just by seeing a poster or hearing a conversation and showing up at a demonstration or a meeting. Their own motivation was far more important than anybody's "marketing strategy" in getting them there.

Some of these movements, like the civil rights movement that developed in Southern black campuses and communities, drew on a pre-existing constituency that shared an identity and common traditions. Some, like the women's movement, shared an identity, but not one that was already seen as a basis for protest or collective action. Some, like the peace movement, addressed issues that affect everyone, and those who joined the movement cut across a wide range of class, cultural, and other categories.

I was perplexed by the complexity of the relation between problems and constituencies. It was easy to understand, for example, why black students in the South protested racism, but large numbers of whites in the North also joined in, some even sacrificing their lives for the cause. The anti-Vietnam war movement likewise included both highly privileged white college students and highly oppressed African Americans. Working-class women were, by most standards, far more oppressed than middle class women, yet the Women's Liberation Movement was primarily drawn from the middle class. The protest movements of the 1960s were highly concentrated among young people, though whether this was because they were young, or because they were part of the specific "baby boom" generation, or for some other reason, was not obvious. These movements were largely isolated from people whose lives were shaped by family and job responsibilities. No simple mechanical theory, such as class position causing class struggle, seemed able to explain what groups were likely to become part of social movements.

[53] Reference to Alberoni, *Movement and Institution*, on the nascent state to come.

I was also impressed by the fluidity of social movement participation. Well over 100,000 people went through SDS in its short life. Yet in terms of membership, program, strategy, and style it was for practical purposes a new organization every year or two. Impact was fluid, too: The peace movement fluctuated repeatedly between being a negligible force and a power even the superpowers had to reckon with.

Organizationally these movements were often – in fact usually – chaotic. Organizations conflicted and cooperated with each other, split, merged, disappeared, spawned new offshoots, rose and fell, and generally gave the appearance of spectral shape-changers. A great deal of activity was actually coordinated by informal networks that persisted and operated under the aegis of whatever formal organization was currently in favor. I concluded that movements are able to function despite the chaotic character of their formal organizations because their participants' shared activist mentality allows them to coordinate with each other in whatever way seems necessary for the task at hand.

Sociologists such as Max Weber view movements as the product of charismatic leaders. But that was not my experience. The movements that I saw in the 1960s generally had an informal group who served collectively as leaders. Martin Luther King, Jr., was the closest I ever saw to a leader who was followed because of personal charisma. But even King was rarely followed blindly, simply because of who he was. On the contrary, his support was based on his articulation of what his followers wanted him to say and do; he was not too revered to be subject to devastating criticism and even scorn within the movement, often from the very people who participated in actions that he led.

All of the movements created some kind of dialogue about their nature, goals, and strategy. This was conducted in constant informal discussion, in endless meetings, and to a lesser extent in printed position papers, articles, and books. SDS was the only organization that I participated in that conducted a serious on-going formulation of comprehensive positions linking means and ends. But often the theory did more harm than good. SDS's kooky and calamitous decision to abandon leadership of the anti-war movement was driven by a theoretical belief that students were a less important force for social change than an imagined "interracial movement of the poor" to be initiated by student organizing projects in black ghettos.

Movement development was more often shaped by experimental initiatives that worked and were repeated or that failed and were modified or dropped. I remember one of the leaders of the SNCC campaign in Albany, Georgia recounting, "We had no idea what we were doing. We just kept jumping around until we happened to come down on someone's toes and they hollered. That's how we found out who the real power structure was and what kind of pressure would get them to move." Sometimes the movements least guided by theoretical discourse were the most successful.

I was not satisfied with my understanding of how social movements actually make change. The movements of the 1960s talked a great deal about power, but we didn't have much conception of what it was or where it came from. Then-trendy phrases like Mao's "Power grows from the barrel of a gun" were not much help. Initially there was some

attempt to analyze the structures within which power was rooted, such as the alliance of Southern white supremacists and Northern business interests; later "class analysis" of a sort became all the rage, but it took a crude form ungrounded in the experience and situation of real people.

Various paradigms of change jostled each other in these movements and even within the minds of individual participants. Change might come through electoral democracy or through class-based revolution. It might result from changes in values and culture or from threats to the legitimacy of "the system." Some hoped might simply result from protest itself.

I learned that movements might come to a bad end. The experience of Leninism and of American trade unions already provided a warning that social movements could result not in liberation but in bureaucracy and softer or harder forms of domination. In a few short years SDS went from participatory democracy to farcical parodies of Leninist centralism. I wished for, but did not have, a better explanation for such phenomena than bad leaders who simply grew power hungry or "sold out."

I also saw that social movements could lead to new and destructive conflicts and polarizations. A major unintended effect of the radical movements of the 60s was to turn much of the white working class to the right. They became the base for a "backlash" against women's, black, and anti-war movements that was eagerly exploited in the 1968 Presidential campaigns of Alabama governor George Wallace and Richard Nixon -- and that provided a base for right wing domination of US politics for decades to come. My experience with social movements made me acutely concerned that they could lead to new forms of domination and conflict – and led me to seek ways that movements could forestall such results.

All these problems notwithstanding, I saw the movements of the sixties make significant change. The peace movement was largely responsible for the banning of nuclear testing, the establishment of détente, and indirectly for the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe and the end of the Cold War. The civil rights movement ended legally enforced segregation, greatly expanded African American political representation, largely ended the system of lynching based racial terrorism, and laid the groundwork for the election of an African American as President of the United States. The movement against the war in Vietnam helped bring the war to a close; its legacy was a "Vietnam syndrome" that provided a significant if inadequate brake on subsequent US interventionism. The impact of the women's liberation movement in the US and worldwide is too vast and varied even to summarize. Each of these movements also left as a legacy a widely diffused knowledge of how to form and conduct social movements. If these movements failed, we should all aspire to such failure.

My experience in the movements of the 1960s left me full of questions and hungry for answers. Participating in and trying to understand and improve social movements became a passion and an on-going project. But I knew that we were far from adequate solutions to war, injustice, and other threats. I struggled with the problems of program,

goals, strategy, and organization.  That led me to pursue historical and social research that went beyond the movements with which I was personally involved.

# PART 3: DISCOVERING WORKERS POWER

## Introduction to Part 3: Discovering workers power

By 1970, I felt "between two worlds, one dying, the other powerless to be born." Like many others from the New Left, I felt that participatory democracy as we had envisioned it was inadequate for a world of rampant imperialism and repression where even representative democracy was little more than a sham.

I felt wholeheartedly that we needed a revolution. But in contrast to many of my contemporaries, I continued to reject the various Leninist versions of communism as authoritarian travesties of liberation. I sought instead to extend participatory democracy into a revolutionary theory. And I sought to expand its base from the world of student activism to the majority of the US population.

That quest led me to the working class. I immersed myself in the intellectual traditions of working class radicalism. I pored over old leftwing journals. I studied Marx and a variety of Marxists. I read Lenin and Mao, but I was repelled by the whole idea of a vanguard party as a "transmission belt" inculcating socialist consciousness in the masses. I discovered an alternative Marxist tradition that included Rosa Luxemburg and such lesser known figures as Anton Pannekoek and Paul Mattick who advocated a participatory democracy-like system of workers councils as an alternative to the Leninist idea of a vanguard party creating a revolutionary state.

I also tried to make these ideas relevant in practice. I worked with a small group to put out a homemade radical journal called *Root & Branch* and a book called *Root & Branch: The Rise of the Workers' Movements*. I tried rather absurdly to spread the 1970 wildcat postal strike to other government workers and to push the huge anti-Vietnam War "Moratorium" in the direction of a general strike.

Alongside such theoretical and activist excursions, I began discovering the actual history of the American working class. I uncovered a rarely told story of mass revolts and upheavals rooted less in formal institutions like unions and political parties than in informal workgroups and communities.

I wrote a controversial book called *Strike!* to tell that story, using as my guide the ideas I had gleaned from the intellectual traditions of working class radicalism. *Strike!* was less a conventional work of labor history than an attempt to address questions about social change that both old and New Left had failed to answer to my satisfaction. In contrast to both mainstream and conventional leftwing approaches, *Strike!* focused on ordinary working people's own activity. It viewed unions and political parties as vehicles they sometimes used, sometimes circumvented or even opposed, for their own purposes. It tried to find underlying patterns in the periods of what I called "mass strike." It proposed pushing those patterns past their previous limits as a way to create a new society.

Part 3 presents what I learned from this engagement. In my writings of that time I incorporated as much as I could of what I found valuable both in American labor history and in the intellectual traditions of working class radicalism. But I also incorporated some of the flaws of that tradition -- flaws I have been trying ever since to correct without throwing out what is valid and compelling. Part 3 discusses those flaws and the way I tried to overcome them.

"Great upheavals" tells how I first discovered the hidden history of mass strikes in America. "If they can do it, why can't we?" portrays the little-known labor upheaval of the late 1960s and early 1970s, focusing in on the massive 1970 postal wildcat and an effort to spread it to other government workers. "General strike against war?" describes an effort to move the massive anti-Vietnam war Moratorium toward a general strike.

"Strike!" portrays the conditions in the US at the end of the 1960s that made me decide to write a book on American mass strikes. "Sit-down" recounts the wave of sit-down strikes that spread across America in the mid 1930s as an illustration of many of the common features of mass strikes. "Interpreting mass strikes" describes the sources I found to guide me as I struggled to understand what mass strikes were all about.

"Class and power: The keys to the workshop" describes the process by which the majority of Americans came to be separated from the means of production and therefore dependent on the tiny minority who control them, and how this left most people powerless and constrained to work for the employing class. "Workers power" describes how employers and society, in turn, were dependent on workers as a group, providing workers collectively with vast potential power.

"The workgroup: 'A guerrilla band at war with management'" analyzes how informal workgroups form the "cell units" of mass strikes as workers develop from isolated individuals to members of a social group. "'Whatever happened to the unions?'" discusses the origins of unions and the emergence of conflict between them and rank-and-file workgroups. "Spreading by contagion" portrays the process by which mass strikes move beyond the limits of individual workplaces and cross the boundaries that normally divide workers from each other.

I identified three crucial processes that regularly emerged within mass strikes. "The challenge to authority" describes mass strikes as resistance movements. "Solidarity" tells how mass strikes embody the formation of new social bonds. "Self-management" recounts the tendency toward worker control of productive activities that emerges within mass strikes.

The underlying ideas I was developing about social change are explored in "You say you want a revolution?" "Beyond reductionism: My critique of *Strike!*" recounts how I came to recognize the flaws in some of those ideas. "Beyond *Strike!*" tells how I tried to

correct some of the flaws in my thinking in three subsequent books on the American working class.[54]

Today, I find much of my work from this period marked by a kind of monomania in which everything in the world is reduced to class relations, and by a more general kind of misplaced reductionism manifested as a tin ear for complexity and interaction. Nonetheless, my study of mass strikes gave me my first rough answers to how people come together in response to shared problems, how by doing so they increase their power to affect their conditions, and how their movements can come to be a new source of oppression.

Since then I've tried to expand those answers beyond the narrow confines of class and to ground them in a less reductive heuristic. But what I learned from studying workers power helped provide a starting point for understanding the broader problems of common preservation.

[54] Root & Branch, eds., *Root & Branch: The Rise of the Workers' Movements* (New York: Fawcett, 1975); Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello, *Common Sense for Hard Times* (New York: Two Continents/IPS, 1976); Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello, *Building Bridges: The Emerging Grassroots Coalition of Labor and Community* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990).

## Great upheavals

In a Reed college history survey course in 1965 I heard a brief mention of some big strikes in late 19th century America. I was intrigued and started looking in the college library for books on labor history. There was a short shelf of them, few less than 25 years old. This was before the rise of what came to be known as the "new labor history." E.P. Thompson's revelatory and immensely influential *The Making of the English Working Class*[55] had just been published in England, but the news had not yet reached Portland, Oregon. Labor history was a tiny field, preoccupied with an "institutional approach" that took the history of individual trade unions and the evolution of collective bargaining as its primary subject matter.

Then in a secondhand bookstore I picked up *1877: Year of Violence*[56] by Robert V. Bruce. It sported a lurid jacket with a railroad depot ablaze in bright yellow flames. It told a story that amazed me, and one that I was equally amazed that I had never heard before. It described what was seen at the time as a violent rebellion in which strikers seized and closed the nation's most important industry, the railroads, and crowds defeated or won over first the police, then the state militias, and in some cases even the federal troops. General strikes brought work to a standstill in a dozen major cities and strikers took over authority in communities across the nation.

On July 16, 1877, after years of depression, the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad cut wages by ten percent. In the little town of Martinsburg, West Virginia railroad workers hung around the yards all day, talking. Finally, a crew walked off a cattle train. Other workers refused to replace them, and the crowd announced that no trains would leave Martinsburg till the pay cut was rescinded. The mayor, after conferring with railroad officials, ordered the police to arrest the apparent leaders. They just laughed at him -- backed up by an angry crowd. By next day, hundreds gathered to help halt the trains. The governor, after meeting with railroad officials, ordered in the state guard. A striker shot a militiaman and in turn was fatally shot. Workers refused orders to run a train, and the colonel of the guard telegraphed the governor that he was helpless to control the situation.

With this confrontation began the Great Upheaval of 1877, a spontaneous, nationwide, quasi-general strike. The pattern of Martinsburg -- a railroad strike in response to a pay cut, an attempt by the companies to run trains with the support of military forces, the defeat or dissolution of those forces by crowds representing general popular support -- became over the course of a week the pattern for the nation.

President Rutherford B. Hayes sent Federal troops into Martinsburg to suppress what his Secretary of War called an "insurrection," but already the movement was outflanking its opponents. A crowd of 15,000 thronged the railroad depot in Baltimore, blocking all trains; the militia killed ten of them, but the crowds continued the blockade. In Pittsburgh, crowds battled the militia until the militiamen disbanded and slunk away. The crowd burned the railroad yards, destroying 100 locomotives and 2000 railroad cars.

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[55] E.P Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage, 1963).
[56] Robert V. Bruce, *1877: Year of Violence* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1959).

The strike and accompanying crowd action spread to Buffalo, New York; Reading, Pennsylvania; Newark, Ohio; Chicago, Illinois; Marshall, Texas; and many more points nationwide. In several cities, the movement became a general strike. In Columbus, Ohio, for example, a crowd calling "shut up or burn" successfully called out workers at a rolling mill, pipe works, fire clay works, pot works, and planing mill. In Galveston, black longshoremen struck and won pay equal to that of whites; other black workers struck for a $2 per day minimum wage; white workers joined the strike and $2.00 became the going wage for Galveston. In St. Louis, Missouri, a shadowy "Executive Committee" organized a general strike, closed down almost all of the city's industry, and authorized strikers to run passenger trains and collect fares under their own authority.

Federal troops were rushed from city to city quelling what the government declared an "insurrection." Ultimately, President Rutherford B. Hayes noted emphatically in his diary, "The strikers" were "put down by *force*." More than 100 of them were killed in the process.

I gradually discovered that there had been other periods of what mainstream labor historian Irving Bernstein described as "strikes and social upheavals of extraordinary importance, drama, and violence which ripped the cloak of civilized decorum from society, leaving exposed naked class conflict."[57] I of course had heard about the sit-down strikes and the great CIO organizing campaigns of the 1930s, though there was actually very little historical writing about them available in the 1960s. I had heard of the "Haymarket riots," but I didn't know that more than half a million workers struck in 1886, many of them in a nationwide general strike for the eight-hour day. I had heard of strike leader and Socialist presidential candidate Eugene Victor Debs, but I didn't know anything about the huge strikes in all basic industries -- steel, coal, and railroads -- in the mid-1890s. Nor did I know anything about the big strike waves during and after World War I and World War II. And I couldn't find a single book or article dealing with such periods as a general phenomenon, nor a single book or article besides Robert Bruce's even dealing with one such period as a whole.

As I dug further, I began to piece together a picture of repeated, massive, and often violent revolts by American workers. The story included virtually nation-wide general strikes, the seizure of vast industrial establishments, nonviolent direct action on a massive scale, guerrilla warfare, and armed battles with artillery and aircraft.

Such actions called up for me a vision of how ordinary people might liberate themselves from those who oppressed them. They showed people who had been divided and apparently powerless coming together for what I would later call common preservation. It showed them confronting and sometimes defeating the greatest powers in the land. Could that story, I wondered, still be relevant?

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[57] Irving Bernstein, *Turbulent Years: A History of the American Worker 1933-1941* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970), p. 217.

## If they can do it, why can't we?

Although it was not widely recognized then or since, the late 1960s and early 1970s was a period of heightened class conflict in the US that had many elements in common with the mass strikes of the preceding hundred years. In 1969-70, for example, Teamsters on a wildcat strike battled national guardsmen throughout the Midwest; an illegal wildcat strike closed the entire US Post Office; and 42,000 coal miners closed the West Virginia minefields for 23 days in a political strike that forced the state legislature to pass a law to compensate miners with black lung disease.

Labor upheavals were happening in many other countries as well. In 1968, French workers occupied their factories and closed down much of the country for a month. 1970 saw a "hot summer" of militant labor struggles in Italy. Poland, Czechoslovakia, Britain, and other countries saw mass strikes in the same period. While detailed information and worthwhile analysis were hard to come by in that pre-Internet era, my friends and I followed these developments as best we could; our little homemade journal *Root & Branch* published a study of the French occupations and through students of David Montgomery I had a chance to meet some of the young Italian militants. These events and discussions influenced the way I viewed American mass strikes and helped persuade me that their history might still be relevant.

The largest of the US strikes was a national wildcat of postal workers. Working with the writer and activist Stanley Aronowitz, I closely followed the strike, wrote about it for *Root & Branch*,[58] and tried to become involved in spreading it.

The strike had its origin in the conditions postal workers faced. A government study in 1968 reported "widespread disquiet" among postal workers as a result of "antiquated personnel practices," "appalling working conditions," and "limited career opportunities."[59] The disquiet finally exploded in New York City, where high living costs forced many postal workers onto welfare to supplement incomes eroded by the inflation of the late 1960s. After several small wildcats and "sick-outs," letter carriers voted to strike May 17, 1970 and set up picket lines around the city's post offices. Twenty-five thousand drivers and clerks honored the picket lines, bringing postal operations to a halt. Within two days the strike had been joined by workers throughout New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. The strikers organized themselves through informal channels; within two days the New York local said it had received phone calls from letter carriers in 589 communities saying they would join the strike.

It was a felony for government employees to strike, and the courts quickly issued an injunction against the New York strikers. The head of the national letter carriers union

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[58] Jeremy Brecher and Stanley Aronowitz, "Notes on the Postal Strike," *Root & Branch* 1 (June, 1970) p. 1-5, reprinted in *Root & Branch: The Rise of the Workers' Movements*. See also *Strike!,* 1997 edition, pp. 257-61.

[59] President's Commission on Postal Organization, headed by Frederich R. Kappel, quoted in *Wall Street Journal*, March 19, 1970.

sent a telegram to the head of the New York local threatening to expel the local; the local president then urged members to return to work. Meanwhile the Postmaster General made a deal with postal union leaders to "urge their striking workers back to work in return for prompt consideration of their demands." But 6,000 workers in Chicago, the postal system's central hub, voted to join the strike. Next day New York postal workers voted to defy their leaders and the back-to-work agreement. "Branding their national union leaders 'rats' and 'creeps' for urging a return to work, the rank and file . . . roared their refusal to accept the proposed settlement."[60] By March 21, the strike had spread to more than 200 cities and towns nationwide. Despite pleas from the seven major postal unions, more than 200,000 postal workers in fifteen states ultimately joined the wildcat.

Even more alarming to government and union officials, the strike seemed on the verge of spreading to other public employees. The head of one national government union reported he had to intervene personally to prevent several strikes in his locals. Another said his locals throughout the country wanted to strike in support of the postal workers. "The strike definitely could spread throughout the Federal Service." Another top union official said that "tremendous pressure" was being put on the union to authorize strikes, especially in "one of our biggest locals whose primary duty is to supply our war effort in Southeast Asia."

> We have been receiving phone calls from our various local presidents in various agencies throughout the government and throughout the country. They have watched events of the past days and have seen postal workers striking with a degree of impunity, and their question to us is, if they can do it, why can't we?

A handful of radicals in Washington, DC (calling ourselves the "Ad Hoc Committee of Government Employees to Support the Strike" -- which most of us were not) passed out a leaflet headlined "If They Did It, Why Can't We?"

> The New York postal strikers have suddenly shown how much power government workers have -- if they will use it. Now the decision to support and spread the strike is up to you. It is up to you whether you will use the power you have -- or lose it.
>
> If the strike is defeated, Congress will act to punish postal workers, and make future action impossible for all government workers, taking away those few rights they now possess. The only way government employees can defend their own interests is to broaden the strike.
>
> Only by using their power can they even protect their own living standards. The proposed 5.7% pay increase for government classified employees is not enough to offset current inflation -- especially in a high cost-of-living area like Washington.
>
> Government workers in all areas are poised on the edge of joining the strike. But they will have to do it on their own, the way the postal workers did it in New

[60] *Washington Post*, March 22, 1970.

> York -- they cannot wait for the unions. The unions have already shown they will not call a strike -- they are afraid of government higher-ups.
>
> Talk with people in your work unit. Then send somebody around to sound out others about it. Only by such democratic discussion can government workers decide if they really want to strike -- not by waiting for orders from above.[61]

Not surprisingly, our call did not provoke a general strike of government employees. We heard from the grapevine that it was passed out and discussed in a number of government offices, that a few people did in fact walk out (not necessarily as a result of our leaflet), and that a few people were disciplined for one or the other act.

Meanwhile, President Lyndon Johnson declared a national emergency and ordered 25,000 U.S. Army and National Guard troops into New York to break the strike at its most militant point. Strikers responded that "You can't sort mail with bayonets." Many soldiers fraternized with strikers and deliberately created chaos inside post offices to support them.

Though the administration maintained that it would not negotiate until the postal workers returned to work, congressional leaders pledged that they would act immediately on pay increases as soon as the strike was over. A meeting of 500 local union officials agreed to end the strike but ordered their union president to call a new national strike unless their demands were quickly met. As negotiations began, the New York local constantly threatened to trigger another strike and even called a rump meeting of local leaders throughout the country to discuss plans for a coordinated slowdown. Congress granted an immediate 6% pay increase to all government workers and an additional 8% for postal workers.

The 1970 postal wildcat presented a very different picture from the conventional story of unions and strikes, but it fit with many of the patterns I was finding in the history of mass strikes. It emerged unexpectedly. It seemed to be rooted not in the initiative of organizers or pre-anointed leaders, but in workers' daily life problems and experience. Workers organized themselves and acted on their own. They reached out to each other across institutional, geographic, and sub-cultural boundaries. They had to confront and resist their own established union leaders. They made use of their ability to halt production to exercise power vis-à-vis their direct employer and even the US government. They had to stand up against government repression, up to and including the US Army. When they did so they acquired the power to change their lives.

My puny efforts to spread the strike were surely ill-conceived, but they grew out of a passionate desire to find a way to expand that power.

[61] Flyer in author's possession.

## General strike against war?

The first "teach-in" at the University of Michigan in 1965 had originally been conceived as a "moratorium" in which students and teachers would stay away from classes as a protest against the war. The moratorium idea continued to percolate. As opposition to the war grew, anti-war activists initiated the idea of a nationwide "Moratorium." Initially conceived as a general strike against the war, it was watered down to more conventional protests by leaders who, as the *New York Times* put it, "liked the idea of political action but not the threat of a strike." On October 15, 1969, millions of people around the world participated in the first "Vietnam Moratorium." A month later an estimated half-million people protested against the war in Washington, D.C., while millions back home participated in local Moratorium activities. Organizers announced plans to make the local Moratorium a regular monthly protest.

I wrote an article for *Liberation*[62] magazine and promulgated a few flyers proposing to move the Moratorium movement toward a series of general strikes. I argued that this would give the people some actual power to stop the war, something that other techniques, from draft resistance to electoral opposition to demonstrations, did not seem to provide. (I had support in this effort from Dave Dellinger, who even paid for one of the flyers.)

The *Liberation* article criticized three tendencies in the anti-war movement. One was the innocent hope that the expression of anti-war sentiment in itself would somehow sway the government to change its course. I noted that a Gallup Poll showed that a bill to withdraw all U.S. troops from Vietnam within a year was supported nearly two-to-one, but that the war went on nonetheless.

The second was to move opposition into the electoral arena, continuing the 1968 Kennedy-McCarthy movement. Such a strategy failed to recognize that the real power over government action didn't lie in electoral bodies, and that "peace candidates" had repeatedly turned out to be largely opportunistic.

The third was an escalation of confrontation "in the streets." Such confrontation didn't offer any way of actually taking control of the country. But, "Since confrontation can always be interpreted as a deliberate provocation of violence, it plays directly into the hands of the authorities, who through their control of the press can make even a non-violent confrontation appear a deliberate act of violence." Confrontationists would either try to make future Moratoriums more militant or generate confrontations through separate demonstrations and organizations. "The result will be a tendency toward splitting of the movement, falling off of mass support, new vulnerability to government attack, and no doubt a few concussions."

[62] Jeremy Brecher, "The Vietnam Moratorium," *Liberation Magazine*, December, 1969.

All these tendencies were rooted in the idea that real power to stop the war lay in Washington. But it was not the government officials in Washington who did the work and fought the wars. "Rather, it is the people – the same people who support two-to-one the withdrawal of all U.S. troops from Vietnam. If they refuse to work – if they strike – the war must end." To end the war, "the Moratorium must more and more become a general strike against the war. It is here that the real power of the movement lies, not in playing politics or playing with violence."

Throughout the country, workplace committees had sprung up spontaneously to coordinate participation in the Moratorium demonstrations. In New York, for example, Moratorium committees were formed by employees in each of the major newspapers, T.V. stations, and publishing houses; in Boston, by secretaries and lab workers at M.I.T.; in Washington, D.C., by workers in various government agencies. I proposed that war opponents form such workplace organizations wherever they could:

> Set up a Moratorium or strike committee where you work. Coordinate directly with other workplace organizations. Organize teach-ins, educational meetings, and participation in Moratorium-day demonstrations among your co-workers. Move these actions as rapidly as possible toward mass walkouts.

It was not to be. After the second Moratorium, the national leadership of the movement simply shut down its office and told people to focus on "local organizing." Soon many of its leaders resurfaced in campaigns for candidates in the 1970 congressional elections. As I had feared, the anti-war movement polarized between electoral and street action.

While my initiative had some plausibility in the hothouse political climate of the time (*Time* headlined its cover story on the Moratorium "Strike against the War") my proposal for a general strike was completely abstract. I had little concept of smaller, more concrete actions that might build in that direction; of intermediate targets where mass pressure might force institutions to withdraw support from the war; or of how to link varied interests to broaden support for such actions. I lacked "feedback loops" that could have allowed my abstract ideas to be corrected by concrete reality and the perspectives of other people. As a country song wryly puts it, "Oh, To Be Sixteen Again and Know What I Know Now"!

## Strike!

As we agonized over how to end the war in Vietnam, I often talked about the story of mass upheavals I was piecing together from American labor history. Finally one day Marcus Raskin at the Institute for Policy Studies told me it was time to stop talking about it and start writing. He got me a book contract with a publishing company being set up by *Rolling Stone* magazine and I went to work on a book that I originally called *Mass Strike in America* that Straight Arrow Books published under the provocative title *Strike!*.

While *Strike!* was ostensibly a work of history and described past events in considerable detail, it was driven by an effort to find underlying historical patterns that might help guide action in the present – a "presentism" that more conventional historians often condemn. Indeed, it was written out of pressing political concerns:

In the struggle against the Vietnam War, we had won the public debate, helped persuade the majority of Americans to oppose the war, mobilized millions of people to act, and engaged in massive confrontations with the forces of authority. Yet we didn't seem to have power to stop the war. The mass strikes of the past, whether successful or not, seemed like laboratories in how ordinary people had organized themselves at the grassroots and then used their collective power to contest the power of those who ruled them. I wanted to know what lessons we could learn from them.

Young workers and above all military veterans returning from Vietnam were challenging management authority in American factories. Yet there was more hostility than mutual support between this workplace resistance and the movements opposing the war and making a more general critique of capitalism and imperialism. I wanted to help form a junction between working class discontent and the New Left, to reduce the elitist anti-worker sentiment that permeated the New Left, and at the same time to help rehabilitate the traditions of working class radicalism. I saw the history of mass strikes as a medium for all those purposes.

In the late 1960s, the New Left had largely lost its compass. Participatory democracy had been a productive idea, but the dialogue around it in SDS hadn't gone very far. I wanted to extend it to the sphere of production -- the workplace. And I wanted to envision a far deeper, indeed revolutionary, social change that would replace existing power centers with forms of popular self-management. But I wanted to find a way that revolutionary social change could empower ordinary working people rather than new elites – including elites spawned by the Leninist organizations to which many New Leftists were then turning. I hoped that the history of mass strikes might illuminate the way.

In the Introduction to an early account of the 1936-7 sit-down strikes in Flint, Michigan, two union leaders observed that there was "an iron curtain between the people and their past" designed to deny "the sense of strength and direction for the future" that history

could provide to "the millions of men and women who labor for their living."[63] Since that time, there has been a great expansion of labor history and the histories of other oppressed groups, notably women, African Americans, other racially-defined minorities. But the "iron curtain" separating Americans from the history of their working class revolts has by no means been lifted. A student today who hears about the Great Upheaval and consults the *Encarta Encyclopedia*, for example, will learn no more than that "In the railroad workers' strike of 1877, federal troops had to be used to restore order."[64] *Strike!* aimed to break down that iron curtain.

In 1970 I left Washington, D.C. and went back to my family home in Connecticut to write *Strike!*. I was hardly well prepared for the task. I had taken only one brief American history course in college and I had never even met a real live labor historian until after *Strike!* was completed. Nonetheless, I resolved not to go anywhere -- except the stacks of the Yale Library -- till it was done.

[63] George F. Addes and R.J. Thomas, "Introduction," in Henry Kraus, *The Many and the Few* (Los Angeles: Plantin Press, 1947).
[64] "Trade Unions in the United States." *Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2001.* © 1993-2000 Microsoft Corporation.

## Sit-down

I had heard since childhood of the great sit-down strikes of the 1930s. I even knew a song about them:

"When they tie a can to a union man
Sit down! sit down!
When you want the boss to come across
Sit down! sit down!
Sit down, just have a seat
Sit down, and rest your feet
Sit down, you've got 'em beat
Sit down! Sit down!"[65]

I had always heard the sit-downs described as the action of unions to win recognition from American corporations. But as I began to discover long-forgotten first-person accounts of the sitdowns from people like the immigrant worker and writer Louis Adamic,[66] the Akron *Beacon-Journal* reporter Ruth McKenney,[67] the auto union publicist Henry Kraus,[68] and the *New York Times* labor journalist A.H. Raskin, a very different picture began to emerge. The actual origin and history of the sit-down strike wave of the 1930s illustrates how the story of mass strikes I was uncovering differed from conventional accounts of American labor. It also illustrates what I was learning from my study of labor history about what today I would call the emergence of common preservation.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, a huge industrial zone devoted to autos, auto parts, and tires developed in the American Midwest. Millions of workers from the American South and around the world poured into cities like Detroit, Flint, and Cleveland. With the coming of the Great Depression of the 1930s, these industrial centers suffered mass unemployment, job insecurity, and intense speed-up at work. Workers who had made relatively good wages during the boom years of the 1920s found themselves working to the point of exhaustion for less than it took to live on.

Competing with each other for jobs and divided by ethnicity and race, workers seemed to have little choice but to accept the conditions they faced. A worker in the rubber capital of America, Akron, Ohio, wrote to the local paper, "Only our machines are alive. We must treat them with respect or they turn against us." The previous week, he wrote, a mill had swallowed one worker's hand and part of his arm. "The mills stopped only long enough for us to pull him out, and then they resumed their steady turn." He concluded fatalistically, "We've nothing to look forward to. We're factory hands."

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[65] "Sit Down" by Maurice Sugar, 1937.
[66] Louis Adamic, *My America, 1928-1938* (New York, Harper, 1939).
[67] Ruth McKinney, *Industrial Valley* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1939).
[68] Henry Kraus, *The Many and the Few* (Los Angeles: Plantin, 1947).

Akron workers did have common problems and to some extent a common identity as rubber workers. They did try to organize unions, but they met severe obstacles. Those who were identified as union activists were often summarily fired. Ethnic and racial conflict blocked cooperation. Above all, unaccountable union leaderships repeatedly threatened to strike, then signed agreements with rubber companies that left intolerable labor conditions unchanged. In the wake of one such agreement, union membership in Akron's Summit County dropped from 40,000 to 5,000.

Then workers in Akron developed a new tactic – halting work and sitting down in the workplace – which they themselves could directly control without need for any outside leaders. When writer Louis Adamic visited Akron in 1936 and asked how the sit-downs had begun, he was told that the first had occurred not in a rubber factory but at a baseball game. During one of the periods of union upsurge, players from two factories refused to play because the umpire was not a union man. They simply sat down on the diamond while the crowd yelled for a union umpire until the non-union umpire was replaced.

Not long after, a dispute developed between a dozen rubber workers and their supervisor. The workers turned off their machines and sat down. Production throughout the highly integrated plant ground to a halt. What had happened, other workers wanted to know. "There was a sit-down at such-and-such a department. A sit-down? Yeah, a sit-down; don't you know what a sit-down is, you dope? Like what happened at the ball game the other Sunday." In less than an hour, the dispute was settled with victory for the workers.

As Adamic described the response, "Sitting by their machines, cauldrons, boilers, and work benches, they talked. Some realized *for the first time* how important they were in the process of rubber production. Twelve men had practically stopped the works. Any dozen or score of them could do it!"

According to Adamic, the sit-downs established connections and broke down barriers among what had been a fragmented mass of workers. "The sit-down is a social affair. Sitting workers talk. They get acquainted." One Goodyear gum-miner told Adamic, Why, my God, man, during the sit-downs last spring I found out that the guy who works next to me is the same as I am, even if I was born in West Virginia and he is from Poland. His grievances are the same. Why shouldn't we stick?"

Between 1933 and 1936 the sit-down gradually became a tradition in Akron. It became an accepted norm that when one group of workers stopped work, everyone else along the line sat down too. Some sit-downs closed entire factory complexes. Fear of the sit-downs eventually helped pressure rubber company managements to recognize the United Rubber Workers Union.

The Akron sit-downs became the inspiration for similar actions elsewhere. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, nearly 400,000 U.S. workers engaged in sit-downs in 1937 – not counting innumerable "quickies" of less than a day. In Flint, Michigan a huge sit-down closed much of General Motors and forced it to recognize the United Auto Workers Union. The idea spread like wildfire. Sit-downs occurred not only in factories but in

stores, restaurants, hospitals, government offices, state legislatures, prisons, high schools, and movie theaters. The threat of the sit-down eventually helped persuade bitterly anti-union employers in rubber, steel, auto, and other industries to recognize unions -- out of fear of something worse.

Workers continued using sit-downs in auto and other plants even after the unions won recognition. But the unions did everything they could to stop them. A *New York Times* article entitled "Unauthorized Sit-Downs Fought by C.I.O. Unions" reported that, "As soon as an unauthorized strike occurs or impends, international officers or representatives of the U.A.W. are rushed to the scene to end or prevent it, get the men back to work and bring about an orderly adjustment of the grievances." Organizers and representatives were informed that they would be dismissed "if they authorize any stoppages of work without the consent of the international officers." "Hot-heads" and "trouble-makers" were "purged." According to the *Times*, the continuing sitdowns were due in part to "dissatisfaction on the part of the workers with the union itself," making them "as willing in some cases to defy their own leaders as their bosses."

A spokesperson explained the C.I.O.'s opposition to sitdowns: "The first experience of the C.I.O. with sit-downs was in discouraging them. This was in the Akron rubber industry." C.I.O. representatives cautioned the new unionists against sit-downs on the grounds that "they should use such channels for negotiating grievances as the agreement provided." He added, "When collective bargaining is fully accepted, union recognition accorded and an agreement reached, C.I.O. unionists accept full responsibility for carrying out their side of it in a disciplined fashion, and oppose sit-downs or any other strike action while it is in force." C.I.O. President John L. Lewis was even more blunt: "A C.I.O. contract is adequate protection against sit-downs, lie-downs, or any other kind of strike."

While every mass strike has a different history, they also have a family resemblance. The sit-down strike wave of the 1930s – like the Great Upheaval of 1877 -- illustrates some of these common patterns. Its roots lay in the conditions, experiences, and traditions of rank-and-file workers. In the course of their daily lives they discovered the conditions and common interests they shared. Small struggles and rebellions revealed the power they could develop by acting together. These tended to spread to larger and larger groups of workers. In each case the movement was met by a combination of repression, concession, and cooptation.

When *Strike!* was written, the great American auto, rubber, and steel industries from which the sit-downs emerged were still in place and their workers were still a significant power, organized informally in the workplace and formally in unions, with continuing tension between the two as revealed by the wildcat strikes of the era. Since then, vertically and horizontally integrated national corporations that can be brought to a standstill by factory occupations have been transformed into global corporations that can move their operations all over the world to escape recalcitrant workers; unions have been reduced to a tiny fraction of the workplace and informal workgroups have been disrupted by the expansion of contingent work. If there are mass strikes in America in the future

they will be as different from the sit-downs of the 1930s as the sit-downs were from the Great Upheaval of 1877.

If there are lessons to be learned for today from experiences like this one, they are not just about industrial class struggle, but about the wider process of self-organization and social change. The sit-downs still reveal the capacity of people who are disorganized and divided to join together for common preservation. And they still reveal the power of the apparently powerless when they make use of the dependence of the powerful on them.

## Interpreting mass strikes

What was I to make of the incredible strike stories I was uncovering in dusty history books, moldering newspapers, and tattered archival documents? As I assembled the story of American mass strikes from the bits and pieces I tracked down in the library, I found little in the way of an interpretive tradition to draw on to understand it. Conventional academic labor history largely ignored mass strikes or treated them as irrational aberrations on the way to orderly collective bargaining.

Left historians held a surprisingly similar view, focusing on the organization of unions and political movements more than on what workers themselves were doing. A collection of self-styled "New Left" historical writings published in 1969 had only one essay dealing with the industrial working class, "Urbanization, Migration and Social Mobility in Late 19th Century America." It concluded, without the slightest reference to the three great periods of mass strike in late 19th century America, that "what stands out most is the relative absence of collective working-class protest aimed at reshaping capitalist society."[69]

I scratched around for whatever guidance I could find. It was a crucial breakthrough when I discovered Rosa Luxemburg's short book *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions*. Drawing on the Russian Revolution of 1905 and other class struggles in Europe, Luxemburg developed the concept of the "mass strike." The mass strike, she emphasized, signifies not just a single act but a whole period of class struggle:

> Its use, its effects, its reasons for coming about are in a constant state of flux. . . . political and economic strikes, united and partial strikes, defensive strikes and combat strikes, general strikes of individual sections of industry and general strikes of entire cities, peaceful wage strikes and street battles, uprisings with barricades -- all run together and run along side each other, get in each other's way, overlap each other; a perpetually moving and changing sea of phenomena.[70]

That sounded a whole lot like what I was discovering.

I found other, largely forgotten traditions from the radical working class movement that were also of some help. Anton Pannekoek was a Dutch astronomer and Marxist theorist whom Lenin had once celebrated -- but subsequently excoriated in a pamphlet called *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*. He had worked with Luxemburg and

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[69] Stephen Thernstrom, "Urbanization, Migration, and Social Mobility in Late Nineteenth-Century America," in Barton J. Bernstein, ed., *Toward a New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History* (New York: Vintage, 1969) pp. 172-3.

[70] Rosa Luxemburg, "The Mass Strike, the Political Party, and the Trade Unions," in *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970) p. 182.

continued developing similar ideas for decades after her assassination; his book *Workers' Councils*[71] provided many of the ideas I appropriated.

Pannekoek viewed both Leninist and social democratic parties as attempts to replace capitalism with rule by a new elite. He saw trade unions as organizations created by workers to meet their needs; but their function as means to reach agreement with employers tended to turn them into vehicles for subordinating workers to old or new elites. Workers fought their subordination both to employers and to their own unions through wildcat strikes and other forms of action they controlled themselves.

Pannekoek portrayed the strike committees and other organizations that workers improvise in the course of wildcat strikes as a form of democratic control that could become the nucleus of a society genuinely ruled by rank and file workers themselves. He advocated a revolutionary process in which workers, coordinating their action through such organs, would take control of production, begin to produce on their own behalf, and disarm and disband the expropriated employers' agents of violence and repression.

Pannekoek's approach drew on the organizations known variously as soviets, factory councils, or workers councils that sprang up in Russia, Germany, Italy, Britain, and elsewhere at the close of World War I. They were composed of representatives of workers from different local factories, who then periodically sent delegates to wider regional and national councils. They served both to coordinate workers' struggles and, in many places where owners and managers had fled or been driven out, took over control of production and civil authority.

In Russia, the power of these councils (Soviets) was broken by the Communist Party. In Germany they were made subservient to the government by the Social-Democratic Party. In each case they helped a left party come to power, only to have it suppress their efforts to establish workers control in industry. Yet in Pannekoek's view, such workers councils might in the future provided the starting point for organizing a society ruled by the workers themselves, with no bosses – whether capitalists or government bureaucrats – ruling over them.

I had the privilege of long conversations with Paul Mattick, the most important apostle of the workers council tradition in the US.[72] I collaborated on *Root & Branch* with his son and political disciple Paul Mattick, Jr. While I never fully accepted what I considered the Marxist ultra-orthodoxy of "council communism" (the senior Paul Mattick had once written a book whose title, *The Inevitability of Communism*,[73] epitomized for me the absurdity of Marxism as a set of "iron laws"), I applied as much as I could of it to understanding American labor history.

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[71] Anton Pannekoek, *Workers' Councils* (Melbourne, Australia: Southern Advocate for Workers Councils, 1948); reprinted (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2003).

[72] Paul Mattick, Anti-Bolshevik Communism (White Plains, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1978. See also Jeremy Brecher, "Review of Paul Mattick, *Anti-Bolshevik Communism*," *Our Generation*, Vol. 15, No. 3, Fall 1982.

[73] Paul Mattick, *The Inevitability of Communism* (New York: Polemic Publishers, 1936).

I drew on whatever other sources I could find. I happened upon the writings of Martin Glaberman, an auto worker in Detroit and a follower of the respected Trotskyist writer C.L.R. James, which provided a complementary view.[74] I discovered an article called "USA – The Labor Revolt" by longshoreman and labor educator Stan Weir that put the wildcat strikes and union opposition movements of the 1960s in a similar perspective.[75] I absorbed anarchist theorists like George Sorel.

Most of all, I drew on the indigenous traditions of American workers, as represented in such movements as the Knights of Labor and the Industrial Workers of the World. These traditions viewed the corporate capitalist concentration of wealth as a subversion of democratic government by a new autocracy. They rejected wage labor as a fundamental violation of human freedom. They saw the struggle for the emancipation of labor as a continuation of the struggle to abolish slavery. And they saw economic cooperation under the control of workers as an alternative both to competition and to domination. I found in the documents of the struggles I was studying revealing interpretations by participants of what they were doing and what it meant. My interpretation was most deeply influenced by them. They inducted me into seeing mass strikes as episodes in the self-liberation of working people. I found in them a lost historical tradition for participatory democracy.

As *Strike!* was being written, labor history itself was being revolutionized by E.P. Thompson, David Montgomery, Herbert Gutman, and others. This "new labor history" eschewed the institutional preoccupation that had marked the "old labor history" in favor of an emphasis on workers' own activity and self-organization. But most of their work, which would later have a big impact on me, was not available in time to influence *Strike!*. Ironically, it was more influenced by traditional labor history and labor economics that viewed conservative American trade unionism as a pragmatic adaptation by privileged "aristocrats of labor" to their opportunities within American capitalism. I drew heavily on that older, more conservative interpretation of unionism and collective bargaining, while inverting to condemnation their celebration of American trade unionism's conservatism.

I also drew on a tradition within American sociology that, starting with Robert E. Park and E.T. Hiller in the 1920s and continuing through Alvin Gouldner in the 1960s, analyzed labor struggles as social movements. These sociologists conducted extensive studies of working class conditions and strikes. They often emphasized the role of informal workgroups and the importance of what workers themselves thought and did, recognizing, as a sociological study of the 1919 steel strike put it, that "Strike conditions are conditions of mind."[76]

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[74] Much of Glaberman's writing has been collected in Martin Glaberman, *Punching Out and Other Writings* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 2002).
[75] "USA—the Labor Revolt," first published in the *International Socialist Journal* (Rome, Italy), April and June 1967, reprinted in Staughton Lynd, ed., *American Labor Radicalism* (New York: Wiley, 1973).
[76] Commission of Inquiry, Interchurch World Movement, *Report on the Steel Strike of 1919* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Howe, 1920) p. 147.

*Strike!*'s emphasis on periods of mass strike, worker self-organization, and endemic conflict between unions and workers has not found a great deal of resonance among subsequent historians of American labor. It no doubt underemphasized periods of worker quiescence, the role of organizers, and the positive contributions of labor organizations. Yet it would also be a mistake to ignore the reality of those periods of "strikes and social upheavals of extraordinary importance, drama, and violence which ripped the cloak of civilized decorum from society, leaving exposed naked class conflict." Understanding what I called the "mass strike process" can still teach us much both about the actual history of the working class and about the emergence of new common preservations.

## Class and power: The keys to the workshop

My involvement with labor history had roots in my own and my peers' feelings of powerlessness in the face of the war in Vietnam, nuclear holocaust, and our probable future work lives. I wrote in the Introduction to *Strike!*, "The greatest problem we face today is our powerlessness. It underlies every particular problem we face: war, pollution, racism, brutality, injustice, insecurity, and the feeling of being trapped, our lives wasting away, pushed around by forces beyond our control." These problems resulted from the fact that "we do not control the life of our own society. The fundamental problem we face – and the key to solving the more particular problems – is to transform society so that ordinary people control it."[77]

I found in the traditions of the radical labor movement both explanations of such powerlessness and strategies for challenging it. While today I recognize that those traditions frequently reduced complex questions to deceptively simple answers, I believe they can still help illuminate the very different conditions we face today.

Many 19th century American workers saw wage labor as akin to slavery and even referred to it as "wage slavery." They saw the rise of large corporations as creating a new form of tyranny. They envisioned the working class movement as a freedom struggle that continued the American Revolution's fight against British oppression and the struggle against slavery conducted by the abolitionists and the Union forces in the Civil War.

In this tradition, workers were seen as sharing a common problem: They don't own or control society's means of production, or even the means to produce their own livelihood. Therefore they have little choice but to sell their capacity to work to those who do. The result is that all workers share a subordination to the control of employers, who have the power to make decisions that shape their daily lives.[78] While these ideas are often associated with Karl Marx, they were pervasive in working-class movements before Marx and they were widely shared among non-Marxist and anti-Marxist workers.

This was not a natural predicament nor even a longstanding one. Its origins can be traced historically. They were vividly apparent to machinist Terrance Powderly, Grand Master Workman of the Knights of Labor, no revolutionary or Marxist, who in 1889 looked back over the changes he had observed in his lifetime:

> With the introduction of machinery, large manufacturing establishments were erected in the cities and towns. Articles that were formerly made by hand, were turned out in large quantities by machinery; prices were lowered, and those who worked by hand found themselves competing with something that could withstand

[77] *Strike!*, 1977, vii.
[78] *Strike!*, 1997, p. 238. For a fuller discussion of issues of class, see Jeremy Brecher, "Book Review: The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925," *Review of Radical Political Economics*, December, 1988.

> hunger and cold and not suffer in the least. The village blacksmith shop was abandoned, the road-side shoe shop was deserted, the tailor left his bench, and all together these mechanics [workers] turned away from their country homes and wended their way to the cities wherein the large factories had been erected. The gates were unlocked in the morning to allow them to enter, and after their daily task was done the gates were closed after them in the evening." They no longer carried the keys of the workshop, "for workshop, tools and keys belonged not to them, but to their master. [79]

The enormous expansion of industry after the Civil War had transformed millions of people who had grown up as farmers and self-employed artisans and entrepreneurs into employees, growing armies of whom were concentrated within each of the new corporate empires. Their work was no longer individual and competitive, but group and cooperative; they no longer directed their own work, but worked under control of a boss; they no longer possessed the property on which they worked or its fruits, and therefore could not find fruitful employment unless someone with property agreed to hire them.

The process of differentiation into "masters" or, as we would say today, employers, and "those who no longer carried the keys of the workshop," aka workers, has continued since that time. I learned from Gabriel Kolko's book *Wealth and Power in America* that in 1951 one fifth of one percent of American "spending units" owned between 65 and 71 percent of all the marketable corporate stock held by individuals.[80] Since then, such concentrated ownership of the means of production has only intensified.[81] It doesn't take a séance with Karl Marx to see that those who lack such wealth are generally going to have to work for those who have it.

These facts went against the grain of the belief that the US is a classless society. While the US is often presumed to be a land of individual freedom, most of our society's resources have long been controlled by a few. The rest have no way to make a living but to sell their capacity to work. Most Americans are – by no choice of their own – workers. The basic experience of being a worker – of not having sufficient economic resources to live except by going to work for someone else – shapes most people's daily lives, as well as the life of our society. Individually, workers are powerless and unfree.

Meanwhile, the wealth created by the labor of the many is owned by a tiny minority, primarily through ownership of large corporations that dominate the national and increasingly the global economy. They control the labor of millions of people in the United States and worldwide. The wealth and power of corporations and those who own them is further parlayed into power over the media, the political process, the institutions that shape knowledge and opinion, and ultimately over the government. Workers are

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[79] Terence V. Powderly, *Thirty Years of Labor 1859-1889* (Columbus: Excelsior Publishing House, 1889), pp. 26-27. The actual course of capitalist development was of course different in different countries.
[80] *Wealth and Power in America* (New York: Praeger, 1962) p. 51.
[81] In 1989, the top 1 percent of U.S. families owned 48 percent of net financial assets while 54% of American families had zero or negative net financial assets. Lawrence Mishel, Jarred Bernstein, and John Schmitt, *The State of Working America, 1996-1997* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1997) pp. 278, 280.

thereby rendered relatively powerless, as individuals, even in supposedly democratic societies. Oversimplified as it may be, this critique of the idea that the US is a classless society remains valid today.

Underlying this approach is the idea that powerlessness grows out of dependence. Others can have power over us when they are able to exclude us from that which we need to survive or pursue our goals. Workers are excluded from control over the large-scale, technologically advanced, integrated means of production that are necessary to make wealth in modern society. Indeed, all except a tiny minority are excluded from that control. Here was a key to understanding the powerlessness I and my peers experienced and observed in so many spheres. I later learned to see it as one example of a broader pattern of differentiation, unequal dependence, and powerlessness not just in class relations, but in many other social relations as well.

## Workers power

Although they recognized the enormous power of capital, the radical working class traditions I was discovering were uncowed. As the labor anthem *Solidarity Forever* put it, "In our hands is placed a power greater than their hoarded gold." Workers as individuals might be powerless; but they are not alone in this condition. They share it with their co-workers and the great majority of other people who are also workers. When workers see themselves as having interests in common with other workers and in conflict with their employers, they may turn to collective rather than individual strategies for solving their problems. As I studied labor history, I discovered this process recurring in the lives of individuals, the experience of social groups, the history of the United States, and indeed worldwide.

When workers begin to pursue collective strategies, they discover they have far greater power together than they have alone. They are the great majority in any workplace, community, or country. All the functions of their employer, indeed of society, depend on their labor. By withdrawing their labor and by refusing to cooperate with established authorities in other ways, they can bring any workplace, community, or even country to a halt. Mass strikes, like the Great Upheaval of 1877 and the sit-down strikes of the 1930s, revealed the power of workers to virtually stop society, to counter the forces of repression, and to organize cooperative action on an extended scale.

The same historical process that made workers individually powerless made them collectively powerful – potentially. Paradoxically, employers and other social institutions were dependent on workers as a group for everything – including their own power. As I put it in *Strike!*,

> Ordinary people – together – have potentially the greatest power of all. For it is their activity which makes up society. If they refuse to work, the country stops. If they take control of their own activity, their own work, they thereby take control of society.[82]

But *Strike!* emphasized that the power thereby created was not the same as the power of employers and other authorities:

> Today, power means the power of some people to tell others what to do. The power we see rising in this book is the power of people directing their own action cooperatively toward common purposes. Ordinary people can only have power over social life when power as we have known it – power of some people over others – is dissolved completely.[83]

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[82] *Strike!*,1977 edition, p. viii. This passage illustrates the unconscious reduction of the very broad category "activity" to the economic one of "work" and the reduction of "society" to "the country."

[83] *Strike!*, 1977 edition, p. viii. "People directing their own action cooperatively toward common purposes" is very close to what I now term "common preservation." This quote indicates the utopian aspirations that colored *Strike!* without entirely shaping it.

Workers have made use of that potential power in ways ranging from on-the-job resistance to strikes to wider forms of solidarity. In *Strike!* I told a story of how, under different conditions, American workers discovered and rediscovered that power.

Participants in mass strikes themselves often believed that the real issue in their struggles was not one or another specific demand but rather the distribution of power, and that this in turn would determine more specific questions of wages, working conditions, and the like. Indeed, the theme echoes from one mass strike to the next. In the great Southwest Strike of 1886, the workers' goal according to historian Ruth Allen was to be recognized by management as "men equally powerful in and responsible for the conduct of the Gould Southwest System" whereas H. M. Hoxie, Gould's top manager on the scene, proclaimed that the time had come "when the question had to be decided whether he should run his own railroad or have the Knights of Labor run it."[84] A century later Alfred Sloan, president of General Motors, wrote at the height of the Flint sitdown strike, the "real issue" was, "Will a labor organization run the plants of General Motors" or "will the Management continue to do so?"[85]

From my study of workers power I learned that power that appears unilateral may instead be asymmetrical. Employers exercised power over workers, but workers could acquire counter-power – albeit of a different kind – when they joined together. The desire for that power provided a motive for workers to join together – to pursue what I would later call common preservation.

[84] Ruth Allen, *The Great Southwest Strike* (Austin: University of Texas, 1942) p. 30.
[85] Alfred P. Sloan, Jr., January 5, 1937, Kraus Papers, Box 9, cited in Sidney Fine, *Sit-Down: The General Motors Strike of 1936-37* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), p. 182.

## The workgroup: "A guerrilla band at war with management"

One day around 1965 I saw a classified ad in the *Nation* for literature presenting a rank and file view of American labor. I wrote away for it and received a packet of pamphlets from a little-known group called Facing Reality, followers of the now-revered but then obscure Caribbean Marxist writer C.L.R. James. One short pamphlet (unsigned but actually written by Marty Glaberman) published in 1952 titled *Punching Out* had a big impact on me. In straightforward, non-ideological language it described the way workers in the Detroit auto plants organized themselves and used guerrilla resistance tactics to improve their lives on the job. They controlled the pace of work to provide break time for each other; got rid of unpopular foremen by secretly sabotaging production; and turned the shop floor into an informal beauty parlor, restaurant, credit union, and (birthday) party headquarters. *Punching Out* portrayed such actions as an indication that workers' position in production led them to collective action in their own interest that contradicted the logic of capitalism at even the most intimate level. I later found similar views in the writings of rank-and-file longshore activist and labor writer Stan Weir on informal workgroups.[86]

My friend and *Root & Branch* collaborator Steve Sapolsky went to Pittsburgh to study labor history with David Montgomery. At that time Montgomery and his students were opening up the whole issue of worker self-organization and resistance on the job and its interaction with scientific management and other employer efforts to control the work process, but little of their research had yet been published. Steve sent me a draft of a paper he was writing on the use of informal on-the-job resistance and some of Montgomery's not-yet-published papers, circulating *samizdat* among his graduate students.

Since workers usually avoid publishing articles about their informal resistance tactics on the job, Montgomery and his students were mining the management literature concerned with the horrors of workers' "restriction of output." Some had insights that paralleled those of Marty Glaberman and Stan Weir. In a once-famous study of American factories published in 1946, for example, Elton Mayo wrote that in every department he studied, the workers have, whether aware of it or not, "formed themselves into a group with appropriate customs, duties, routines, even rituals" and "management succeeds (or fails) in proportion as it is accepted without reservation by the group as authority and leader."[87]

I adopted the hypothesis that such informal work groups form the venue in which the invisible, underlying process of the mass strike develops. They are milieus within which

[86] Stan Weir, "The Informal Workgroup," in Alice and Staughton Lynd, eds., *Rank and File: Personal Histories of Working-Class Organizers* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973).
[87] Elton Mayo, *The Human Problems of an Industrial Civilization* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946) pp. 226-27.

workers come into opposition to the employer, begin acting on their own, realize their need to support each other, and discover the collective power they develop in doing so. The end product of this process is the rejection of management as "authority and leader," and the transformation of the work group into what one sociologist and erstwhile factory worker described as a guerrilla band at war with management.[88]

My friend Steve Sapolsky put me onto a 1946 study of Chicago area factories that described how most work groups established a "quota" beyond which the group expected no individual worker to produce. A new employee was systematically "indoctrinated" by the work group, which expected the employee "to conform to its system of social ethics." This system was backed by the workers' knowledge that management would use one worker's higher production as a lever to speed them all up. As one worker expressed it, "They begin by asking you to cut the other guy's throat, but what happens is that everybody's throat is cut, including your own."

Workers created time for themselves to talk, read, and do what they referred to as "government work" – using company facilities to produce tools to make their own work easier and to produce products for themselves and their friends. This required "a system of social controls imposing, upon the individual, responsibility to the group." Essentially what results is an informal secret organization. Workers employ "a social ethic which requires that each individual realize his own goals (social and pecuniary) through cooperation with the work group."[89]

I discovered that such informal groups had developed right along with the emergence of industrial capitalism and had begun constructing their own vision of their situation and prospects. As machinist and Knights of Labor leader Terrance Powderly wrote after describing the transformation of independent craftsmen into employees, "Thrown together in this way, in these large hives of industry, men became acquainted with each other, and frequently discussed the question of labor's rights and wrongs."[90] Another worker's autobiography described how, in the small railroad town of Sedalia, Missouri in the depression of 1884, a group led by a cobbler and a railroad machinist met night after night, discussing the condition of workers and how to change it; from them came the leaders of future strikes in the area.

Eighty-six years later, the *Wall Street Journal* noted that, in response to the recession of 1970, there was a "pickup in 'group therapy sessions,' when employees gather around watercoolers and elsewhere to moan about layoffs, past or pending. An office worker at the Otis unit in Cleveland says he noticed that such sessions were well attended 'almost every time I went to the men's room.'"[91]

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[88] Donald Roy, "Making Out: A counter-System of Workers Control of Work Situations and Relations," in Tom Burns, ed., *Industrial Man* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1969).
[89] Orvis Collins, Melville Dalton, and Donald Roy, "Restriction of Output and Social Cleavage in Industry," *Applied Anthropology* (Summer, 1946) p. 4.
[90] Terence V. Powderly, *Thirty Years of Labor 1859-1889* (Columbus: Excelsior Publishing House, 1889) pp. 26-27.
[91] *Wall Street Journal*, August 6, 1970.

I began to think of such informal work groups as the cellular units of mass strikes. In them took place a process of group formation, mutual recognition of common interests, and a move from individual to collective strategies. Those transformations, occurring almost invisibly in myriad workplaces and communities, moved across the borders of the workgroup, the workplace, the locality, and ethnic, racial, gender, occupational, and other established boundaries to produce the great upheavals I was calling mass strikes. While mass strikes appeared to be huge, dramatic events, I came to believe that they actually had their roots in the daily life settings of workplaces and communities. As I put it in *Strike!*:

> The actions recounted in this book grew out of the daily problems of ordinary people. What happens when we go to work or school, make a home, shop, try to make a life, may seem at first glance far removed from making history. But in trying to solve the problems of their daily lives, people sometimes find they must act in ways which also challenge the whole organization of society.

I've subsequently taken the pattern of informal self-organization by work groups as a pattern for understanding self-organization more generally. The paradoxical result of pursuing individual self-preservation may be that "everybody's throat is cut, including your own." And in such situations, people may develop into a group with a "social ethic" which requires that "each individual realize his own goals" through cooperation with the group. Such a group formation process did not require indoctrination from outside; it might emerged as a pragmatic response to a situation in which other strategies amounted to people cutting their own throats – and therefore evoking what I would now call a strategy of common preservation.

## "Whatever happened to the unions?"

"What ever happened to the unions?" That was a constant refrain among liberals and leftists in my youth. Many people I knew had worked to build unions in the 1930s and 1940s, but found themselves detached and disillusioned by the 1950s and 1960s. I myself had grown up with a romantic image of the rise of industrial unionism in the 1930s as workers organizing themselves to combat their corporate bosses. But I lived with the reality of unions that pursued "labor-management cooperation" and were in effect junior partners in American capitalism.

Some blamed the workers themselves. They had gotten too fat. But I wanted an answer that was less of a smug self-justification for people who themselves had abandoned the struggle for a better society. The answer I proposed was perhaps *Strike!'s* most controversial aspect.

In periods of mass discontent workers could coordinate action on a large scale. They started with their own workgroups. Action spread from there. Classic labor historian John R. Commons, no friend of mass strikes, described how the 1886 strike wave began with "spontaneous outbreaks of unorganized masses." When a ten-hour day law passed by the Michigan legislature proved unenforceable, "In response, and with little previous organization, the predominantly Polish and American workers in the lumber and shingle mills struck for an immediate ten-hour day with no reduction in pay. The strikers marched in a body from mill to mill, demanding that the men quit work, and shut down the entire lumber industry."[92]

Coordination could spread far and wide despite the absence of preexisting formal organization. Virtually all unions had been broken in the years leading up to the Great Upheaval, for example, but, as Robert Bruce observed, workers were able to act in concert out of a "sense of unity" that was "not embodied in any centralized plan or leadership, but in the feelings and action of each participant." The editor of the *Labor Standard* pointed out that, "There was no concert of action at the start. It spread because the workmen in Pittsburgh felt the same oppression that was felt by the workmen of West Virginia and so with the workmen of Chicago and St. Louis." Bruce recorded that in Newark, Ohio, "no single individual seemed to command" the strikers. "They followed the sense of the meeting, as Quakers might say" on such proposals as one or another of them put forward. "Yet they proceeded with notable coherence, as though fused by their common adversity."[93]

When workers wanted to make their relations more permanent, they organized unions. Initially these might simply be vehicles to perpetuate the organization of workgroups and their connections. The first unions were simply associations of workers in the same trade in a locality.

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[92] John R. Commons, *History of Labour in the United States* (New York: MacMillan, 1918) Volume II, p. 366.
[93] Robert Bruce, *1877: Year of Violence*, pp. 128-9.

Unions could serve simply as the means for linking worker-initiated activity. In the 1894 Pullman boycott, as Eugene Victor Debs, president of the American Railway Union explained, "The committees came from all yards and from all roads to confer with us. The switchmen, for instance, would send a committee to us, and we would authorize that committee to act for that yard or for that road, and that committee would then go to that yard and take charge of the affairs."[94] This informal structure of strike committees allowed the improvised coordination of the strike over a vast area of the country despite the lack of organized preparations.

However, over time most unions developed a professional leadership separate from the "rank and file." They developed a permanent bureaucracy of organizers, officials, and professionals that could serve as a political machine for the leadership. They developed institutional interests distinct from those of their members. This process had been traced by a wide range of analysts, from radicals like Sidney and Beatrice Webb and Antonio Gramsci to conservative scholars like the American labor economist E.A. Ross.

I found divisions between union leaders and the rank and file almost ubiquitous in US labor history. As early as the 1880s, labor historian John Commons found "Extreme bitterness toward capital manifested itself in all the actions of the Knights of Labor, and whenever the leaders undertook to hold it within bounds they were generally discarded by their followers, and others who would lead as directed were placed in charge."[95] Indeed, Knights leader Terrance Powderly issued a "secret circular" designed to sabotage the movement for an 8-hour day.[96] Eighty-five years later we could see the same phenomenon in the 1970 postal wildcat strike: other union officials attempting to undermine strikes and other independent action by their own rank and file.

In periods of mass strike, workers often organized unions or used existing unions as vehicles for coordinating their activity and confronting management and government. But they also frequently found existing unions and their leadership unsupportive or even hostile to their actions. In such cases, they created new unions; created or used other forms of organization; or linked informal work groups outside of official union channels.

The mass strike wave of 1919, which saw major conflict in the steel, railroad, coal, and other industries as well as the famous Seattle General Strike illustrated all these tendencies side by side. Where – as in the Seattle general strike – the rank and file was able to control existing unions, the militancy and class-consciousness of the workers gave union action radical forms; where – as in steel – unionization had been prevented, establishing trade unionism was the primary objective of strike action. In the two basic industries that had been thoroughly unionized – coal and railroads – the unions tried desperately to head off or kill off rank-and-file strike action, and the workers were forced to organize against their own unions.

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[94] 1977, p. 82-3. *U.S. Strike Commission Report*, Senate Exec. Doc. No. 7 53d Cong., 3d Sess. (Washington: GPO), submitted to Pres. Cleveland on November 14, 1894, p. 140.
[95] Commons, Vol. II, 373-4.
[96] Powderly, p. 496.

In the 20th century, both the government and the corporations came to see unions as vehicles they could use to control an unruly working class. World War I placed workers in a uniquely powerful position because of the shortage of labor and the necessity for war production. Alexander Bing, wartime labor mediator, wrote "The workers could, had they seen fit to do so, have taken advantage of the scarcity of labor and the enormous need for commodities, which the war produced, and have demanded radical changes in industry, and it is very difficult to see how such demands could have been successfully resisted."[97] Employers and government turned to the unions to resist such demands. In effect, this policy took the form of a deal, in which the A.F.L. agreed to combat strikes, in return for which it was guaranteed the right to organize craft unions in substantial parts of American industry.

Employers also used unions to establish labor discipline in the workplace. For example, as we saw above, workers had used the sit-down to establish a direct counterpower to management – freedom to set the pace of work, to tell the foreman where to get off, to share the work equitably, to determine their share of the product, and the like. They saw trade unionism as a way to guarantee this power. The new C.I.O. unions – like any political organizations trying to win a following – presented themselves as the fulfillment of the workers' desires. But to management they declared that a C.I.O. contract was insurance against strikes and sit-downs. And they enforced the contract against the workers with discipline, firing, and blacklists.

I've come to see "what happened to the unions" as an instance of a broader problem of participants' loss of control over their own organizations. The differentiation of leaders and led, the emergence of unaccountable control of organizations from above, and the reduction of the rank and file's ability to coordinate their own action directly are common patterns not just in labor organizations but in many other social spheres. They form a fundamental – though perhaps not irremediable -- problem for democracy.

[97] Alexander M. Bing, *War-Time Strikes and Their Adjustment* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1921) p. 262.

## "Spreading by contagion"

Class conflict was the result of a system that differentiated workers and employers. The domination of workers by employers was embodied in each workplace, but it was also a feature of society as a whole. So while the microcosmic cell units of mass strikes lay in workplaces and their informal workgroups, mass strikes I argued were also part of a macrocosmic national and even international system.

Mass strikes were related to the periodic crises – economic, political, or military – that have been features of industrial capitalism since its beginnings. The mass strikes of 1877, 1886, 1894, and the 1930s were associated with worldwide depressions. Those of 1919 and 1946 were part of the reconstruction that followed World Wars I and II. The Vietnam-War-era mass strike accompanied the crisis of "stagflation" that marked the end of the relatively steady economic growth after World War II.[98] Such broad crises force employers to put pressure on workers in a myriad ways, even at the risk of provoking revolt.

Such pressures generated what I called a "mass strike process" that began with the invisible and unrecorded daily skirmishes of working life in normal times. Clayton Fountain, a Detroit auto worker and later a UAW official, describes one such conflict on a cushion production line at a non-union Briggs auto parts plant in 1929. Working on incentive pay, workers would "work like hell for a couple of weeks, boosting our pay a little each day." Then "Bingo, the timekeeper would come along one morning and tell us that we had another new rate, a penny or two per cushion less than it had been the day before."

One day when this happened, "We got sore and rebelled. After lunch the whistle blew and the line started up, but not a single worker on our conveyor lifted a hand. We all sat around on cushions waiting to see what would happen.

> In a few minutes the place was crawling with big-shots. They stormed and raved and threatened, but our gang stood pat. . . . We didn't belong to a union and we had no conception of organization. There were no leaders chosen by us to deal with the angry bosses; we all pitched into the verbal free-for-all with no epithets barred.

After forty-five minutes, the bosses agreed to reinstate the previous piecework rate. "Looking back, I can see that, in a small and disorganized fashion, we tasted the power of the sitdown strike on that far-away day in the Briggs plant in 1929."[99]

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[98] Even when they raise wages, such crises undermine the rhythms of daily life, the patterns of adaptation to which people have become accustomed. See Mac Brockway (Tim Costello), "Keep on Truckin'," in *Root & Branch*, No. 2 (1971), reprinted in *Root & Branch: The Rise of the Workers Movements*.

[99] Clayton W. Fountain, *Union Guy* (New York: Viking Press, 1949) pp. 28-29

At a time of growing discontent, in which invisible, low-intensity conflicts at the workplace level generate a potential basis for solidarity, the action of one group of workers often served as the inciting example to large numbers of others. These rebellions were often described as "spreading by contagion." The strike and defeat of the militia in Martinsburg, West Virginia, started a chain reaction in the Great Upheaval of 1877; successful sit-downs of rubber workers set off the sit-down wave of the 1930s; and the illegal strike of New York postal workers ignited a nationwide postal wildcat in 1970 and helped spur a national wave of wildcats. Each exemplary action demonstrated the power workers had because they could stop production. And it showed their willingness and capacity to withstand retaliation, often violent, from employer or government forces, thus infusing other workers with confidence and an appreciation of their ability to stand up for themselves and stick together.

Labor historian John Commons described what happened when a strike forced railroad magnate Jay Gould to sign an agreement with the Knights of Labor. "Here a labor organization for the first time dealt on an equal footing with the most powerful capitalist in the country. It forced Jay Gould to recognize it as a power equal to himself . . . The oppressed laboring masses finally discovered a champion which could curb the power of a man stronger even than the government itself. All the pent-up feeling of bitterness and resentment which had accumulated during the two years of depression . . . now found vent in a rush to organize under the banner of the powerful Knights of Labor."[100] The Knights grew from 71,000 in 1884 to 730,000 in 1886.

The sit-down wave of 1936-37 illustrates the same phenomenon. The sit-down idea spread so rapidly because it dramatized a simple, powerful fact: No social institution can run without the cooperation of those whose activity makes it up. Once the example of the sit-downs was before people's eyes, they could apply it to their own situation. The power and spread of the sit-downs electrified the country: In March, 1937 alone there were 170 industrial sit-downs reported with 167,210 participants; no doubt a great many more went unrecorded.

Defeats or impending defeats might also lead workers toward wider solidarity and more dramatic tactics. For example, in 1892 the defeat of a strike of skilled steelworkers at Andrew Carnegie's works in Homestead, Pennsylvania, was watched by workers throughout the US. Secretary of the Treasury Charles Foster, campaigning in Ohio, reported "trouble among laboring men." They were "talking about Homestead, about Carnegie being too rich, while they were poor."[101] The Homestead strike revealed to workers throughout the US their capacity for cooperation and resistance. But its defeat also revealed that even heroic struggles by isolated, local groups of workers could be overcome by the superior force of the corporations. The conclusion was drawn in the extensive solidarity that characterized the huge, overlapping strikes two years later in 1894. One railroad worker said the lesson of that year's largest strike, against the

[100] Commons, Volume II, p. 370.
[101] Cited in Henry David, "Upheaval at Homestead," in Daniel Aaron, ed., *America in Crisis* (New York: Knopf, 1952) p. 167.

Pullman company, was to "demonstrate to laboring men that they must get together; that no single organization can win."[102]

As a result of such lessons, mass strikes tended to spread in wider and wider circles, cutting across existing lines of cleavage within the working class. In the mass strike of 1886, Commons noted "The obliteration, apparently complete, of all lines that divide the laboring class, whether geographic or trade."[103] In 1894, the great majority of American railroad workers joined a sympathetic strike in support of the workers who manufactured Pullman cars, who were not even railroad workers. Scores of traditionally hostile nationality groups separated by religion, language, history, and the deliberate policy of the employers joined together with close cooperation and mutual trust in the steel strike and the Lawrence textile strike of 1919. Black and white workers in such Southern cities as St. Louis in 1877 and New Orleans in 1892 joined together in general strikes supporting each others' demands. Indeed, *Strike!* argued that, "The tendency of mass strikes – never fully realized – is toward joint action of all working people."[104]

Such conflicts also tended to develop into broad class polarizations. What Pullman strike leader Eugene Victor Debs said of that strike could be said of many other mass strikes: "The struggle with the Pullman Company has developed into a contest between the producing classes and the money power of the country."[105]

Mass strikes led to counter-mobilizations by employers and their allies. The Great Upheaval was followed by the organization of militias and the building of armories for the suppression of domestic unrest. After the strike wave of 1886, there was a "tidal wave of formation of employers' associations to check the abuses of unionism, even to crush it." Thousands were fired and blacklisted.[106] In 1892, the Pinkertons' detective agency's agents and reserves, used primarily for labor disputes, totaled more than the standing army of the nation. State and Federal troops have intervened in labor disputes more than 160 times.[107] According to historian Leon Wolff, "One searches United States labor history in vain for a single case where the introduction of troops operated to the strikers' advantage. In virtually all conflicts before and after 1892 the state guard acted, in effect, as a strike-breaking agency."[108]

Looking back, I am struck by the metaphors like "chain reaction" and "spreading by contagion" that others used and that I often adopted to describe what happened in mass strikes. That may be what it looked like – and yet these actions were not the result of atoms blindly striking each other or bacteria spreading infection. They were the product

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[102] *U.S. Strike Commission Report*, p. 76.
[103] Commons, Vol. II, pp.373-4.
[104] *Strike!*, 1977 edition, p. 237-8.
[105] Eugene Debs, *Public Opinion*, July 5, 1894.
[106] Clarence E. Bonnett, *History of Employers' Associations in the United States* (New York: Vantage Press, 1956) p. 282.
[107] Hugh D. Graham and Ted R. Gurr, *The History of Violence in America, A Report to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence* (New York: Bantam Books, 1969) p. 380.
[108] Leon Wolff, *Lockout. The Story of the Homestead Strike of 1892: A Study of Violence, Unionism and the Carnegie Steel Empire* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965) p. 228.

of thinking, feeling, communicating, and acting human beings. How could the "mass strike process" manifest such similar patterns among such different contexts and protagonists? I had little idea of how to reconcile the roles of "process" and "praxis." The immediate result was often confusion; the longer run result was a quest for a point of view that could reconcile the two.

## The challenge to authority

In trying to understand the "perpetually moving and changing sea of phenomena" that characterized mass strikes, I identified three crucial processes: the challenge to authority, the spreading of solidarity, and the growth of worker self-management. I address them sequentially in this and the next two chapters. Each of them arose repeatedly in periods of mass strike. I believed they represented what today I would call "emerging properties" – characteristics of the working class that arose out of the mass strike process itself. I believed they could serve as the basis for transforming society.

At the turn of the 1970s we were living in an era of rebellion. Blacks were rebelling against racism; students and young people were protesting the Vietnam war; soldiers were "fragging" their officers; women were revolting against sexism; workers were challenging their bosses and often their own unions as well. I identified with all of these rebellions, and was happy to celebrate mass strikes as a heritage of mass rebellion.

Conventional labor economics treats a strike as a vendor's withholding of a commodity from the market to get a better price. Drawing on the tradition of Eugene Victor Debs and the IWW, I maintained in *Strike!* that when workers cease to work – strike – it is a kind of revolt. It is, as sociologist Alvin Gouldner put it in his book *Wildcat Strike*, "a refusal to obey those socially prescribed as authorities in that situation, that is, management."[109]

*Strike!* could have made it clearer that not all strikes are rebellions. Some really are more like a vendor's withdrawal of a commodity from the market to raise its selling price. Once unions are officially recognized by law and management, participation in an authorized strike can be less a revolt against authority than obedience to the union leaders who have become the legally prescribed authorities. But many strikes, especially wildcats and strikes for recognition, are indeed revolts against the established authorities. They reveal a type of social action that violates established authority without taking the form of insurrectionary violence.

[109] Alvin W. Gouldner, *Wildcat Strike: A Study in Worker-Management Relationships* (New York: Harper and Row, Torchbooks, edition, 1965) p. 66.

## Solidarity

As a young child I had listened over and over to a song with a refrain that goes "Solidarity forever, solidarity forever, solidarity forever, for the union makes us strong." But what is solidarity and where does it come from?

As the powerlessness of ordinary individuals makes their position look less and less tenable, the psychology of "looking out for number one" becomes futile. The need to support others who in turn will support you becomes evident, and a spirit of all-for-one and one-for-all spreads in a bond that is at once an intellectual recognition of reality and an emotional feeling of unity. That bond is summed up in the hallowed labor movement adage, "An injury to one is an injury to all." That bond is worker solidarity.

In *Strike!* I portrayed solidarity as a response both to the immediate needs of workers' struggles and to the fundamental problems of society; workers might conduct a sympathetic strike or boycott in support of another group of workers to prevent a defeat that might also have disastrous consequences for themselves, but also because they recognized a general need to combat workers' powerlessness. In the course of social struggles, solidarity arises out of the realization that the struggles will be lost without it. But that in turn is a result of the inability of individual strategies to solve people's problems.

The reason this sense of solidarity crystallizes so suddenly is the feeling that, as Paul Mattick Jr., used to put it, "I will only make sacrifices for you when I can sense that you will grasp the need to make sacrifices for me." Such mutuality develops in a thousand miniature experiments taking place in the background of a mass strike – like the railroad blockade in Martinsburg in 1877 and the Briggs work stoppage in Detroit in 1929.

One result of this process is the sense of being part of a class. That is in some ways comparable to the sense of being part of a nation, but, I maintained, its source and result are different from those of nationalism. The common situation of workers is that individually they are powerless, but together they embody the entire productive force of society. Workers' solidarity reflects their discovery of this. It is rooted in the fact that in modern society individuals can gain control of the social forces that determine their lives only by cooperating. Thus, "individualism" keeps the individual weak, while solidarity increases the individual's control over her or his life. Once the consciousness of this need for solidarity develops, it becomes impossible to say whether the motive for an act such as joining a "sympathetic strike" is altruistic or selfish, because the interest of the individual and the collective interest are no longer counterpoised; they have come to be the same. (*Strike!* was less forthright on the ways in which those who shared some interests in common might nonetheless have others that conflicted.)

Numerous mass strikes have revealed the willingness of workers in unrelated trades and industries to support each other. The railroad strike of 1877 and the Toledo Auto-Lite strike of 1934 involved the unemployed and impoverished joining together in the streets

with those on strike. The Homestead strike showed mutual support between skilled and unskilled workers. In the General Motors sit-down of 1936-37, employed women participated extensively in the strike, and non-employed wives, whose social realm had often been limited to home and family, emerged to play an active role as well.

Worker solidarity is a special case of what I would now call common preservation. It can be undermined, of course, by pursuit of the narrow self-interest that economists refer to as the "free rider problem" – sharing in the benefits of joint action without sharing in its sacrifices. But that is often overcome by a shared understanding that cutting the other guy's throat ends up with everyone cutting their own throat; by the experience of benefit through mutual support; by a "decentering" that allows you to see yourself in the others' shoes; and by view of solidarity as a better way to live and act.

## Self-management

I first ran into the concept of self-management in a special issue of the *New Left Review* devoted to workers control. I enthusiastically adopted it as the application of participatory democracy to the workplace. At the Institute for Policy Studies I got to know Gerry Hunnius, author of a book on self-management in Yugoslavia, and attended a seminar on self-management in Algeria with the former Algerian Ambassador to the US Cherif Guellal. I read what I could find on the attempt by factory committees to institute workers control in the early days of the Russian revolution and the workers' management of production in Catalonia during the Spanish Civil War.

In most organizations, whatever their formal organizational chart may say, workers exercise a degree of self-management just to get the work done. In workplace conflicts over the speed and organization of production, workers take over part of the management function and coordinate their own action in their own interest. In a strike, the normal power of the employer to shape daily life is broken, and workers are put in a position to think, act, and coordinate their actions for themselves.

A strike requires workers to manage many activities, including picketing; countering employer and government violence; providing food, health care, and other vital needs of the strikers; coordinating strike activity; reaching out to supporters and the public; providing information; and setting strike strategy. If the strike seriously affects the public, the strikers often find it necessary to continue part of their usual work to show their social responsibility and keep public sympathy; for example, railroad strikers have often run passenger and mail trains while blocking freight traffic.

This tendency of strikers to conduct social activities under their own management perhaps reached its height in the Seattle general strike of 1919, when the various striking trades provided the necessary services for an entire city. Indeed, the view of self-management that influenced me most came from the stirring retrospective report on the 1919 Seattle General Strike prepared by the General Strike Committee.

It described the existing world "of strife and insecurity, of unemployment, and hungry children." It was "not a pleasant world to look upon." The solution? "We see but one way out. In place of two classes, competing for the fruits of industry, there must be, eventually ONLY ONE CLASS sharing fairly the good things of the world. And this can only be done by THE WORKERS LEARNING TO MANAGE."

> When we saw, in our General Strike:
>
> The milk Wagon Drivers consulting late into the night over the task of supplying milk for the city's babies;
> The Provisions Trades working twenty-four hours out of the twenty-four on the question of feeding 30,000 workers;
> The Barbers planning a chain of co-operative barber shops;

> The Steamfitters opening a profitless grocery store;
> The Labor guards facing, under severe provocation, the task of maintaining order by a new and kinder method;
> When we saw union after union submitting its cherished desires to the will of the General Strike Committee:
> THEN WE REJOICED. . . .
>
> Some day, when the workers have learned to manage, they will BEGIN MANAGING. . .
> And we, the workers of Seattle, have seen, in the midst of our General Strike, vaguely and across the storm, a glimpse of what the fellowship of that new day shall be.[110]

The tendency toward self-management in working-class history is rooted in the reality that, unless people direct their own activities, someone else will direct them – in ways that prevent them from pursuing their own ends. Self-management is the only alternative to management by somebody else. This tendency arises out of the immediate needs of the struggle – keeping the workplace closed, feeding strikers, and the like. But I argued that all the actions of a mass strike can be viewed in essence as responses to the fact that when a small minority manage society, they will generally do so in a way that conflicts with the needs of the majority. Mass strikes were thus a replacement of management by others with workers' self-management.

The concept of self-management provides a way to think about how participatory democracy could replace top-down organization of work. Workers' activity in strikes illustrates and expands their capacity for self-management. But *Strike!* never addressed how managing a slowdown, or a wildcat strike, or even an insurrection is similar to or different from managing a factory, let alone managing an economy or a society. The exclusion of ordinary people from decision-making concentrates skill and knowledge in the hands of elites, casting doubt on the adage that "any cook can govern." How social movements can realize self-management, rather than simply installing new managerial elites, remains an unsolved challenge for advocates of basic change in work relations.

[110] History Committee of the Seattle General Strike Committee, *The Seattle General Strike* (Seattle: The Seattle Union Record Publishing Company, 1920). Original report drafted by Anna Louise Strong. See Anna Louise Strong, *I Change Worlds* (New York: Henry Holt, 1935) p. 68.

## You say you want a revolution?

In *Strike!* I portrayed the mass strike as a process in which working people, in order to solve their problems, transformed themselves. It was marked by the three processes, described in the previous three chapters, that embodied the transformation of the working class itself and the possibility of transforming society: workers' challenge to existing authorities, their development of solidarity with each other, and their taking over direction of their own activities. These were what philosophers of science call "emergent properties" – ones that were not present at the beginning of a process but develop during the course of the process itself.

I portrayed the transformation of the working class and of society as a revolutionary process in the sense that it had the potential to eliminate the present ruling class.

> Because it challenges the real power-holders of our society – the industrial managers – and because carried to its logical conclusion it would have to replace them, the mass strike can be considered in essence a revolutionary process.

But this revolutionary process was more and other than merely a struggle for power between two groups. Out of that struggle develop

> the tendencies toward self-management and toward solidarity – qualities which if extended could form the basis of a society different from any now existing. Most people in their work life and community life are passive – submitting to control from above. They are also atomized – separated from each other. What we see in mass strikes is the beginning of a transformation of people and their relationships from passivity and isolation to collective action.[111]

Drawing heavily on the ideas of Anton Pannekoek, I presented the emergent properties workers developed in class struggles as the basis for a different kind of society:

> This unity of individual and collective interest and the feelings of unity it generates are the necessary basis of a society based on cooperation rather than competition. From one perspective, therefore, the mass strike can be seen as a process in which workers are transformed from competitors to cooperators. Combined with a replacement of managers by self-management, this would result in a society of free human beings working together to meet their own needs by meeting each others' needs. Thus we may consider the mass strike as a revolutionary process whose outer expression lies in contesting the power of the existing authorities, and whose inner expression is the transformation of those who do society's work from passive and isolated individuals to a collective of self-directing cooperators.[112]

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[111] *Strike!* 1977 edition, p. 238.
[112] Strike! 1977 edition, p. 240.

I knew, however, that such a transformation was not the only tendency within mass strikes. The need for coordination could and often did create new coordinating centers – unions, parties, or even workers councils -- that make use of their position to assert themselves as new authorities over workers and society. When this occurs, "conflict next arises between the agency attempting to assert the new authority and the subjects of that authority."[113] That was seen in the conflicts between workers and the unions and parties that claimed to represent them.

The revolutionary process expressed in workers councils and workers self-management was nascent in American mass strikes. I indicated that it had proceeded much further in such other struggles as the Russian revolution of 1917, the Italian factory occupations of 1920, and the self-managed Catalan factories during the Spanish civil war.

While celebrating the initiative workers took and their visions of liberation, *Strike!* also emphasized that the outcome of these revolutionary efforts had often been the establishment of new dominations. Forestalling that result remains a central problem for advocates of social change.

Like many radicals of the time, I took revolution – defined as the replacement of one ruling class by another -- as *the* historical model for "real social change." As Karl Marx famously said, "The working class is revolutionary or it is nothing." Today I would see revolutions as only one rather special case of the process of social change. In 1997 South End Press gave me the opportunity to publish a 25th anniversary "revised and updated edition" in their South End Press Classics series. One of the revisions I made was to add:

> Most of the time a kind of equilibrium exists among classes. This reflects a formal or informal class compromise, which most members of the respective classes conform to whether they like it or not. This equilibrium reflects the unequal power of classes, but rarely a total domination of one over the other; it provides each with certain guarantees that they consider their entitlement. This balance is often embodied in rules and institutions ranging from minimum-wage laws to collective bargaining agreements.
>
> Periods of mass strike reflect the disruption of such equilibriums. This may occur because the underlying power relations have shifted or because the aspirations of the parties have changed. Mass strikes challenge the subordinate position of workers and foreshadow transformations of their position in society.[114]

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[113] *Strike!*1977 edition, p. 239.

[114] *Strike!* 1997 Revised edition, 274-5. I recently discovered a similar formulation of class equilibrium and its disruption in E.P. Thompson's essay "Revolution," which I originally read in the early 1960s. "The countervailing powers are there, and the equilibrium (which is an equilibrium within capitalism) is precarious. It could be tipped back towards authoritarianism. But it could also be heaved forward, by popular pressures of great intensity, to the point where the powers of democracy cease to be countervailing and become the active dynamic of society in their own right. This is revolution." E.P. Thompson, "Revolution," in E.P. Thompson, ed., *Out of Apathy* (London: Stevens, 1960).

Mass strikes, I added, also changed the position of workers in society. The Wagner Act, grievance procedures, seniority systems, and other reforms "are largely the result of the threat of disruption and revolution implicit in the mass strike. Mass strikes have shifted the equilibrium between classes, winning for workers rights and entitlements they were previously denied."[115]

Mass strikes have also forestalled a reverse shift in equilibrium. A railroad engineer observed after the suppression of the Pullman strike in 1894, "If there had never been a strike or a labor organization I am satisfied that every railway employee in the country would be working for one-half what he has been working for of late. Strikes are not generally successful, but they entail a heavy loss on the company and it is to avoid that loss that the company ever meets us at all."[116]

I still believe that it is often necessary to change power relations to solve the problems faced by workers and indeed by any subordinate group. But I doubt that changing power relations can be reduced to a simple dichotomy between revolution and the status quo. The changes we require to solve the global problems of today's era of mutual destruction are in many ways greater than those made by any revolution. I doubt that those changes will look very much like the revolutions of the past. They require something more and other than the replacement of one ruling social group by another. I am sure, however, that they will require – and evoke -- the kind of transformation of people and their relationships from passivity and isolation to collective action that mass strikes showed to be possible.

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[115] *Strike!* Revised edition, p. 303. To my surprise, my current perspective on revolution as only one of a variety of forms of social change echoes a position of John Dewey's. In a debate with Trotsky, Dewey did not rule out revolutionary class struggle as a means to human freedom, but refused to endorse it as the consequence of a fixed law of social development. He observed that "the belief that a law of history determines the particular way in which the struggle is to be carried on certainly seems to tend toward a fanatical and even mystical devotion to the use of certain ways of conducting the class struggle to the exclusion of all other ways of conducting it." (Quoted in John Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, p. 472.) If this be pragmatism, make the most of it!

[116] *United States Strike Commission*, p. 121.

## Beyond reductionism: My critique of *Strike!*

It was the summer of 1973, the year after *Strike!* was published, and I was interviewing a group of militant young steelworkers in Chicago. For several hours the talk had focused on the micro-details of informal resistance on the job, when one of them broke in to chide me:

> Look, work isn't the whole story. I drive to work and maybe listen to the Watergate hearings on the car radio. I go home and face all the crap of the cities. Everywhere I go I have to breathe the air. No so long ago we had a war going on.[117]

It rang a bell. I knew there was something procrustean about the way I was approaching workers history and experience – something I came to identify as "reductionism."

As I was finishing *Strike!*, my friend Steve Sapolsky, a *Root & Branch* participant who had gone out to the University of Pittsburgh to study labor history, passed an early draft to his professor David Montgomery, who was pioneering the "new labor history" in America. Professor Montgomery sent me back an astonishingly supportive, but in part highly critical, response. He warned that the draft at one point threatened "to reduce workers' struggles to a Pavlovian response: oppression and kick."

He was right: My approach indeed suffered at points from misplaced reductionism. Pavlov's psychology, which reduced all of a dog's behavior to conditioned responses to external stimuli, was a telling metaphor with what was wrong with this approach. At many points *Strike!* focused on action as a direct response to oppression and failed to fully portray the roots of action in internal processes of thinking, feeling, learning, planning, organizing, and deciding by individuals and groups.

Steve later raised some related questions in a laudatory but also critical review of *Strike!*.[118] After an extended praise-that-precedes-the-pan, Steve wrote that the book "suffers from the utilization of preconceived categories that do not do justice to the complexities of history." Each strike seems to be like every other strike. "There is very little investigation of the goals and aspirations of the strikers, and instead, they seem to be robots, propelled into action with unfailing regularity by the relentless course of history." Parodying Hegel's idea of the "World Spirit," Steve wrote that each strike, instead of "erupting out of particular environments and structured by particular intentions," emerges "courtesy of the Spirit of the Proletariat, kind enough to reveal itself as it makes its way through the world."

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[117] Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello, *Common Sense for Hard Times*, p. 106.

[118] "Strike: A Review," *Root & Branch* #4 (nd). For a retrospective view of the non-reductionist approach to the complexity and diversity of working class experience that Montgomery was developing at the University of Pittsburgh, see James R. Barrett, "Class Act: An Interview with David Montgomery," *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas*, Volume 1, No. 1, Spring 2004.

Actually, I was developing my own post-publication critique of *Strike!* along similar lines. While I certainly didn't renounce the book, I became increasingly conscious of how much was left out, from race and gender to government and politics, and how much of what was there was squished into "preconceived categories" that had not been adequately adapted to fit workers' actual experiences.

I gave the label "reductionism" to the things that were bothering me in *Strike!* Such reductionism was personified for me by Karl Marx' statement that "The handmill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steammill, society with the industrial capitalist." [119] Human society could be explained by "laws of motion" like those of Newtonian physics. Like so much of the tradition from which it grew, *Strike!* tended to reduce all social conflict to the conflict between workers and employers, ill-attending even to other classes, let alone other kinds of social groups and identities. It often treated other kinds of injustice besides class oppression as secondary and derivative. It viewed institutions like the state or racial discrimination merely as an aspect of class relations.

In the "Forward" to *Strike!* I wrote, "All historical writing is a matter of selecting a limited number of significant facts from an infinity of others. In this book, far from trying to present a general history of labor in the United States, I have deliberately focused on those aspects of the story which can help us in the tasks we face today."[120] Certainly a selection process is necessary and I would still accept usefulness as the ultimate criterion for that selection. The problem lay in my tendency to select the facts that fitted my preconceived ideas about what contemporary tasks were and how they could be accomplished, then use those selected facts to validate the preconceived ideas. This cut out the information that might have allowed me and my readers to engage in a critical dialogue in which "inconvenient" facts would provide a basis for criticizing and revising the theory. My ideas certainly evolved as I learned more about the actual history. But *Strike!* didn't leave enough room for facts that were "bad news" for the conclusions I had reached.

My strategy in *Strike!* was to focus on those aspects of US labor history that appeared most revolutionary. For that reason, it was not (and did not pretend to be) a full or balanced account of American labor history. Much of the book's power comes from its single-mindedness. Indeed, *Strike!* is marked by a sort of monomania. Everything can ultimately be derived from one relationship: wage labor and capital. This class relationship is not seen as interacting with other realities. Everything not an expression of that core contradiction can be ignored. That which relates to the central contradiction is, as they say, "privileged."

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[119] Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*. This quote of course represents only one side of Marxism. That in turn was an expression of the reductionist perspective that had dominated science since Sir Isaac Newton. In this view the world is seen as a collection of separate entities – physical objects, or, for the social sciences, individuals, states, pieces of property, or similar units – whose actions and reactions can be understood as a simple chain of distinct causes and effects.

[120] *Strike!* 1977 edition, p. ix.

The problem was not that *Strike!* told the story of American mass strikes or even that it attempted to theorize them. It was that it attempted to derive a whole theory and strategy of social change from that limited framework and experience.

In 1997 I had the opportunity to revise *Strike!* for a 25th anniversary edition. I experienced the process as "a collaboration between myself of 25 years ago and myself of today."[121] In many ways I liked what my younger collaborator had to say, even if I sometimes had to smile at his brash over-confidence. But I bridled at *Strike!*'s many lurking traces of reductionism.

For example, like many theorists of many persuasions, I presented "society" as if societies were self-contained wholes; there was little sense of social institutions and networks that overlap and cut across each other.[122] Similarly, instead of grasping human beings as complex and multifaceted beings, there was a tendency to view people as acting and interacting simply as expressions of their positions – specifically their class positions -- in a particular society.

From the perspective of today's globalizing economies and societies, it is stunning how much *Strike!* takes the primacy of a national framework for granted. Except for a brief acknowledgement that the post-World War I mass strike was part of a world-wide crisis, mass strikes are seen almost exclusively in a national context. The United States was pretty much taken as "a society," capable of being understood in isolation from the rest of the world. This unquestioned national framework was manifested in such statements as, "If [ordinary people] refuse to work, the country stops. If they take control of their own activity, their own work, they thereby take control of society."[123]

Marxist theory often proclaimed the "primacy of production" on the grounds that society was only possible if the things it needed were produced. Somehow this extremely broad idea of production became identified specifically with the economy. I narrowed this privileging of the economy still further, to assume the primacy of the industrial workplace. The workgroup became my touchstone both for interpreting workers' history and for projecting the key locus of future social change.

If the economy determines the rest of society, then it follows that the only kind of social stratification that really matters is class. This privileged the working class struggle as the most important aspect and motor of social change. The political implications of this approach were invidious, and feminists were beginning to argue that it downplayed the sphere of "social reproduction" and therefore the critical role that women played within it. *Strike!* barely touched on conditions that might give class struggles different meanings for men and women or for members of different racial and ethnic groups, let alone

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[121] *Strike!* Revised edition, p. 6.
[122] See discussion of the work of Michael Mann in Part 4 below. For dimensions of overlap in labor history, see Richard Oestricher, *Solidarity and Fragmentation* (Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1986.)
[123] *Strike!* 1977 edition, p. viii.

considering struggles that such people might engage in that were not first and foremost expressions of their class situation.

In *Strike!*, class itself is reduced to relatively homogeneous categories of capitalists and workers. There is little consideration of what have come to be known as "contradictory class positions" – for example, women who work in low-paid menial jobs but who are married to capitalist executives; highly-skilled manual workers whose pay far exceeds many small business people; or highly-educated but low-paid and casualized college teachers. "Workers" are, with few exceptions, equated to blue-collar industrial workers. The "middle class" is noticed primarily as a supporter of workers or capitalists in class struggles or as a group that is being progressively reduced to the conditions of workers. Economic power is portrayed as the possession of those it calls "industrial managers," with little concern about the changing relationship of ownership and management over the history of American capitralism.

Even within the life of the working class, *Strike!* only addresses direct antagonism to employers. The cultural life of working people, their daily life institutions, their community building, are treated as significant only as they bear on large-scale resistance. Even the normal institutionalized class struggle, embodied in unions, collective bargaining, and conventional strikes, is largely ignored. So is all conventional political activity. And the complexities of compound identities and multiple group memberships are not considered. Mass strikes and wildcats are the gold standard to which all other aspects of working class experience are to be compared – and inevitably to be found wanting.

Indeed, the real gold standard was revolution. Class struggle was significant only insofar as it was potentially revolutionary. All social change was reduced to what it contributed to revolution. Mass strikes were appealing in part because they looked a little like nascent revolutions. While *Strike!* distinguished between a social revolution that changed basic human relationships and a conventional political revolution based on the seizure of state power, I still took fore granted the replacement of the rule of one class by another as the criterion for whether or not social change was meaningful.

Because of its emphasis on the workplace, *Strike!* reduced class conflict to domination and struggles against domination. Even issues of great interest to Marx, such as the "anarchy of the market" with its unintended side effects and interaction effects, were largely ignored.

*Strike!*'s presentation of how unions become dominated by leaders and bureaucrats was also conditioned by its narrow focus on class relations. The specific drive to modulate class conflict through union contracts and the paraphernalia of industrial relations was undoubtedly important in this process. But *Strike!* ignored the factors that create similar forms of organizational alienation in institutions ranging from governments and political parties to churches and even social clubs. Labor organizations have no monopoly on the "iron law of oligarchy."

With its narrow emphasis on class, *Strike!* rarely recognized the ways in which people, including workers, are organized on bases other than class. As a result, I saw class formation as exclusively a move from individual to collective strategies. I failed to recognize that many workers are already acting on collective strategies – but collective strategies of other collectivities, such as ethnic and racial groups, occupational groups, religious groups, or nations. Working class rebellion therefore often involves less a shift from individual to collective strategies than from one collective strategy to another.

Today I see the relation between mass strikes and systemic social change as more problematic than the way it is portrayed in *Strike!*. The immediate response to the conditions of everyday life and to the employing class, even for the most proletarianized, is not necessarily adequate for the changes that are needed in society. *Strike!* portrayed a transformation of working people through the process of class struggle, but didn't really measure that change against the kind of transformation necessary to make the social revolution it advocated. *Strike!* demonstrated, in a way I still find compelling, that mass strikes and other worker action in some ways prefigure such a change. But it never adequately assessed what would be necessary to realize that potential. That doesn't necessarily mean that some other group has to "bring consciousness" to the working class. But it does require the mediating and transforming process embodied in a social movement.

Some of *Strike!*'s forms of reductionism have come to matter more over time. For example, in the early 1970s the economy, class relations, and culture of the United States coincided far more closely with the boundaries of the nation; my tendency to treat the US as a bounded society whose connections with the rest of the world could be ignored led to only occasional distortions. Three decades later, with the global interpenetration of corporations, labor markets, and media dubbed "globalization," such a tendency would produce colossal howlers.[124]

Similarly, the rise of multiculturalism and widespread recognition of the multiplicity of individual identities has made the assumption that large numbers of people might act simply on their identity as "workers" even more problematical than it was in the past.[125] And in the 1960s and 1970s, national economies controlled by a handful of huge "oligopolistic" corporations and regulated by powerful national governments made the issues of domination seem far more central and the problems of markets and economic chaos seem far less important than they are today.

Many of these flaws I gradually discovered how to correct in later work. For example, my next book after *Strike!*, *Common Sense for Hard Times*, specifically addressed the differing experiences of black and white and male and female workers. *Brass Valley: The Story of Working People's Lives and Struggles in an American Industrial Region*

[124] I was forced to correct this in my work on globalization. See Part 6 below.

[125] See, for instance, Alberto Melucci, *Challenging Codes: Collective Action in the Information Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

gave communities equal billing with the workplace. *Building Bridges: The Emerging Grassroots Coalition of Labor and Community* moved "beyond reductionism" by accepting that social actors came from multiple starting points, including but not limited to class-based ones, so that the key to achieving their objectives was their ability to coordinate their action notwithstanding their differences.

Part 4 of this book will tell how I discovered approaches that allowed me to retain much of what I valued most in the tradition of working class radicalism while reducing its tendency to reductionism. Interestingly, the first book that started me on the track of those approaches was titled *Beyond Reductionism*.[126]

[126] Arthur Koestler and J.R. Smythies, ed., *Beyond reductionism: New perspectives in the life sciences* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).

## **Beyond** *Strike!*

While I continued a certain amount of direct activism, I gradually decided that writing was likely to be the most useful and the most personally congenial contribution I could make to the development of social movements. (It also allowed me to support myself, after a fashion, in my parents' trade as a freelance writer.) During the 1970s and 1980s I wrote three more books on the American working class that tried in various ways to get "beyond reductionism."

Two of the three books were the result of my emerging -- and enduring -- collaboration with Tim Costello. Tim was a young truck driver who used to show up occasionally at *Root & Branch* meetings in New York and hang out around the fringes of the group. We first met about the time I was finishing *Strike!*.

Tim drove a fuel oil truck. He worked an incredible number of hours, often twelve to fourteen a day six or seven days a week. He was, however, a world class expert at stealing time -- indeed, he regarded it as the fuel oil drivers' principal form of class struggle. He would entertain us with stories of cooperation among drivers to establish their own work rates for the various jobs. He set up an office in the back of his truck and spent several hours in each working day reading and writing.

Tim wrote an article for *Root and Branch* called "Keep on Truckin'" under the name "Mac Brockway."[127] It provided a detailed look at informal resistance on the job at a fuel oil company. It described a threatened work stoppage that forced the rehiring of two fired militants (one of them, one might guess, the article's author). I was working on *Strike!* at that time, and from Tim I got a sense of informal worker self-organization on the job that I presented as the force underlying mass strikes.

Tim and I both landed in Boston at the same time, crashing in Paul Mattick, Jr.'s living room and looking for a place to rent. We decided to look together and ended up renting a railroad apartment in Summerville next door to a popular hangout. The neighborhood's alienated youth swarmed under our second story window, exchanging uppers and downers; we fantasized addressing them from our window and proclaiming the revolution.

Tim's family was from Ireland and Scotland (via the Canadian Maritimes) and about as mainstream Boston working class as you could find. His father, who died when Tim was a teenager, had been a railroad conductor and head of his union local for 30 years. As a child, Tim had laboriously typed the local's correspondence on his father's manual typewriter. When his father was laid off and went to work as a construction laborer, Tim had worked beside him "playing the banjo." (He had to explain to me that this meant digging with a shovel.) Tim says that his father "preached unionism," but that he always saw "the union" less as an institution than as an activity that you engaged in.

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[127] *Root & Branch: The Rise of the Workers' Movements*, (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett, 1975).

I felt I was finally beginning to understand Tim when he mentioned that his father had wanted him to become a lawyer. I waited for the conventional next line: "So you won't have to be a working stiff like your old man." Instead it was: "So you can get the bastards." (Tim's daughter became a labor lawyer, although, when I told her this story, she swore she knew nothing about it.)

Like me, Tim had gone to college, found it less than satisfying, and dropped out. But he had always continued to study. He had a strong bent for philosophy. He loved Herbert Marcuse, especially *Reason and Revolution*.[128] Whenever we got down to fundamental questions about why some approach was good or bad, he would quote Aristotle: "The virtue of a thing is its use." I encouraged him to give me a little philosophical tutoring, but I'm afraid I've been a poor student.

Neither of us had much use for conventional conceptions of leadership. We both believed in the capacity of ordinary people to act on their own behalf. We thought of social change in terms of an on-going effort by working people to understand and affect their world. We saw our own efforts to spread information and understanding as just one more contribution to that process.

Tim's favorite formulation was Jean-Paul Sartre's analysis of "the series" and "the group" from the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*.[129] He used to say that all he did all day in on the job and in the bars was explain to people about the series and the group.

The series was represented by Sartre's famous description of a line of people waiting for a bus. They all relate to the bus, but they don't relate to each other except through the bus. The series is the normal condition of workers -- they relate to each other only through their relation to the boss.

But when people face a common threat or a common interest, they may form themselves into a group. Sartre's classic example was the action groups that formed in poor Paris neighborhoods at the start of the French Revolution. These initially formed as a response to the threat of military repression, but then decided to go on the offensive and storm the Bastille. Such a transformation from a series to a group lies at the core of what people need to do to achieve their own liberation.

Unfortunately, the group tends to develop leadership and structure that turns its members back into a series. That is why, for example, unions that had been created as an expression of groups of workers had become instead bureaucracies that often prevented them from acting on their own behalf. (Sometimes, as Sartre pointed out, this process might even lead to terror and dictatorship.) When that happened, workers had to turn themselves back from a series into a group, even if they had to do so against the opposition of their own recognized leaders. Tim's approach, drawing on Sartre but far more on his own experience, converged with what I had worked out in *Strike!*

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[128] Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941).
[129] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (London: Verso, 2004).

Meanwhile, we were living in the midst of what we can in retrospect see was the mass strike of the early 1970s, spearheaded by rambunctious young workers. Indeed, the revolt of young workers – symbolized by a big strike at the Lordstown, Ohio General Motors factory – was headline news. Tim and I decided to take a few months, travel around the country interviewing young workers, and write a book about their situation, experiences, and revolt. The result was *Common Sense for Hard Times*.

Tim had always informally interviewed the people he worked with. That experience provided the starting point for the discussions we had with more than 100 people around the country about their lives, work, ideas, and observations.

We invented our own "methodology" as we went along. We made it clear that we did not consider ourselves to be studying the people we talked with, or surveying their opinions. Rather, we regarded them as experts on the social worlds in which they lived and as colleagues in trying to make sense of our common situation. Our goal was to learn something about the structure of everyday life – both the circumstances people face and what people do about them.[130]

*Common Sense for Hard Times* was written for the kind of people it was written about – particularly young people who knew something was wrong with the life they were being forced to lead and who wanted to resist it. It drew on the radical working class tradition and the "new labor history" to explain the life problems that young workers described to us so eloquently. We retold their stories of informal resistance – often creative and sometimes hilarious – on the job. We explored the causes and effects of the economic crisis that was shaking up American life in the early 1970s. We described the condition that all people forced to work for a living faced in common.

*Common Sense for Hard Times* was different from *Strike!* first of all in its methodology: We started by talking to workers. We assumed that they, as well as we, had insights into their conditions and what to do about them. While we gave our own interpretation in the book, that interpretation was highly influenced by those we talked with.

One result is that the book begins its interpretation from the experience of individual workers, rather than from the position of the working class as a whole. We assumed that people set out to live their lives and in the process of pursuing their own ends come up against the realities of their class position. We didn't assume that people started out with a conception of themselves as workers; we did assume that the ways they assimilated the experience of being a worker – of not controlling the means of production -- was at the core of the story.

We still treated class as a central dimension of life. And we still treated it as the basis on which people might and should be unified for efforts to change society. But we recognized that the history of the working class and what it meant to be part of it signified something very different to men and to women, to whites and to blacks, to

[130] Brecher and Costello, *Common Sense for Hard Times*, "A Note on the Interviews," p. 231.

younger and older people. And we recognized that life has important dimensions that can't be reduced to class.

We still advocated fundamental social change. Indeed, we used the "action groups" of the American Revolution – for example, the Sons of Liberty -- as an example of the revolutionary transfer of social power from one group to another. But we had a far more flexible view of how such change might come about. Instead of projecting a model for social change, we offered broad guidelines for practice, with a wide variety of examples to show what we meant: When the opportunity arises, people should cooperate directly with each other to meet their needs. Members of different groups should offer each other solidarity as a way to progressively unify their struggles. People should strive to retain control of their own organizations. Divisions within the working class should be reduced by fighting inequality. Knowledge and thought should be democratized, rather than remaining the province of leaders, intellectuals, and specialists. People should use their power over production to replace control by a minority of owners and managers with control by the majority of people who do the work.

Reflecting its change in viewpoint, the style of presentation in *Common Sense for Hard Times* was far more dialogic than *Strike!'s*. We advocated, but more in the spirit of conversation than of laying down the law.

Over the course of the 1980s, Tim and I began noticing that coalitions among labor and other groups were proliferating at a local level, and that this was eroding the invisible boundaries that often separated the world of trade unionism from other social worlds. We solicited reports and analyses of this development from a wide range of participants and observers for a book called *Building Bridges: The Emerging Grassroots Coalition of Labor and Community*. The contributors described the growing role of community-labor alliances in strikes and other labor struggles; the emergence of community coalitions challenging deindustrialization and promoting alternative forms of economic development; new electoral coalitions; and diverse labor-community issue campaigns ranging from economic conversion from military to peacetime production to blocking the confirmation of President Reagan's Supreme Court nominee Robert Bork. The book also included programmatic alternatives ranging from employee ownership to statewide economic development strategies to military conversion.

*Building Bridges* did not assume that class was the single organizing principle for understanding society and that the working class represented the necessary and sufficient agent of social change. Rather, it assumed multiple class and non-class starting points from which different individuals and groups entered the process of attempting to affect the conditions of their lives. Class and class-based organizations like unions were treated as important but not uniquely privileged.

The book also assumed that people might come to social action with a variety of different identities. Effective action was seen as based not on unification around a single identity, but rather on the development of cooperation among people who thought of themselves

as having different identities, but who might discover common or at least overlapping interests.

The book recognized a wide variety of organizational forms that varied from wildcat strike action groups to highly bureaucratized national unions and from local community organizations to national coalitions. It tried to portray the complex interaction among these types of organizations, acknowledging what they brought both in the way of conflict and of synergism.

All these efforts pointed toward an approach that would preserve what I valued in the traditions of working class self-liberation without the reductionist tendencies that so often marred it. They helped me discover what such an approach might look like, even if I couldn't yet formulate the principles on which to ground it.

## Part 3: Discovering workers power: Conclusion

My study of labor history and the traditions of working-class radicalism provided me with a heuristic, albeit an incomplete and flawed one, for investigating the questions raised by my own experience in social movements. It was incomplete because it addressed people's problems solely from the perspective of their role as workers; but it could be generalized to move beyond that limitation. It was flawed because of its reductionist tendencies; but it could be corrected because most of its basic ideas were anything but reductionist.

The starting point for that heuristic was a status quo that created problems for somebody. In the case of workers, the problems were experienced concretely as workplace oppression, insecurity, inadequate pay, and the like. But behind those specific problems lay an entrenched social pattern: the control of production by a tiny minority.

More generally, I learned that to understand and address social problems it was necessary to trace them back to the social patterns within which they arose. That required historical investigation of the processes that initially created and then maintained those patterns. The contemporary pattern of workers and employers, for example, had developed because the new means of production created by the industrial revolution were controlled by men of wealth. Unable to produce for themselves without those means of production, other people had to go to work for them. Powerlessness was the result of dependence – in the case of workers, dependence on those who controlled society's means of production.

This situation, however, created common interests among workers. They shared both particular grievances and the general grievance of being denied the opportunity to participate in the decisions that affected their lives.

The result was a process of group formation – in the case of workers, of class formation. This process involved mutual recognition of common interests and of the capacity for and benefit of concerted action. This process was often marked by long retardations and sudden crystallizations because any particular individual or group would have little motivation to act unless it was apparent that others were also prepared to do so.

Workgroups appeared to be the primary milieu in which workers' process of group formation initially emerged. In periods of mass strike, in which large numbers of common grievances were accumulated, the group formation process repeated itself on a widening scale across geographical, industrial, and social boundaries.

I also began to see why people who appeared powerless as individuals became powerful as part of a movement. In the cases of workers, they did the work. If they ceased to work, production stopped. All the factories and machines owned by the employers were useless if nobody would run them. Workers as individuals were dependent on employers,

but employers were dependent on workers as a group. If workers formed themselves into a group, they could make use of that dependence – and thereby exercise power.

Such power cannot be utilized unless people coordinate their action. For that reason people have to organize themselves. Initially this often takes the form of a networks in which people coordinate their action informally. Then participants may assemble together as a whole. In periods of mass strike, coordination often takes such direct forms as mass meetings and temporary strike committees. The ability of such forms to coordinate action among diverse groups and over huge areas was nothing short of astounding.

Workers often decide to make their collectivity permanent, generally by establishing unions. Such unions develop a formal organization with leaders, staff, and rules of procedure. Over time leaders and staff may develop their own interests distinct from those of the rank and file. Ordinary workers become dependent on them to lead the struggle against employers. The union may thus become less a vehicle for workers to coordinate their own action than a new means for controlling them.

In such circumstances, in order to take concerted action against their employers workers often have to ignore or oppose "their own" organizations and leaders and turn to wildcat strikes and similar actions coordinated by informal networks, worker assemblies, and strike committees. I thought of this process -- the formation of organizations, their alienation from control by their membership, and the development of new forms to challenge that alienation -- as specific to labor organizations, but I can see now that it is a far more general phenomenon.

I envisioned a process of social transformation based on the development of solidarity among work groups and the working class as a whole; rejection of the authority of employers, managers, and their political supporters; and the growth of workers' capacity for self-management. Its objective was the replacement of management by employers with self-management by workers. I conceived of this as a social revolution. I contrasted this process to revolution directed by a political party that takes control of the government and uses state power to take control of the economy.

Many of the ideas I developed in *Strike!*, stripped of misplaced reductionism, are central to the broader heuristic I have developed for common preservation. I have extended them beyond their original context and incorporated them in a more general interpretation of social change.

For example, I continue to see alienated labor – and more generally activity conducted for the benefit and under the control of others – as a ubiquitous form of oppression. A struggle for self-liberation remains an appropriate response.

Class oppression is also something of a paradigm case for understanding other forms of social stratification. The problems of individuals and groups generally have roots in the way people are socially differentiated and their activities integrated. This applies not

only to class and workplace oppression, but also to the limitation of women by men's desire to monopolize opportunities and the tendency of corporations to dump their waste into the environment to avoid the costs of preventing pollution. In such situations, solving a problem may require not just individual action or established forms of collective action but new patterns of concerted action that change social relationships – new common preservations.

People are not ignorant blank slates until they are brought the truth by outside experts. People construct understandings, including new and better understandings, from their experience and from their individual and joint reflection on their experience. Such a process is necessary for democracy, for without it people can be nothing but the prey of those who would manipulate them in one way or another.

In the course of acting together, people develop new capacities and characteristics – "emergent properties." In labor and other social struggles, cooperation and self-direction are essential to success. They therefore tend to emerge in such struggles – or rather, people construct them in response to the perceived necessities of the struggle. They also construct new understandings that transcend limited individual and group perspectives and place their experiences in a wider context – manifesting what I later came to call an "ecological shift."

People who are separated can join together. Solidarity is not a given, but it can be created and historically it has been created over and over again. It requires a process in which people abstract from their differences sufficiently to recognize their commonalities – what I would later learn to call "decentering." It involves the construction of collective identities and the incorporation of collective identity as an aspect of personal identity.

The idea that dependence provides a basis for potential power can be extended beyond workers and beyond the workplace. Many strikes, after all, involved not only the withdrawal of labor power but active interference with the process of production through such means as picket lines and factory occupations. But these can be and often are used by others than the workers directly involved – anyone, after all, can join a picket line. Further, large strikes and especially general strikes pressure not just employers but a variety of other players and society as a whole, making possible "indirect strategies" like sympathetic strikes and boycotts that pressure secondary targets to put pressure on primary ones. So do mass demonstrations and other expressions of popular resistance. In short, any social institution – and society as a whole – depends on the cooperation or at least the acquiescence of those whose activity makes it up or who are in a position to affect it.

I generalized the power of workers to the idea that ordinary people were potentially powerful because their activity made up society. Therefore apparently powerless people currently excluded from the control of institutions nonetheless may be able to change society. The power of the powerless is captured in such sayings as "You can't mine coal with bayonets" and "What if they had a war and nobody came?"

Under some conditions people can act in concert without pre-established institutional structures by creating new forms of direct, non-institutionalized coordination with each other. The dynamics that arise when this can be done on a large scale are very different from more ordinary times.[131]

While people must organize themselves to act effectively, they may also lose control of the organizations they create. Those organizations may even become vehicles for disorganizing or oppressing them. Unless people retain control of their organizations, those organizations may turn against their creators like Frankenstein's monsters.

I learned a great deal from my involvement with the traditions and history of working class radicalism. Yet there was something unsatisfactory about the way the elements were assembled, both in that tradition and in my own contribution to it. Concepts that had been developed to understand and act on one situation and set of problems -- the oppression of workers under capitalism -- were extended to a total worldview or philosophy and a total theory of human history and society. That extension generated enormous problems and contradictions.

I had no desire to throw out what was valid in the concrete analysis. I was even happy to extend many of the concepts to other contexts. But when they were used to provide a comprehensive system for understanding and changing human life as a whole, too many problems resulted.

Yet I was not content to simply accept the idea of a social world composed of fragments which could not be meaningfully related to each other. For example, I found that the common intellectual strategy of adding race and gender to class to form a privileged triad of mutually irreducible but jointly comprehensive social factors was just a more sophisticated form of reductionism.

I didn't want to abandon the attempt to grasp the interconnections among different aspects of human life. I felt the need – even if I could not articulate it – for a way to put the pieces of human life and history together into meaningful wholes. But I didn't want to impose a pre-conceived schema on them either.

I needed a method for exploring interconnections without imposing a preconceived whole that determined the parts – in short, without reductionism. Such a method might help people better understand how to change their world. My search for that method is the story told in Part 4.

In the decades since *Strike!* was written, both strikes and the labor movement have undergone a dramatic decline in the US. I detailed that decline in the 25th anniversary edition of *Strike!* published in 1997. But worldwide, mass strikes have continued to make history. The mass strikes of the late 1980s in Poland led the way for the fall of

[131] See, for example, Francesco Alberoni, *Movement and Institution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

Communism. And mass strikes are proving to be a significant feature of the era of globalization. A single two-year period saw general strikes and other mass labor struggles in countries as diverse as Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Columbia, Ecuador, France, Haiti, Italy, South Korea, and Spain. If workers power is not the answer to every question, it still has a crucial role to play in solving the problems that threaten the future of humanity.

# PART 4: DISCOVERING WAYS OF THINKING ABOUT CHANGE

## Introduction: Discovering ways of thinking about change

The principal traditions with which I identify are not academic ones but rather those of ordinary people trying to solve their problems by changing society. I see my primary intellectual forebears as those who Antonio Gramsci called "organic intellectuals,"[132] people associated with social movements like Gerrard Winstanley of the Diggers, the farmer pamphleteers of the American Revolution, and even the didactic songwriters of the IWW. But such thinkers often drew on the wider intellectual culture of their day, and in Part 4 I try to follow their example.

Most of what I do I learned to do by imitation. *Strike!*, for example, was written primarily by applying approaches I found elsewhere to American mass strikes. But I've struggled to complement imitation with explicit formulation – what sometimes goes by the name of "theory." Such an approach was more abstract than the concrete researches I was accustomed to. It required thinking not just about concrete situations, but also about ways of thinking about them – "metathinking."

Even while I was working on *Strike!*, I was struggling with broader questions about the nature of change. My driving concern remained the question, how can people address problems that they can't solve individually or through established patterns of social organization? I had found bits of answers in the experience of the movements I had participated in and studied. But I increasingly felt the need for a more general framework or paradigm or theory to integrate what I had learned from different situations. At the least, I needed a heuristic to guide my inquiry. And I needed a way to get beyond the kind of misplaced reductionism I didn't know how to fully eliminate from *Strike!*

A more general approach would make it easier to transfer the lessons of one context to another one. It could help guide the effort to better understand and act on particular situations. And it could help test whether one's interpretation of a particular situation was consistent and coherent, or whether it contained gaps, contradictions, and paradoxes that undermined its validity and usefulness.

Such abstraction was neither my inclination nor my forte. Sometimes I felt silly even posing such questions -- perhaps they could only be answered for particular situations. But if the point of studying specific historical situations is to gain knowledge useful for other situations in the present and future, there has to be some higher level framework

[132] Antonio Gramsci, *The Modern Prince* (New York: International, 1959).

that cuts across and links different times and places, making it possible to explore similarities and differences. And such a framework has to be more general than the situations it compares.

Conventional political thought often takes the status quo not only as a given but as a norm – not only as the way things are, but as the way they are meant to be. The existing state of things is natural and, explicitly or implicitly, right and proper. Change can only mean a disruption that threatens a beneficent status quo.

But social movements need ways to think about change and the forms of stability that impede change. The possibility of constructive social change makes concerted action for social change plausible. When they oppose the status quo, social movements must explicitly or implicitly argue that change can be possible, necessary, and good.

Social movements also need ways to think about interaction. Conventional political thought often tends to see different aspects of society in isolation. Workers may be poor, but that has little to do with the fact that employers are rich. One country may make war on another, but that has little to do with the economic structure of the countries or the system of sovereign nations of which they are part. An individual worker works for a particular capitalist; there is no reason to look at either as part of a class, or to see the working class and the capitalist class as determining each other through their interactions. Movements for social change need ways of looking at the world that counter such atomization and encourage a more integrative view.

I couldn't have fully articulated what I was looking for and why when I started out thinking about abstruse questions of change and interaction. I was responding to felt needs, not following a clearly formulated intellectual agenda.

My quest led me to pillage fields far removed from the kinds of social, political, and economic history that my work normally centers on. In retrospect, however, I can see that these explorations were almost always driven by my desire to develop a better understanding of how people can change society. While Part 4 includes excursions into physiology, child psychology, family therapy, heuristics, and even thermodynamics. I'll try to take you only to places from which I brought back something useful for common preservation.

History has always been my touchstone for understanding social change. The first chapter of Part 4, "What is history?," draws on the work of E.H. Carr and E.P. Thomson to see how historians work back and forth between concepts and evidence and how historical concepts can be constructed to deal with change. The second, "What is history for?," considers how something can be learned from history that is useful for the present and future.

For a century-and-a-half, the figure of Karl Marx has loomed over thinking about social change. I've conducted my own on-going dialogue with Marx and Marxism since I first discovered Erich Fromm's *Marx' Concept of Man*. "Re:Marx" explains why I never

became a Marxist. "Robbing Marx" tells how nonetheless I drew some of my fundamental ideas from Marx. "Adventures of the dialectic" discusses how Marx' dialectical way of thinking illuminates social change but also confuses it.

The pragmatism of John Dewey was going out of fashion by the time I started trying to understand social change, but it still echoed all around me. I absorbed many of its ideas from other sources without even knowing what they were. I can see in retrospect that in many ways I have been a pragmatist without knowing it.

Around 1970 my anthropologist friends Bob and Nancy Jay passed on to me a paper by Gregory Bateson, not yet published in book form, called "Form, Substance, and Difference." It drew on cybernetics, systems theory, and other newfangled ideas to argue that the units of evolution and of mind could not be individual organisms or persons, but had to include the circuits of interaction between them and their environment. When Bateson's collected papers *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*[133] appeared in the bookstores I eagerly bought and digested a copy. Around the same time, my fellow *Root & Branch* editor, Paul Mattick, Jr., was discussing a collection called *Beyond Reductionism*.[134] It led me to Ludwig von Bertalanffy, C.H. Waddington, Jean Piaget, and others who were trying to develop non-reductionist approaches to processes of change in a variety of fields.

Their ideas were generally referred to as "systems theory" "the systems approach," or "cybernetics." The systems approach was less a single theory than a convergence of ideas from diverse fields that turned out to have a family resemblance.[135] Whether in biology, psychology, or even thermodynamics, they were all using such then-esoteric concepts as "feedback," "open systems," "semi-permeable boundaries," and "meta-levels" to understand physical, psychological, and social phenomena in which the behavior of entities could not be understood apart from their interactions with each other and with the larger wholes of which they were part. From them I absorbed a general paradigm of how systems function and develop.

In those days, "systems analysis" was all the rage in military, bureaucratic, and corporate circles. An outgrowth of engineering, it sought to make highly complex social, political, and economic systems subject to total control. As historian of technology David Noble

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[133] Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballantine, 1972). "Form, Substance, and Difference" is reprinted on p. 448ff.

[134] Arthur Koestler and J.R. Smythies, *Beyond Reductionism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971.)

[135] Among the many efforts to formulate this idea, some of the most stimulating are in Gregory Bateson's *Steps To an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972.) For a classic statement, see Ludwig von Bertalanffy's *General Systems Theory* (New York: George Braziller, 1968). Many classic papers are gathered in Walter Buckley, ed., *Modern Systems Research for the Behavioral Scientist* (Chicago: Aldine, 1968). Obviously such ideas are not entirely new and have affinities with many earlier approaches. Hegelian and Marxist dialectics also stress the relativity of boundaries and the importance of the whole of which individuals are part, but they lack many of the features that modern systems theories offer. The organic philosophies of China, notably Taoism, generated similar perspectives, albeit in a pre-scientific context. See Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956) volume II. Many so-called primitive people, for instance Native Americans, incorporated similar elements in their worldviews.

put it, systems analysis consisted in "fracturing reality into discreet components," then making models of their interactions that would allow total control.[136] No wonder my friends looked askance when I started talking about "systems theory"! But what was referred to as systems theory was almost the diametrical opposite of systems analysis. For the "fracturing of reality into discreet components" was exactly what systems theory rejected.

Systems theory expressed in more general terms themes that I had assimilated before. What I had called the "ecological shift" from a focus on individual organisms and species to a focus on their interaction in an ecosystem was a prototype of the shift from an atomistic to a systems perspective. So was the shift from viewing arms build-ups as products of the distinct policy decisions of independent nations to seeing them as the product of an interactive arms race within a nation-state system. And so was the shift from an individual to a collective approach to problems and solutions that I had found workers developing in the course of mass strikes.

"Feedback" and "Open systems," retrace the way I initially assimilated the systems approach. "Unhappy families" and "The politics of connectedness" present some of my early ideas about how it might be used.

The version of systems thinking that I ultimately found most useful for constructing approaches to social movements and social change was that of the Swiss developmental psychologist and epistemologist Jean Piaget. While most systems theorists portrayed systems as in or near equilibrium, Piaget emphasized the importance of disequilibrium, imbalances, and gaps. These, and the efforts to overcome them, are what lead to change. In conditions of imbalance, equilibration – the pursuit of equilibrium -- might lead systems not just to maintain themselves, but to transform themselves.

"Development" provides the background Piaget's approach. Equilibration introduces his central concept. "Pattern and change," presents his approach to transformation. "Thinking" presents his interpretation of tacit and reflective thought. "De-centering" discusses the way individuals form collective subjects. "Plundering Piaget" indicates how I tried to use Piaget for understanding social change. "No dress before the iron" suggests ways in which Piaget offers an alternative to more reductionist approaches.

How to apply systems ideas to society has always been an issue. The proposition that societies are systems has been common, but it also presents a lot of problems. "The abolition of society" draws on the work of sociologist Michael Mann to develop a very different way of thinking about how such ideas might be applied to human social life.

How do people create solutions to problems? "How to solve it" presents some ideas I gleaned from the work of mathematician G. Polya, the inventor of modern heuristics, and applied to solving social problems. From studying Polya I also came up with the idea of presenting the underlying ideas of this book not as a theory, paradigm, philosophy, or worldview but as a heuristic.

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[136] David Noble, *Forces of Production* (New York: Knopf, 1964) p. 55.

Part 4 presents the booty of raiding parties designed to liberate intellectual resources for common preservation. Such concepts as feedback, equilibration, homeostasis, and decentering are all resources I now carry in my toolkit. I drew on them (as well as the experience and study described in Parts 1-3) in the on-going construction of my own way of thinking about social change. Ultimately I came to use them not as a cut-and-dried theory, but rather as a heuristic to use to interrogate concrete situations in the past, the present, and the potential future.

## What is history?

An antagonistic reviewer once described me as an "admitted historian." Here's my confession.

As a child, I loved to dig in the old trash pits that were scattered around the woods, finding old bottles, pots, pans, and other artifacts. I was thrilled when I discovered the mysterious round clearings, sprinkled with bits of charcoal, that had once been the mounds built by the charcoal burners. I spent hours pouring over the Yelping Hill Archives, a sort of collective family album of the Yelping Hill community in which I grew up. I was fascinated by the two old volumes that recounted the history of the town of Cornwall where Yelping Hill was situated. My seventh grade school project (under the active tutelage of my mother, who studied history in graduate school at Radcliffe), was a history of the local iron industry: I visited and photographed the old blast furnace sites; collected samples of iron ore and slag; and found everything I could about the industry in local libraries.

In my family we read aloud Henry Adams' *History of the United States in the Administrations of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison*; William L. Shirer's *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*; Barbara Tuchman's *Guns of August*; John Womack's *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution*; and Frederick Schuman's *American Policy toward Russia since 1917*. (We had started reading George Kennan's *Russia and the West under Lenin and Stalin*, but my father abandoned reading it because of what he felt was its anti-Soviet bias.)

Soon I was also reading history on my own. Deeply moved by Howard Fast's historical novel about Reconstruction, *Freedom Road*, I followed up with W.E.B. Dubois' history *Black Reconstruction*. In my brief stint in college, I read Herodotus and Thucydides in a humanities class and started reading labor history on my own. C. Vann Woodward's books on the American South, like *Origins of the New South*, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, *Reunion and Reaction*, and *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel*, were favorites both for his perspective and for a style that made serious historical work accessible to the general reader and relevant to contemporary social concerns.

I especially liked the history of social movements and revolutions; I read E.H. Carr's three volumes on the Russian Revolution and its aftermath; Isaac Deutscher's three volume biography of Trotsky; and J.P. Nettl's two volume biography of Rosa Luxemburg. My introduction to a more Marxist, economic history came from Louis Hacker's *The Triumph of American Capitalism*. When I went to the Institute for Policy Studies I was particularly attracted to the historians there, notably Arthur Waskow and the visiting Gabriel Kolko.

I learned about history mostly from reading it. I found it intrinsically congenial, but why?

History provided a way both to understand why things are the way they are and at the same time to see them in the context of broader processes of change. It seemed inherently useful to those who want to make change because it showed how existing situations were established, how they were maintained, and how they were changed.

But there was something else that made history intuitively satisfying for me. I got an early inkling of what it was from E.H. Carr's little book *What Is History?*

Carr disparaged the idea that historians first gather the facts, then draw conclusions from them.

> For myself, as soon as I have got going on a few of what I take to be the capital sources, the itch becomes too strong and I begin to write . . . Thereafter, reading and writing go on simultaneously. The writing is added to, subtracted from, re-shaped, cancelled, as I go on reading. The reading is guided and directed and made fruitful by the writing: the more I write, the more I know what I am looking for, the better I understand the significance and relevance of what I find.[137]

The result was a kind of loop in which new information corrected existing patterns of thought and the modified patterns of thought guided a search for still further corrective information. This back and forth process was just what I had engaged in while writing *Strike!,* even if I didn't carry the process far enough. I had plunged myself into the evidence. At the same time, I had sought out ideas about how to interpret that evidence anywhere I could find them. The writing process involved trying to use these ideas to organize the ever-expanding body of evidence. The ideas had to be changed and changed again and new ones sought or invented. The result was far from perfect, but it beat either random raw facts or the ideas I had started with.

I found such an approach further developed in the work of E.P. Thompson, which I first discovered in the *New Reasoner* and the *New Left Review*, but Thompson's fullest discussion of historical logic is in *The Poverty of Theory,* a sustained, mock-hysterical (and hysterically funny) attack on the French Marxist theorist Louis Althuser. Thompson says that historical practice is engaged in

> "an argument between received, inadequate, or ideologically-informed concepts or hypotheses on the one hand, and fresh or inconvenient evidence on the other; with the elaboration of new hypotheses; with the testing of these hypotheses against the evidence, which may involve interrogating existing evidence in new ways, or renewed research to confirm or disprove the new notions; with discarding those hypotheses which fail these tests, and refining or revising those which do, in the light of this engagement."[138]

A historical notion can be said to "work" if it "has not been *dis*proved by contrary evidence" and "successfully organizes or 'explains' hitherto inexplicable evidence." If it

[137] Carr, p. 33.
[138] E.P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory* (London: Merlin, 1978) p. 235

meets these tests, it is "an adequate (though approximate) representation of the causative sequence, or rationality, of these events, and it conforms (within the logic of the historical discipline) with a process which did in fact eventuate in the past."[139] These tests appeal both to the evidence, and to the "coherence, adequacy and consistency of the concepts" and to their "congruence with the knowledge of adjacent disciplines."[140]

According to Thompson, the purpose of what he calls "historical logic" is "to test hypotheses as to structure, causation, etc." and "to eliminate self-confirming procedures." It proceeds by "a dialogue between concept and evidence, a dialogue conducted by successive hypotheses, on the one hand, and empirical research on the other."[141] This logic – the evidence interrogated thus -- constitutes history's "ultimate court of appeal."[142]

But historical concepts are not necessarily the same as those of disciplines that study more static phenomena. Instead, they may describe processes.[143] Thompson gives the example of a "crisis of subsistence in which a poor harvest leads to dearth, which leads to rising mortality and the consumption of the next year's seed. A second poor harvest then leads to extreme dearth, epidemics, a peak in mortality, and then a sharply rising conception-rate."[144]

Such historical concepts are generalized from many examples. But Thompson stresses that historical concepts cannot be applied like classical scientific laws or like models into which the evidence is to be fitted. Rather, they are "expectations" that "do not impose a rule" but that do "hasten and facilitate the interrogation of the evidence."[145] They are, in short, heuristic.

The knowledge provided by history cannot aspire to the same standards as are claimed for natural sciences. Historical knowledge is in its nature "provisional and incomplete (but not therefore untrue)," "selective (but not therefore untrue)," and "limited and defined by the questions proposed to the evidence (and the concepts informing those

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[139] Thompson, p. 235-6.
[140] Thompson, p. 237.
[141] Thompson, p. 231.
[142] Thompson, 231. Historical logic probably fall into the category G. Polya calls "plausible reasoning" based on "heuristic syllogisms" in contrast to "demonstrative reasoning based on "demonstrative syllogisms." G. Polya, *How to Solve* It, p. 188. See "How to solve it" below.
[143] Thompson defines "process" as "a total logic of changes of sets of interrelated activities." *Poverty of Theory*, p. 263.
[144] Thompson, p. 237. Thompson quotes Sartre: "History is not order. It is disorder: a rational disorder. At the very moment when it maintains order, i.e. structure, history is already on the way to undoing it." *Poverty of Theory*, p. 230.
[145] Thompson, p. 237. Thompson frequently counterpoised historical "logic" or "tendency," or "pressure" as well as "expectation," to "law." See, e.g., p. 230. Carr points out that today natural scientists, similarly, do not generally view their work as producing "laws" in the sense understood by 17th and 18th century scientists.

questions)."[146] Historical knowledge "must always fall short of positive proof" but "false historical knowledge is generally subject to *dis*proof."[147]

Thompson lambasted Althuser – and by implication other "structuralists" – for believing they could fruitfully develop "theory" without the bother of struggling with historical evidence.[148] I myself had once been enamored of "Theory." One summer home from college I discovered Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* and spent endless hours trying to master its way of thinking. I followed up on other representatives of the Frankfurt School, even pouring over their then little-known journal. Much of what I wrote in my early 20s – for example, the paper I wrote about male gender roles -- was influenced by their approach.

But ultimately I found "Theory" that wasn't grounded in history unsatisfactory because there were such limited means to test its fit to the world we had to deal with. I concluded Theory could easily be lost in an endless sea of speculation without the discipline of the historian, who must "bring into the picture all known or knowable facts relevant, in one sense or another, to the theme on which he is engaged and to the interpretation proposed" -- including those facts apparently contradictory to his interpretation.[149]

I continued to delve into "Theory" – as the rest of Part 4 illustrates. But I always did so as a way of seeking ideas and hypotheses to subject to tests of "historical logic" -- tests against evidence and tests of coherence -- like those Thompson had described.

But despite being an "admitted historian," I didn't exactly become a historian of a conventional kind. My project was not simply to seek knowledge of the past. From history I primarily borrowed a method of inquiry. I tried to apply what Thompson calls "historical logic" to solving social problems.

I also tried to share this epistemological approach beyond the community of professional historians, to make it available as a tool for those trying to understand their own social realities. In *History from Below: How to Uncover and Tell the Story of Your Community, Association, or Union*, I tried to present it as an extension of practices familiar in everyday life.

> You can't prove what happened in the past the way you prove an answer in mathematics; all you can do is construct the most likely account of what happened. It's like a courtroom, except that you often have to be satisfied with 'the most probable account' even if it can't be proved 'beyond a reasonable doubt.' . . . Keep testing each new thing you learn against what you already know.

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[146] Thompson, p. 231.
[147] Thompson, p. 232. Elsewhere he states that history affords "evidence of necessary causes" but never of "sufficient causes." (p. 230)
[148] Of course there are many theories about what theory is and many kinds of theory and such criticisms cannot fairly be applied to all of them.
[149] Carr, p. 32. Thompson rightly emphasizes that the historian's tests are not against isolated "facts" but rather against "the evidence." *Poverty of Theory*, p. 320.

> If something 'doesn't fit' with the rest of what is known, it may be false – or it may cast what was believed before in a whole new light.[150]

That back and forth testing between concept and evidence, between pattern and instance, became a centerpiece of my heuristic.

[150] Jeremy Brecher, *History from Below*, p. 13.

## What is history for?

I wanted to use history to address problems people were facing in the present, and again I drew on E.H. Carr's *What Is History?* to do so. Carr explains the purpose of history with a sort of parable. Jones, after drinking too much and getting into a car with defective brakes, runs over and kills Robinson, who was crossing the road at a dangerous intersection to buy cigarettes. An inquest at the local police headquarters examines the possible causes of the accident. Was it due to excess alcohol consumption, or poor car maintenance, or bad road marking? Just then some interlopers arrive who argue that Robinson was killed because he was a cigarette-smoker. They are gently but firmly edged to the door and the janitor ordered under no circumstances to allow them to return.

Why? According to Carr, "The historian distils from the experience of the past, or from so much of the experience of the past as is accessible to him, that part which he recognizes as amenable to rational explanation and interpretation, and from it draws conclusions which may serve as a guide to action."[151] Rational and historically significant explanations are those that "could also be applied to other historical situations." In the case of poor Robinson, "it made sense to suppose that the curbing of alcoholic indulgence in drivers, or a stricter control over the condition of brakes, or an improvement in the siting of roads, might serve the end of reducing the number of traffic fatalities. But it made no sense at all to suppose that the number of traffic fatalities could be reduced by preventing people from smoking cigarettes."[152]

I embraced Carr's idea of history as a rational reconstruction whose rationality was defined by its usefulness. I recognized that there were many non-rational factors in human experience. But I wanted to mobilize rational responses to real problems, and for that purpose it was appropriate to emphasize the rational, purposive aspect of human existence.[153]

Carr emphasized that the culmination of the past – that which gives it significance – is not the present, but the future: The historian must not only ask the question "why"," but also the question "whither?"[154] As I put it in *Strike!*, the historian's work is important

[151] Edward Hallett Carr, *What Is History?* (New York: Vintage, 1961) p. 136.
[152] Carr, p. 140. Such views were part of the self-conception of the historical discipline almost from its inception. The ancient Greek historian Polybius wrote of the "special province" of the "science of history" that it included "to learn why it was that a particular policy or arrangement failed or succeeded. For a bare statement of an occurrence is interesting, to be sure, but not instructive; but when it is supplemented by a statement of cause, the study of history becomes fruitful. For it is by applying analogies to our own circumstances that we get the means and basis for calculating the future; and from learning from the past when to act with caution, and when with greater boldness, in the present." (Polybius, *Historia* (XII, 25e, quoted in Savoie Lottinville, *The Rhetoric of History* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976) p. 46.
[153] This book also represents such a "rational reconstruction," drawing selectively on my experiences and emphasizing what I believe to be relevant to the problem it addresses.
[154] Carr, p. 143.

because "it contributes to what we need to know to cope with the practical problems of the future."[155]

But on one point I disagreed with Carr passionately. Carr defended the idea of "history as progress" and devoted his final chapter to showing aspects of progress in modern history.[156] I believed that history was on a fundamentally wrong track, and that the problem was to get off that track and onto another one. As I put it in *Strike!,* "The new threats of nuclear and ecological disaster, combined with the more traditional effects of economic, social, and military crisis, mean that humanity – if it survives at all – will do so only through fundamental changes in its way of life."[157]

Hamlet once grumbled,

"The time is out of joint, oh cursed spite
That I was ever born to set it right."

Make that "we."

[155] 1977 edition, p. 319. The "Afterword: A Challenge to Historians" from which this discussion is drawn is omitted from the revised edition. Thompson's expectations that "do not impose a rule" but that do "hasten and facilitate the interrogation of the evidence" is precisely the kind of knowledge that is useful for human action.

[156] "The Widening Horizon." Carr explicitly defends the concept of progress as a necessary justification for the sacrifices imposed on the living generation for the sake of generations yet unborn. p. 158. This has been interpreted as an apology for Soviet Communism, which Carr is often accused of defending. It seems to me that making the future better than it would otherwise be is an equally adequate, and more defensible, justification for sacrifice than an argument that human life is ever improving.

[157] *Strike!* 1977 edition, p. 319.

## Re:Marx

Marxism had a strange and ambiguous place in the world in which I grew up. It was most familiar as the ideology used to justify a system of tyranny with aspirations to global domination. A few hardy souls tried to maintain or develop it as a serious theory of society and/or of social liberation, but they were largely isolated from both the non-Marxist left and from most of those who called themselves Marxists.

Neither of my parents, despite their radicalism, had much interest in Marx. Nor, for that matter, did the US Communist Party or those I met who were close to it. It was a standing joke that many top Communist leaders had never read Marx' major work, *Capital*. While many in the British New Left came from a Marxist background and continued to work in a Marxist paradigm, few of the founders of the American New Left, at least in SDS, were serious students of Marx. I never called myself a Marxist or accepted Marx or Marxism as "correct." But I've spent a lot of my life learning from Marx and Marxists.

In this chapter I tell a little about my encounters with Marxism and why I never accepted what I take to be the core of Marxist doctrine. In the following chapter, "Robbing Marx," I present some of the ideas I've gleaned from Marx for my own work. The third chapter on Marx, "Adventures of the dialectic," considers the unresolved problems in Marx's "dialectical" approach to change that helped stimulate me to explore the other approaches discussed in Part 4.

As a budding radical, I inevitably stumbled on the writings of Marx and Marxists. After Erich Fromm's *Marx's Concept of Man*,[158] I discovered some of the early translations of Gramsci and the work of Herbert Marcuse. I read the *Communist Manifesto*, *The Civil War in France*, Engels' *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, and various other Marxist classics. Many of the historians I read, such as E.P. Thompson, Gabriel Kolko, Christopher Hill, William Appleman Williams, and Louis Hacker considered themselves or were considered by others to be Marxists.

In the late 1960s Gabriel Kolko sent me in the direction of the Marxist writer Paul Mattick. In his youth after World War I, Mattick had participated in the German worker uprisings, then came to the US and worked as a machinist. He became the leading US advocate for council communism and a writer on Marxist economics.[159] I worked closely with his son and intellectual heir, Paul Mattick, Jr., publishing the magazine *Root and Branch*. Paul, Jr. gave a seminar on *Capital* in the Cambridge-Goddard M.A. program

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[158] See Part 1 above.

[159] For more on Paul Mattick, see my review of *Anti-Bolshevik Communism* in *Our Generation*, Vol. 15, No. 3, Fall, 1982. Mattick was unusual among post-war American Marxists in trying to apply Marx' economic analysis in *Capital* to contemporary capitalism. This led him to much greater skepticism than most about the extent to which Keynesian policies could permanently ameliorate, let alone overcome, the contradictions Marx diagnosed as inherent in capitalism. See *Marx and Keynes: The Limits of the Mixed Economy* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1969).

which I took on a non-credit basis. It was a great intellectual experience to study *Capital* in the context of a strong living tradition of Marx interpretation. But it perhaps says something about my priorities that, after finishing the study of Volume I and the first part of Volume III, which together comprise the core of Marx' mature economic theory, I chose to abandon the seminar to travel with Tim Costello interviewing young workers for our book *Common Sense for Hard Times*.[160]

I early gave up on trying to pin down "What Marx really meant." Indeed, I've been less and less sure that he was fully aware of what he meant much of the time, or that he was aware of the potential for ambiguity and contradiction lurking in his own thought – let alone the diversity of contradictory and self-contradictory views that would be embraced by those who claimed to follow and interpret him. But such a fate may be inescapable for any truly innovative, multifaceted, and evolving thinker. I've given up on the idea that Marx can reasonably be held to a higher standard than other thinkers. I've come to think of him as just another one of us bozos trying to figure it all out as we go along.

Whatever the evolution of Marx' own thought, historically Marxism has been identified above all with the *Communist Manifesto*. It was a source of inspiration for me as for tens of millions of others around the world. For many years I re-read it annually and still regard it as an on-going reference point.

Marx' long-term collaborator Frederick Engels summed up "the fundamental proposition" which forms the "nucleus" of the *Manifesto* thus:

> "In every historical epoch, the prevailing mode of economic production and exchange, and the social organization necessarily following from it, form the basis upon which is built up, and from which alone can be explained, the political and intellectual history of that epoch; that consequently the whole history of mankind (since the dissolution of primitive tribal society, holding land in common ownership) has been a history of class struggles, contests between exploiting and exploited, ruling and oppressed classes; that the history of these class struggles forms a series of evolution in which, now-a-days, a stage has been reached where the exploited and oppressed class – the proletariat – cannot attain its emancipation from the sway of the exploiting and ruling class – the bourgeoisie – without, at the same time, and once and for all, emancipating society at large from all exploitation, oppression, class-distinctions and class struggles.[161]

[160] In connection with this course I also read a wide swath of secondary Marx interpretation, such as Karl Korsch's *Karl Marx* (New York: John Wiley & Son, 1938) and I.I. Rubin's *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1972).

[161] Engels, "Preface," 1888 London edition. Read carefully, Engels' statement may be equivocal on whether socialist revolution is inevitable, but surely the great majority of readers both of the *Manifesto* and other works of Marx and Engels have taken them to say that it is, and reasonably so based on their texts. There are also contrary texts, of course, such as Engels' statement that bourgeois society faced the alternatives of "transition to socialism or regression into barbarism."

I never found this "nucleus" credible.[162] In a paper I wrote at IPS in the late 1960s titled "Re:Markx," I argued that the actual course of social development was far from what Marx had predicted. The establishment by the working class of a socialist society in the economically most advanced countries "obviously has not occurred."

Marx had adopted a false premise: "That social transformation can only be accomplished by the coming to power of a new class, that is, by revolution." The history of the transition from feudalism to capitalism, which Marx took as his model, belied this view. In some countries, such as France, this transition did involve a political seizure of power by the bourgeoisie, in others – notably Germany and Japan -- "it was brought about by the old feudal ruling class itself, which retained its dominance while revolutionizing its own economic system to overcome its economic fetters."[163]

Much the same thing had happened with the socialization of modern capitalism. Marx identified the contradiction in capitalism as between the private ownership of the means of production and the increasingly social nature of the production process. Only by socializing the economy could this contradiction be overcome. And in fact the economy was reshaped by socialization – "carried out not by the working class but by the capitalists themselves, who have virtually abolished the classical capitalist market and substituted economic planning, while retaining their social domination."[164]

This example illustrated a deeper flaw: Marx's assertion of historical inevitability. "To the extent that the pronouncements of the *Manifesto* are given the status of scientific laws,[165] they are clearly false – proven so by the scientific test of historical experiment."

But if there was no law in history, perhaps there was a logic.[166]

> The historic rise of modern productive techniques posed a problem for Western societies. Typically, the bourgeoisie *did* smash the older feudal societies. But this result was not inevitable. In some cases, e.g. Germany, they failed to do so, and the old feudal classes made the transition to modern society instead; in the case of Russia, both groups failed and the task was left to the workers and intellectuals; in Spain, the process never happened at all.

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[162] My methodological approach here followed E.P. Thompson's dictum that Marxist concepts, to be judged superior to others, must "stand up better to the test of historical logic." (*The Poverty of Theory*, p. 236.)

[163] This analysis was derived in part from the work of Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993). Something similar has happened with the Chinese Communist Party's introduction of many aspects of capitalism.

[164] This of course was written long before the era of neo-liberalism produced a reversion toward classic capitalist markets and a decline of economic planning worldwide.

[165] Engels wrote in his Preface to the *Manifesto* that its "fundamental proposition" is "destined to do for history what Darwin's theory has done for biology."

[166] I presume that the distinction I made between law and logic derived from a reading of some early writings of E.P. Thompson.

These historical results, I concluded, "have a common logic which makes them intelligible, even though no law dictated them."

I saw this distinction between scientific law and historical logic as of practical significance. "At present, the United States is posed the problem of liquidating its disastrous commitment in Vietnam. This liquidation may be achieved by popular opposition to the war. It may be achieved by the establishment. Or it may not be achieved at all."

I saw such a non-deterministic approach as an alternative to "the optimism of the Marxist position" which had "led to disastrous attitudes," such as "the view of German revolutionaries that since socialist revolution was inevitable eventually, there was no real possibility that Nazism would develop instead." But I also saw it as an alternative to New Left tendencies toward "hostility to a historical view of man's situation" rooted in "an existentialist view of man's absolute freedom in the present."[167] This led to "forms of action which go completely against the logic of history" and "makes it impossible to develop strategies which utilize the logic of history."[168]

Historical inevitability "often served as a means of absolution from moral responsibility" for Marxists.[169] Without it "we are again responsible."

This responsibility was partly negative.

> If we plan a demonstration in which people are killed, we are partly responsible. If we follow a policy which results in a fascist coup, we are partially responsible. If we create a movement which ends up deliberately starving huge masses of people to death – as socialists did in Russia – the blood is partly on our hands.

But the responsibility was also positive.

> The horror that is our present world will not cure itself automatically. It requires our action for its salvation. And it requires something we might call statesmanship, the ability to take social forces and shape them to one's ends, rather than merely reflecting them.

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[167] "Man" was used as a generic term for "human," even by feminist writers, until the early 1970s. Even Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* did so. I tried to eliminate such use in *Strike!* when it was already in final draft thanks to a discussion with Dolores Hayden.

[168] This can also be a problem today with "post-modern" theories that sometimes go beyond a critique of determinism to a general dissolution of historical connectedness.

[169] It was one of the less attractive tendencies of Marxist tradition to substitute irony and sarcasm for explicit discussion of values, ethics, and morality. The avoidance of explicit discussion of values is characteristic of social groups who assume their own moral superiority, making explicit statements unnecessary. Marxism ironically parallels the cult of "Western values" in this respect. Both eliminate the need for value dialogue with those who disagree or come from different value traditions. As John Brown Childs indicates, this generates a politics grounded in the expectation that others will or should convert to one's own obviously superior position. See John Brown Childs, *Transcommunality: From the Politics of Conversion to the Ethics of Respect* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003). See also discussion below on Piaget's ideas about de-centering and coordination of values.

One could easily find Marxist texts in accord with the non-deterministic approach I was advocating; "Men make history, but not under conditions of their own choosing" and "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it" come to mind. But the very fact that Marx could so easily by interpreted in almost opposite ways led me early on to leave to the Marxicologists the question of which were his "real" views.

My rejection of Marx' "fundamental proposition" notwithstanding, Marx and Marxism have been formative for me as for millions of others around the world. The very critique I made of it in "Re:Markx" used ideas about social dynamics that would have been unthinkable without Marx and the Marxist tradition.

Karl Marx hated what capitalism did to workers. Whatever the flaws of his theories, he continues to inspire because of his relentless encouragement of collective action by the oppressed. To his apparently determinist interpretation of history, he could have answered with his own words: "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point is to *change* it."[170]

In the early 1970s I attended a lecture by Paul Mattick. He had spent much of his long life studying Marxist political economy, and he spoke for what seemed like several hours delineating the entire theoretical edifice of *Capital*. (One young worker who attended was afterward heard to say, "I have only one question: Does he breathe?) Then, to my amazement, he closed by saying that none of this matters. "The political economy of the working class is the class struggle."

There's at least one Marx who would have agreed.

[170] Theses on Feuerbach," Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, (Moscow: Progress, 1964) p. 647.

## Robbing Marx

Stripped of the baggage of historical inevitability, Marx' work provides an extremely rich body of hypotheses to test against historical evidence. The failure of some – such as the prediction that the working class would transform capitalism into socialism – by no means renders the rest worthless. In *Strike!* I tested many of Marx ideas about the formation of capitalism, the development of the working class, and the impact of capitalist crises on society and found them well supported by the facts of US history and useful for organizing our understanding of those facts.

Furthermore, embedded within Marx' theory are more general ideas that can be readapted to purposes and contexts beyond the proletarian class struggle. Many of these have been crucial for my own thinking about social change.

Marx' idea of class exemplifies a more general idea of social differentiation and stratification. Marx' theory in *Capital* involves two kinds of differentiation. One is the division of labor.[171] The other is the division between workers and capitalists, based on capitalists' exclusive possession of the means of production.

Theorists before Marx analyzed differentiation through the division of labor. Adam Smith portrayed the division of labor as leading to an interdependence that benefitted all. Those whose labor was specialized received the blessing of Adam Smith's "hidden hand." Social classes were similarly interdependent: Workers provided capitalists with labor; capitalists provided workers with wages.

But Marx saw in such differentiation the seeds of antagonism. Each worker's freedom was restricted by their limited role in the division of labor. And of course, workers had an antagonistic relationship to employers, both within capitalism in the struggle over wages and historically in the struggle over capitalism vs. socialism.

Marx did not abandon Adam Smith's idea that differentiation leads to interdependence. But he maintained that the inequality between capitalists who own society's means of production and workers who do not turned mutual dependence into unilateral dependence. Since workers don't own the means of production, they are forced to work for those who do. The power of capitalists over workers is the result of workers' dependence on the means of production and therefore on the capitalists who possess them.

The idea of differentiation leading to antagonism and dependence can be and has been applied to many other aspects of society. For example, it provided a template for the "dependency theory" that examined the relation between imperialism and the societies it

[171] This in turn is broken down into the division of labor in society, between hunters and farmers, for example, and division of labor in the production process of a single product, for example the collaboration of different crafts in making a vehicle.

dominated. More recently, it was manifested in the resurgence of feminism, which highlighted the antagonistic dimension of the relation between women and men.

Such an approach can also be applied to organizations. For example, the differentiation of organizations into leaders and led is often presumed to be necessary and beneficial to all. But it can lead, whether in unions or parties or churches, to an antagonistic relationship in which power is concentrated in leaders and the rank-and-file are rendered powerless.

Marx' two forms of differentiation lead to two different kinds of problems for those who live under capitalism, which Marx distinguished in a brilliant passage in *Capital*. On the one hand, capitalism generates problems of domination -- for example, the tyranny of the capitalist over the worker in the workplace. This class division "implies the undisputed authority of the capitalist over men, that are but parts of a mechanism that belongs to him."[172]

On the other hand, capitalism generates chaos and disorganization, notably what Marx calls the "anarchy of the market." The division of labor within society "brings into contact independent commodity-producers, who acknowledge no other authority but that of competition." Marx admits that there is a tendency toward equilibrium among the various spheres of production, but "only in the shape of a reaction against the constant upsetting of this equilibrium" -- through what today economists might call equilibration by feedback. He compared this to the war of all against all in the animal kingdom that "more or less preserves the conditions of existence of every species."[173]

This classification of problems of domination and problems of disorder is applicable to many other areas of social life. In the nation state system, for example, there are problems that have to do with the domination of one nation or people by another -- aka imperialism. But there are also problems that have to do with uncontrolled interactions among nations, such as arms races and cycles of violence and revenge. And, as in Marx's analysis of capitalism, the two can easily appear together.

Distinguishing problems of domination and problems of disorder has been important for me in thinking about alternatives to the existing organization of society. If domination were the only problem, then the solution would simply be liberation; but in fact, liberation by itself can simply lead to disorder. Conversely, if disorder were the only problem, an organizing authority would be the evident solution; unfortunately, history has shown that such an authority can easily become a new center of oppression. So adequate solutions to social problems require ways of limiting both domination and disorder by combining freedom and coordination.

The domination of the immediate employer over workers, combined with the general disruption and impoverishment workers experience as a result of the "anarchy of capitalist production," led in Marx' analysis to the process of class formation. In the

[172] *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 356 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965.)
[173] *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 356.

*Communist Manifesto*, Marx gives a marvelous synoptic description of the formation of the working class through its struggle with the capitalist class.

At first "the contest is carried on by individual laborers, then by the workpeople of a factory, then by the operatives of one trade, in one locality, against the individual bourgeoisie who directly exploits them." At this stage "the laborers still form an incoherent mass scattered over the whole country, and broken up by their mutual competition." But with the further development of industry, "the proletariat not only increases in number, it becomes concentrated in great masses, its strength grows, and it feel that strength more."

As the economic crises and other problems of capitalism deepen, "the collisions between individual workmen and individual bourgeois take more and more the character of collision between two classes." Workers begin to establish combinations in the form of trade unions. "They club together in order to keep up the rate of wages; they found permanent associations in order to make provision beforehand for these occasional revolts." Improved means of communication place workers in different locations in contact with one another, centralizing local struggles "into one national struggle between classes."[174] Labor historians like E.P. Thompson have corrected and enriched this account, but its general outlines have remained persuasive.

This model of class formation – in Sartre's terms, the transformation from a "series" to a "group" to achieve common purposes -- can be and has been applied with greater or lesser modification to the formation of many groups other than social classes. For example, the emergence in colonies of national consciousness and national resistance movements can be analyzed in similar terms. So can the rise of modern feminism. They all embody aspects of common preservation.

For Marx, the formation of a class does not take place in a vacuum; it occurs not only through its internal development but also through its interaction -- especially conflictual interaction -- with other classes. Such an interactive framework is also necessary for understanding the development of other kinds of social groups. For example, the development of the nationalist movements in countries like India or Algeria is incomprehensible unless one looks at the impact of the emerging movement on the various interest groups that affect the colonial administration, the resulting evolution of colonial policy, and the impact of that in turn on the colonized people and their national movements.

I've absorbed these Marxist concepts into my own thinking and applied them in a myriad ways. The idea of differentiations leading to antagonisms is as applicable to sectarian religious conflict as it is to class. The distinction and interrelation between problems of domination and of disorder are as relevant to the nation state system as they are to

[174] In a tricky passage the *Manifesto* then goes on to say, "Every class struggle is a political struggle. . . . This organization of the proletarians into a class, and consequently into a political party . . . ." A process more or less along these lines took place in most countries in Europe. It did not in the US.

capitalism. The formation and development of social groups out of isolated individuals is as apparent for gender, racial, national, and other groups as it is for the working class.

Marx' account of the formation of the working class, whatever its flaws, provides one valuable model for thinking about the emergence of common preservation. His analysis of differentiation provides a reminder that there are many interests besides common ones that will have to be addressed to overcome today's threat of mutual destruction. His delineation of the twin problems of domination and disorder should alert us to the need to address both.

## Adventures of the dialectic

"The despair of necessity," Soren Kierkegaard wrote, "is due to the lack of possibility." When one is about to swoon with despair the cry is, "Procure me possibility!"[175] The lack of belief in even the possibility of significant change reinforces the status quo. As Tim and I put it in *Common Sense for Hard Times*, "The sheer fact that people's experiences take place entirely within the existing society often makes the idea of any fundamental change in that society seem a mere fantasy."[176]

Much of the power and influence of Marxism results from its view of the world as a process of change. Objects may appear to be fixed and permanent, but such an appearance is false. Rather, objects are constituted by each other and by the wholes or systems of which they are part. The relations between objects and within systems contain contradictions that inevitably lead to change.

These assertions define a paradigm of the nature of change in general, often referred to as the Marxian dialectic. I've long sought ways to use what is of value in the Marxian dialectic while escaping some of its problems.

In a brilliant and in many ways friendly review, my friend the labor historian Steven Sapolsky traced some of the problems in *Strike!* to a too uncritical acceptance of the dialectic. Steve wrote that the book is structured by many dialectical either/or's:

> Either the working class is powerful or powerless, self-active or passive, engaged in mass strikes or integrated into the system, self-organized spontaneously or unorganized by leaders, self-conscious or laboring under false consciousness.

But the problem with any such dialectic is that it is "a very crude instrument of analysis."

> The working class is described by a range of possible conditions that barely captures the richness and variety of its presence throughout modern history." And "the dialectic has a way of mystifying the dynamics of the transition that the working class often makes from one condition to another." The net result of overdependence on the dialectic is "a heavy-handed manipulation of its categories at the expense of a sensitive study of reality, and ultimately, a stifling of the historical imagination.

"To a certain extent," Steve wrote, *Strike!* suffers from this sort of distortion." The dialectic

> is not much help in dissecting the involved interaction of spontaneity, organization, and leadership, let alone in making sense of the overall pattern of

[175] Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling and The Sickness unto Death* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1954) p. 170-172.
[176] *Common Sense for Hard Times*, p. 5-6.

> labor history. We must remove the either/or from its traditional central place and face up to the both/and and the neither/nor. Perhaps then we may arrive at a more refined sense of what it takes for the working class to become self-reliant and powerful.[177]

My explorations of dialectical thinking have been motivated by a desire to escape such distortion without losing sight of its insights into transformation and interconnection.

Dialectical ways of thinking have appeared in many different forms, from the early Greek philosopher Heraclitus to some versions of modern systems theory.[178] A vast and murky literature probes the "real" character of Marx' dialectic. Marx apparently never wrote down a mature statement of his own view of the dialectic, so interpreters depend either on his practice, his passing remarks, or the extensive interpretations of his collaborator Frederick Engels.[179] Marx' views often appear vague or contradictory – and those of his interpreters are even more so. But the Marxian dialectic is important, both because of the contribution it can make to understanding change and interaction and because for a century and a half it has underpinned so much thinking about social change.

Bertell Ollman, perhaps the best known American interpreter of the Marxian dialectic, points out that "Understanding anything in our everyday experience requires that we know something about how it arose and developed and how it fits into the larger context or system of which it is part."[180] The need to situate anything in relation to its history and context was central to what I had learned from my participation in social movements and my study of their history. The process of forming such an understanding I had come to refer to as "contextualization" or "the ecological shift."

Dialectical thinking provides a way to focus attention on change and interaction. It stands in contrast with several other ways of thinking about change. In pre-modern societies, the cosmos was often seen in terms of recurring cycles or as a degeneration from a previous golden age. In many religious and philosophical traditions, the only real

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[177] Steven Sapolsky, "Strike: A Review," *Root & Branch* #4 (nd) The importance of "both/and" formulations has recently been emphasized by neuroscientist J.A. Scott Kelso. See J.A. Scott Kelso and David A. Engstrøm, *The Complementary Nature* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

[178] Marx drew on, but also radically revised, the version he found in Hegel. As David Harvey puts it, Hegel's dialectic was, or at least has frequently been interpreted as, "just a matter of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis." This gave rise to a rather simplistic teleology like "class struggle under capitalism necessarily gives rise to a classless socialism." (David Harvey, *Justice, Nature & the Geography of Difference* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1996] p. 57.)
Some interpreters, like Harvey, basing themselves on Marx' intellectual practice rather than on his and Engels' explicit formulations, argue that Marx's dialectic is less a necessary logical structure than "a flow of argument and practices." (p. 57) At the opposite pole is Frederick Engels, who argued that "the dialectical laws are really laws of development of nature, and therefore are valid also for theoretical natural science." (*Dialectics of Nature*, "II. Dialectics.") While I find Harvey's view far more congenial, Engels' is certainly closer to what "dialectics" has meant to most Marxists historically.
For a useful summary of the Marxian dialectic seen as "a flow or argument and practices," see Harvey pp. 48ff. and references given there.

[179] Engels' *Dialectics of Nature* is a principal source for later interpreters, but different schools have debated endlessly whether Marx' views were really the same as those presented by Engels.

[180] *Dance of the Dialectic*, p. 13.

reality is that which is unchanging; Plato, for example, evokes unchanging eternal forms as the highest reality. Starting around the time of the industrial revolution, ideas that portray the world as a continuing process of progress became pervasive; the "Whig" interpretation of history as progress and "social Darwinist" applications of Darwin's theory of evolution provide examples.[181]

It is not hard to construct connections between these paradigms and ideas about what is natural, necessary, and proper for society. Intellectual historians have seen links between Plato's eternal forms and society ruled by a hereditary elite. Similarly they have asserted a logical connection between the idea of conflict-free progress and a bourgeoisie seeking to legitimate itself against both a feudal aristocracy and an emerging working class. Nor should it be surprising to find advocates of revolutionary social change like Marx and Engels maintaining that change through conflict is the law of the natural and social world.

The Marxian dialectic involves some very broad assumptions about change and interaction that – like their contraries – cannot be verified by historical tests.

Conventional political thought often assumes what exists is normal and change from it must be explained. The Marxian dialectic tends conversely to regard change as normal and stability as merely a passing appearance. This assumption makes it difficult to explain stability, let alone retrogression. As one Marxist philosopher warned, Marxists are always at risk from the danger of looking at every situation as if it were about to dissolve. Further, the Marxian view tends to rule out a priori the possibility of conflict-free change and to imply that only revolutionary change is real. Crippling or even disastrous political conclusions can result from all of these unverifiable presuppositions.

The Marxian dialectic also arbitrarily emphasizes the interrelatedness of the whole over the distinct identity of the parts. In this perspective "the truth is the whole." Reality forms a system in which all elements are actually manifestations of "internal relations" within the whole.

The assertion that everything is related to everything is not false. But it provides no way to distinguish more and less significant relations. Marxism "solved" this problem by asserting that economic production and exchange are *the* significant relations and that the social classes that express economic relations are *the* significant social actors.[182]

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[181] E.H. Carr's discussion of progress in history represents a confluence of "Whig" and Marxist ideas of progress. In the 1970s, portrayals of history as a sequence of radically different worldviews so little connected that they are incomprehensible to each other became widespread.

[182] The priority of production is sometimes justified by the argument that the mean of human existence must be produced for human life to proceed. But one might as well argue that human biological reproduction is prior to production because people must be biologically produced before they can produce. The priority of production is at other times defended as empirically validated by historical research. But as we saw in "Re:Marx" above, the empirical historical case for Marx' "fundamental proposition" is pretty unconvincing even for the transition from feudalism to capitalism.

This view provided Marxism a powerful tool to integrate the whole social field into a coherent totality. The problem was that it was too coherent – to the point of class monomania. A paradigm that started as a holistic approach often ended up producing an extreme reductionism. Much of the misplaced reductionism in *Strike!* reflected this aspect of the Marxist tradition.

As social movements increasingly focused on non-class issues, ranging from the oppression of women to nuclear exterminism to the environment, the Marxist paradigm generated more and more anomalies. While extreme efforts could still give it a degree of coherence, the effort seemed less and less justified by the payoff. Much social movement thought moved toward "post-modernism," in some versions of which the search for coherent wholes was itself abandoned. But this failed to meet social movements' need for understanding social connections.

An additional problem results from the way the Marxian dialectic uses language and concepts to represent change and interaction – something I have to grapple with constantly as a writer. As Ollman explains, the Marxian dialectic requires "expanding our notion of anything to include, as aspects of what it is, both the process by which it has become that and the broader interactive context in which it is found." Dialectics "restructures our thinking about reality" by "replacing the commonsense notion of 'thing' (as something that has a history and has external connections with other things) with notions of 'process' (which contains its history and possible futures) and 'relation' (which contains as part of what it is its ties with other relations.)"[183] A classic example is the way Marx transforms the economists' term "capital" from meaning money and physical means of production to meaning the historically developing exploitative relationship between workers and capitalists.

Ollman notes that Marx does not present definitions of his concepts and records his initial shock at discovering that the apparent meanings of Marx' key concepts "varied with the context, often considerably."[184] It was this feature of Marxism that made Italian sociologist Vilfredo Pareto complain in exasperation, "Marx's words are like bats. One can see in them both birds and mice."[185] Ollman and others have plausibly defended this as a valid way to deal with an interrelated and changing reality, and it may not be inherently illegitimate, but it sure can be confusing.

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[183] *Dance*, p. 13. Buckminster Fuller echoed this approach in his witty statement, "I seem to be a verb." Ollman stresses the roots of Marx' approach in the philosophy of "internal relations."

[184] *Dance*, p. 4.

[185] Quoted in *Dance*, p. 4. The same tendency in British followers of Hegel led one of their critics to cry out in exasperation, "Every thing is what it is and not another thing!" Source to come. To see the kind of problem this way of speaking can generate, consider, for example, Engels' statement that "Even simple mechanical change of place can only come about through a body at one and the same moment of time being both in one place and in another place, being in one and the same place and also not in it." (F. Engels, *Anti-Duhring* (New York, 1934, Part I, Ch. XII.) See M. Mark Mussachia, "On Contradiction in Dialectical Materialism" (*Science & Society*, Vol. XLI, No. 3. Fall, 1977).

There is nothing wrong with using a noun to refer to a process rather than to an entity or substance. Such terms as "arms race," "class struggle," and "racialization" do just that.[186] Nor is there a problem using a noun to refer to an entity that undergoes change, as long as it is clearly defined as such: It's fine to use the noun "oak" to refer to the entity that begins as an acorn and ends as a mighty tree.

The problem comes when we take a term normally used to refer to an entity and use it to refer instead to a process. Thus "capital" might normally be defined as wealth used for production. Marx uses it instead to refer to something we eventually come to understand as the entire process by which surplus-value is extracted from labor in a society divided into owners and non-owners of the means of production.

There is nothing unacceptable about this concept – in fact, it is extremely useful for understanding capitalist economies. However, the strategy of using the language of entities to refer to processes does make problems, especially where, as in Marx, terms are rarely defined.

Marx' linguistic strategy makes the meaning of words very different for those operating inside and outside the paradigm. This can render an open, democratic dialogue more difficult. Those operating inside the Marxist paradigm have often resembled a cult guided by esoteric understandings accessible only to initiates.[187] For them, the presuppositions of that understanding are not assumptions but reality. This is a dubious strategy for organizing participatory dialogue to guide social action.

The absence of defined terms makes verification outside the assumptions of the theory difficult at best. As Ollman acknowledges, "The results of [Marx'] investigations are prescribed to a large degree by the preliminary organization of his subject matter."[188] Yet Marxism provides little in the way of means to test the validity of its "preliminary organization." When empirical data is inconvenient for the theory, the theory can always be readjusted to take it into account. The result is a theory that is self-validating. This is particularly true of the theory's most fundamental principles, such as the assertion that all is change, which is as unverifiable as the contrary assertion that only the unchanging is real.[189]

Over many years I've tried to learn as much as possible from Marx and the Marxist tradition, but to translate its concepts into explicit descriptions of processes. In *Strike!*, for example, I describe class conflict as a process in which developing social groups battled, but not as a conflict of "labor" against "capital." Such a procedure leads, I hope, to clearer and more testable descriptions.

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[186] Manning Marable regularly uses the term "racialization" and "racialized minorities" to remind readers that race is not a trait of individuals but the expression of a social process.

[187] Such tendencies are obviously not unique to Marxism. In fact, they arise to some degree from the very nature of paradigms. But countering them requires endorsing, rather than rejecting, forms of testing against evidence that are in principle open to all.

[188] *Dance of the Dialectic*, p. 74.

[189] The ever-changing meaning of words and concepts makes it difficult to test for internal consistency as well as for fit to evidence.

I've also continued to search for ways of thinking that would promote understanding of process and interaction while escaping some of the problems of the Marxian dialectic. I've sought approaches that don't take for granted the priority of either change or stability. I've sought ways of thinking that allow the identification of significant connections and relations without falling into either the triviality that everything is related to everything else or arbitrarily assuming that one set of relations is inherently more real or significant than others. I've looked for ways to understand structures, wholes, and systems that escape self-validation by allowing testing against evidence. And I've looked for ways to talk about change and interaction that are accessible to open dialogue among people with different experiences and perspectives.

This quest has led me to explore ways of thinking about change and interaction ranging from pragmatism to cybernetics and from systems theory to Jean Piaget's genetic structuralism. I hope what I've purloined from them can sharpen at least a bit the weapons we have to wield against the despair of necessity.

## Learning by Doing

Somewhere buried deep I my files is an SDS membership card signed by John Dewey. Well, not exactly signed, but at least stamped with his signature. Someone in the SDS office found the stamp in a desk drawer and signed my card with it for a gag. It well symbolizes the looming but unacknowledged influence of American pragmatism, and particularly of John Dewey, in the New Left and in my understanding of social movements.[190]

John Dewey was regarded as the dominant American philosopher for much of the 20th century; Henry Steele Commager described him as "the guide, the mentor, and the conscience of the American people."[191] For many in the New Left, however, "pragmatism" represented the philosophy of liberalism as acceptance of the capitalist and imperialist status quo.

In a *Root & Branch* article more or less contemporaneous with *Strike!* I wrote that "Ideas, insofar as they are relevant to action, are essentially maps of the environment and plans for how to operate in it. They are generally accepted or rejected on the basis of how well the predictions based on them allow people to function in the world."[192] Though I associated this approach more with the version of Marxism I was absorbing from Luxemburg and Pannekoek, it surely amounts to Dewey-style pragmatism.[193] As a recent

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[190] Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991) provides a useful guide to Dewey's thought and the social dimension of American pragmatism. For the roots of this position, see the discussion of Randolph Bourne's criticism of Dewey's support for World War I in Westbrook, p. 195ff. While Marcus Raskin, one of my mentors at the Institute for Policy Studies, considered himself a follower of Dewey, I, like most others in the New Left, never really studied him. The only book of Dewey's I remember reading was *Individualism Old and New*. No doubt I absorbed some of Dewey's ideas from reading and commenting on Marcus Raskin's *Being and Doing* (New York: Random House, 1971) in manuscript.

[191] Westbrook, p. xiv.

[192] "Intellectuals and Class Consciousness," *Root & Branch* #4. (nd).

[193] Marxists have differed greatly on the relation between Marx's ideas and pragmatism. Marx' "Theses on Feuerbach," -- with their statement that "The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but a practical question. Man must prove the truth . . . of his thinking in practice" – sure sounds like Dewey's pragmatism to me. The affinity between Marxism and Dewey's pragmatism was pointed out by Sidney Hook in *Toward an Understanding of Karl Marx*. Hook's conception of workers democracy through democratic workers councils found expression in the 1934 platform of the short-lived American Workers Party, led by A.J. Muste, which I read as I was preparing *Strike!*. For Hook and Dewey, see Westbrook, 463ff.

The workers council tradition moved between an approach similar to Hook's and one that emphasized the "scientific" character of Marxism and specifically the objectivity of its analysis of capitalist economics and its prediction of inevitable collapse. *Toward an Understanding of Karl Marx* was criticized by Paul Mattick in a short book called *The Inevitability of Communism* for failing to recognize the scientific character of Marx's theory of capitalism and its crisis. But Anton Pannekoek was critical of the kind of determinism expressed by Mattick. See Serge Bricianer, *Pannekoek and the Workers' Councils* (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1978) p. 233ff.

Jean-Paul Sartre seems to have come to a view similar to pragmatism. In *Search for a Method* he wrote that "the foundation of anthropology is man himself, not as the object of practical Knowledge, but as a practical organism producing Knowledge as a moment of its *praxis*." (New York: Vintage, 1968) p.179.

Dewey biographer put it, for Dewey "ideas were hypotheses or plans of action, the truth of which rested on their ability to 'work' in experience."[194]

William James and John Dewey borrowed the idea of evolutionary adaptation from Charles Darwin and applied it to human thought and action. Their pragmatism envisions adaptation not simply as an acquiescence to the status quo, however, but as a transformation of it. Dewey emphasized the adjustment of the organism to its environment – but he defined "adjustment" as including "an adaptation of the environment to the individual's needs and ends, rather than vice versa."[195]

Dewey's protestations to the contrary notwithstanding, "pragmatic adaptation" has often come to refer to acquiescence in the status quo. Historians of American trade unionism like John R. Commons often praised the conservatism of American trade unions as an expression of American "pragmatism." They argued that the success of trade unions as institutions within the existing economic system depended on their sloughing off aspirations that could not be achieved within that framework.[196]

But this way of applying pragmatism seemed to me one sided. It ignored the repeated breakdown of trade union adaptation. In periods of crisis, trade unions either collapsed altogether or at least lost the power to maintain workers' conditions of life at currently acceptable levels. With this breakdown of adaptation, a new adaptive process started up as workers searched experimentally for new forms of organization and action based on their own collective power. Mass strikes represented the breakdown of existing modes of adaptation and the attempt to find new ones. Far from being the product of utopian fantasies, they were an attempt to construct a pragmatic "adjustment" that would provide "an adaptation of the environment to the individual's needs and ends."[197]

I was strongly influenced in this approach by Rosa Luxemburg's pragmatist view of social movement action as a series of adaptations leading progressively to transformation of the status quo. Her argument comes out forcefully in her critique of the view -- shared by Leninist revolutionaries and reformist social democrats alike -- that workers are benighted people who can achieve "socialist consciousness" only if they are enlightened by middle class intellectuals.

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[194] Westbrook, p. 130.
[195] Westbrook, p. 127, footnote 15.
[196] *Strike!*, 1977, p. 316. Ironically, in an oddly parallel fashion, Paul Mattick argued that even once-revolutionary labor organizations, in order to succeed in the era of capitalist expansion, had to abandon all revolutionary character in order to escape repression and compete effectively with non-revolutionary ones. Paul Mattick, "Spontaneity and Organization," in *Anti-Bolshevik Communism* (London: Merlin Press, 1978) p. 117ff.
[197] Of course, strikes and other forms of conflict themselves can serve as vehicles for re-integrating discordant social elements back into the status quo. The use of strikes as largely empty rituals of social protest, followed by a return to normal life, illustrates this point. For a large auto strike as an example, see William Serrin, *The Company and the Union* (New York: Knopf, 1973). For a more theoretical sociological view, see Louis Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1956).

In his foundational pamphlet *What Is to be Done*, Lenin had written, "The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade-union consciousness"[198] – in contrast to a deeper "socialist consciousness." Then he quoted with approval the leading theorist of social democracy, Karl Kautsky: "The vehicle of science is not the proletariat, but the bourgeois intelligentsia: it was in the minds of individual members of this stratum that modern socialism originated, and it was they who communicated it to the more intellectually developed proletarians who, in their turn, introduce it into the proletarian class struggles where conditions allow that to be done. Thus, socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without."[199]

Luxemburg argued in contrast that socialist consciousness is something that workers construct through their own struggles. It is only through a process of trial and error that they can gain improved understandings. As she put it in her polemic against the centralized party control Lenin advocated in *What Is to be Done*, "The only 'subject' which merits today the role of director is the collective 'ego' of the working class. The working class demands the right to make its mistakes and learn in the dialectic of history. . . . The errors committed by a truly revolutionary movement are infinitely more fruitful than the infallibility of the cleverest Central Committee."[200]

I saw the ability to move from a fragmented to a wholistic view as a particularly important aspect of what people could and needed to learn "in the dialectic of history." In *History and Class Consciousness*, the once-famous Marxist theorist Georg Lukacs argued that, because of the fragmentation of modern capitalist society, the working class was unable to achieve a true conception of its position in society by itself; he used this alleged fact to bolster Lenin's view that socialist class consciousness "would be implanted in the workers 'from outside,' i.e., 'from outside the economic struggle and the sphere of relations between workers and employers."[201]

In contrast, I saw the transformations that took place among workers in periods of mass strike as precisely a shift from an isolated, individualistic approach to one that recognized individuals and particular groups as part of a wider pattern of interests and interactions. These transformations were somewhat akin to the shift in biology from a focus on individual organisms and species to an ecological perspective, and to the shift in political

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[198] V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers) Volume 5, p. 375.
[199] *Collected Works*, Volume 5, p. 383-4.
[200] "Organizational Question of Social Democracy" (also published elsewhere as "Leninism vs. Marxism") in *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, p. 130. *Strike!*'s focus on action as the privileged source of learning and development was no doubt overdone. As David Montgomery wrote in a critique of *Strike!*, "Mutualism is manifested in values, loyalties, and thoughts, as well as in actions." He made sure to add that "This is not to say that intellectual confrontation with hegemonic bourgeois ideas *is* the revolution either, much less that socialist consciousness must be brought to workers from without their ranks." David Montgomery, "Spontaneity and Organization: Some Comments," *Radical America*, November-December, 1973, vol. 7, no. 6.
[201] Georg Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (MIT Press, 1971). Cited in Jeremy Brecher, "Intellectuals and Class Consciousness," *Root & Branch* #4 (Cambridge, MA: ND).

science from seeing arms build-ups as expressions of national policies to seeing them as part of an interactive arms race in a system of competing nation states.

Seeing things as part of a larger whole or system didn't mean seeing them without conflict. Indeed, in the case of class a growing awareness of systemic class conflict was a central part of what led people to see themselves in the context of a larger whole.

From my study of mass strikes I felt I was finally getting some understanding of how and why such an "ecological shift" might happen, at least in the case of class formation. It was not just a matter of intellectual persuasion, but rather a response to the problems people faced and the means of action needed to address them. As I wrote in a critique of Lukacs' *History and Class Consciousness*, the class struggle provides the solution to the problem of fragmentation that Lukacs poses:

> For this struggle itself constitutes a series of social experiments through which the working class clarifies for itself the actual structure of society and the real nature of the problems it faces. At first, individual workers try to solve their problems individually and fail; they soon come to see that they must cooperate with those they work with to win anything. These groups in turn see that they must support one another or be defeated one by one. It gradually becomes clear that workers are powerless when they are isolated, but that the more closely they cooperate, the stronger they become. The fragmentation created by capitalism is overcome at the point where individual workers see that their individual problems are the problems of the class as a whole, and can only be eliminated by solving them for the class as a whole."

I saw that shift happening in the mass strike process. And, to paraphrase Kenneth Boulding, "Whatever happens, is possible."

Dewey maintained that people's ideas are a means for them to act on the world. He also argued that people used the results of their action to improve their thinking; Dewey's approach to education, for example, was often summed up as "learning by doing."

That requires a loop – or, one might say, a dialectic -- between thought and action, between theory and practice. Action expresses thought, but thought also changes as a result of action. This can be seen as an aspect of the more general tendency of biological organisms both to maintain their organization and to adapt to their environment.

Dewey saw thinking as a response to problems people cannot solve with their existing patterns of adaptation. Reflective inquiry comes to the fore when "there is something seriously the matter, some trouble, due to active discordance, dissentiency, conflict among the factors of a prior non-intellectual experience."[202] Some such presumption must unconsciously underlie the procedure I almost always intuitively adopt of starting any inquiry from a problem to be solved, and of explaining change in people's action as a response to a problem they face.

[202] Quoted in Westbrook, p. 128.

Like the man who had spoken prose all his life without knowing it, I guess I've always been something of a pragmatist without recognizing it. But perhaps that's not so surprising. As the sociologist C. Wright Mills once wrote, Dewey "has deposited so very many of his values in a statement of method, it is often difficult for Dewey, or for us, to have a clear-eyed view of his social content."[203] Indeed, only as I've explored cybernetics, systems theory, and Piaget's genetic structuralism have I come to appreciate what Dewey was driving at.

[203] C. Wright Mills, *Power, People and Politics* (New York: Ballantine, ND) p. 167.

## Feedback

When, in the early 1960s, scientists discovered that nuclear testing was releasing radioactive strontium-90 that was lodging in children's baby teeth, threatening them with cancer and birth defects, some scientists rapidly disseminated the information to the public. Millions of people joined the movement for a nuclear test ban treaty. Such a treaty became US policy, and soon most countries in the world had halted nuclear testing. Global common preservation had become a crucial means to national (and human) self preservation. It had happened because there was some kind of loop between an action (nuclear testing), its results (dangerous nuclear fallout), and modified action (protest and a test ban).

In *Strike!* I described how people turned from individual to collective strategies because the results of their individual efforts indicated that their current strategies weren't working. I described how groups of workers turned to wider forms of mutual aid both because of successes they interpreted as indicating that collective action was working and because of failures they interpreted as indicating that still wider solidarity was needed. Around the time I was finishing *Strike!* I began discovering thinkers in a variety of fields who were exploring such "loopy" processes as part of a much more general pattern of what was coming to be called "feedback."[204]

Long before the term "feedback" was invented, the underlying principle had popped up in fields ranging from windmill and steam engine design to human physiology. In *The Wisdom of the Body*, for example, the American physiologist Walter Cannon explained that organisms have a certain "steady state" to which they tend. If their temperature, or salt/water balance, or other variables rise too high or too low, that triggers mechanisms to counter the excess and return the body to its normal equilibrium or steady state.

"Homeostasis" is the term for the stable conditions created by such processes. Consider, for example, a room with a furnace hooked up to a thermostat. The thermostat is a "control device" composed of a thermometer linked to a switch. If the temperature in the room falls below the thermostat's bottom setting, the switch is triggered and turns on the furnace. When the furnace raises the room's temperature above the thermostat's top setting, the switch is reversed and the furnace turned off. This homeostatic system will tend toward a certain equilibrium or goal or steady state – a normal temperature range for the room.[205]

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[204] I remember seeing Norbert Wiener's book *The Human Use of Human Beings* around the house in my youth and not being able to make head or tail of it. But I was no doubt indirectly influenced by cybernetics via Kenneth Boulding and others I was reading in the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. I learned many of the basic concepts from John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss* (New York: Basic Books, 1969), which used them to explain the basis of childrens' attachment behavior. Only when I picked up Gregory Bateson's *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballantine, 1972) did I begin to appreciate the significance of cybernetics. I only learned of Wiener's personal "feedback" interventions from David Noble's *Forces of Production*.

[205] My friend Joe Eyer and his collaborator Peter Sterling have pointed out that physiological systems do

The process that make such regulation possible is what we know today as "feedback." The idea is now so ubiquitous that it is hard to realize how new it is as a general concept. Ironically, it was first fully developed in order to guide radar-directed anti-aircraft weapons. A projectile might be aimed at its target, but meanwhile the target was moving and the projectile itself was affected by variations in the external environment, such as wind, and by slight imperfections in its own functioning, that diverted it from its intended path. The concept of feedback was developed in the process of solving this problem. A sensor would identify the actual positions of the projectile and the target. A control device would compare the actual locations to the intended trajectory. If the two differed, the control device would calculate the amount and direction of correction needed. It would then activate some kind of effecter – a rudder or a side rocket, for example – to push the projectile back to the required path.

The signal sent by the sensor was dubbed "feedback." Feedback was information -- in Gregory Bateson's phrase, "news of a difference." The circuit that carried the information was called a "feedback loop."[206]

Mathematician Norbert Wiener, who developed the concept of feedback, invented the term "cybernetics" (now, oddly, used to describe almost anything having to do with computers) to describe the whole range of phenomena controlled by feedback. He took the term from the Greek word for "steersman." The steersman of a boat observes its course and compares it with the course desired. The steersman then moves the rudder in a way that changes the course to correct or compensate for the discrepancy between the two. Others have called this idea "control theory" or "regulation."[207]

Such regulation by feedback makes it impossible to say what is cause and what is effect, since within such a system cause and effect form a loop. This leads to phenomena that don't follow a conventional causal chain. Of course, all the actions of the human body, the thermostat, the anti-aircraft projectile, and the steersman follow the presumably universal laws of physics. But they are steered or controlled by a process that pursues a goal, purpose, or norm – in short, an end -- that is not a result of the blind impact of one object on another. Indeed, unguided chains of cause and effect were intentionally counteracted by such cybernetic loops.

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not in fact aim for a single homeostatic target, but rather vary their targets over a very wide range of possible setpoints depending on the functional needs of the moment. They coined the term "allostasis" to characterize such variable goals of feedback systems. See Peter Sterling, "Principles of allostasis: optimum design, predictive regulation, pathophysiology, and rational therapeutics" in J. Schulkin, Allostasis, Homeostasis, and the Costs of Adaptation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Of course, behind such targets may still lie metatargets, such as individual or species survival or wellbeing, that ultimately regulate temporary targets and therefore the goals of action.

[206] Technically, this is a description of "negative feedback" which reduces deviation from a goal. Cyberneticians also described "positive" or "deviation-amplifying" feedback, feed-forward, and various other kinds of information circuits.

[207] For the historical background to Wiener's work, see Flo Conway & Jim Siegelman, *Dark Hero of the Information Age* (New York: Basic Books, 2005) and David Noble, *Forces of Production: A Social History of Industrial Automation* (New York: Knopf, 1984) pp. 48ff.

In a common sense view of purpose, one conceives of a goal and then takes action to reach it. But a cybernetic loop make use of negation. Action is not taken directly to achieve the goal, but rather indirectly by reducing the deviation from the goal.[208] Similarly, cybernetics explains events not be describing their causes, but rather by the absence, removal, or counteracting of that which prevents them from occurring.

Many people find the metaphors of thermostats and guided missiles cold and mechanical, even if they are meant to be anti-mechanistic. So let us return to the metaphor of a workshop for an image of the cybernetic feedback loop.

If the workers in the workshop just make things according to their existing plans and patterns, there is no way to tell if those products have deficiencies in meeting their purpose or if they could meet it better. Their products have to go out and be tested in the world outside the workshop. Someone has to use them and see how well they do their job. Then the results must be reported back to the workshop. For example, the denizens of the workshop may learn that a product breaks down whenever the weather gets too hot. They may learn this from the results of a consumer products testing lab, from angry letters of complaint from users, or from their own investigations outside the workshop.

In each case, the information must somehow get back to the workshop. The workers in the workshop then take out the original plans for the product and compare them to the condition that has been discovered. They try to identify what is wrong with the original plans. For example, the motor may generate heat and the product has no way to dissipate it, so that in hot weather it just gets hotter and hotter. Or a particular part may be extremely sensitive to heat and cease to function properly when it gets too hot.

The workers then try to find a solution to the problem. They may add a vent and fan to dissipate the heat. They may replace the oversensitive part with a less sensitive one. They may add to the product manual an instruction to shut it down for ten minutes every hour in hot weather to let it cool off. The solution must somehow counteract or compensate for the problem.

Some change is made in the product's design – in the pattern from which it is produced. Then the workers implement the modified design to produce the hopefully-improved product.

Then the product must go back out of the workshop and be tested in the world. Does it still overheat or has the problem been fixed? If the problem has been solved, the workshop denizens needs to find that out and use the modified design in their future production. If the problem has not been solved, they need to go "back to the drawing boards" and try to come up with an alternative solution.

Such a "product improvement cycle" illustrates what I mean by a "feedback loop" that guides actors to produce actions that better realize their ends.

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[208] For a further discussion of causal vs. cybernetic explanation, see Gregory Bateson, "Cybernetic Explanation," in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, especially p. 399.

The concept of feedback was used to design weapons, automatic machine tools, and highway systems; the advocates of "systems analysis" hoped to use it to control human society as a whole. But Norbert Wiener, its inventor, rejected that approach. As historian of technology David Noble wrote, "Wiener insisted upon the indeterminacy of systems."

> His approach, reflecting a lifelong interest in biology and a morality based upon independent acts of conscience, was organic, ecological, and human. He emphasized especially that living systems were open and contingent rather than closed and deterministic because the 'steersman,' the self-correcting mechanism, was human in social systems and thus moved not by formal logic but by skill, experience, and purpose.[209]

Warning against the dangers of modern technology running amok, Wiener advocated that the social application of the cybernetic concept should be "a constant feedback that would allow an individual to intervene and call a halt to a process initiated, thus permitting him second thoughts in response to unexpected effects and the opportunity to recast his wishes."

Wiener exemplified that idea in his own life, for example by publicly refusing to work on military projects. The "practical use of guided missiles can only be to kill foreign civilians indiscriminately. If therefore I do not desire to participate in the bombing or poisoning of defenseless peoples – and I most certainly do not – I must take a serious responsibility as to those to whom I disclose my scientific ideas."[210] (Instead he turned his knowledge of control devices, honed on weapons production, to the design of prosthetic devices, which might help rehabilitate the victims of war.[211])

Wiener also wrote public warnings about the social implications of emerging technology, such as a 1947 letter to the *Atlantic Monthly* headed "A Scientist Rebels."[212] He wrote United Auto Workers president Walter Reuther warning of the dangers of industrial automation and proposing to cooperate in a campaign to assure that the radical advances in technology then looming would benefit rather than harm labor.[213] His actions demonstrate that "feedback" is not just a way that people can be forced to conform to society, but that it can serve as a way people can change it.

While it was anticipated by many thinkers, including Aristotle, Darwin, Marx, Dewey, and Piaget, cybernetics provided a way to explain explicitly much that had previously been only vaguely asserted. It influenced fields ranging from sociology to child development. Like many others, I began using cybernetic concepts to try to make my

[209] Noble, p. 71. check quote.
[210] Noble, p. 73-4.
[211] Noble, p. 74.
[212] Noble, p. 73.
[213] Noble, p. 74, 76.

own vague intuitions clearer and more explicit. They gradually migrated to the core of my heuristic.

## Open systems

Far from the world of American weapons laboratories, the Austrian biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy was developing the concept of "open systems" as a way of thinking about organisms.[214] An organism, as Cannon had indicated, tends toward an equilibrium or steady state that is determined by the organism's own structure. In that sense it is a system that maintains itself, producing and reproducing its normal features. The means it uses to do so are essentially feedback loops like those of cybernetics, which it uses to identify its present state, compare it to a target state or norm, and then act to correct any discrepancy.

But Bertalanffy saw that internal homeostasis was only half the organism's story. In isolation, an organism would quickly die through suffocation, dehydration, starvation, and/or the accumulation of poisons. It is only able to maintain its norms or "state variables" by importing matter and energy from outside, from its environment, and by exporting waste material that would otherwise poison it. Bertalanffy called such a system, one which maintained its norms by means of interchange with its environment, an "open system."

The secret of such an open system was the semi-permeability of its boundaries. Such boundaries selectively let certain matter and information in and out, but prevent others from crossing. Such a system can counter the natural tendency toward disorganization, known as entropy. In the case of an animal, imported air (inhalation) prevents suffocation; imported water (drinking) prevents dehydration; imported food (eating) prevents starvation. Export (exhalation, urination, defecation) gets rid of poisonous waste materials. Fur keeps in heat by insulation; sweating gets rid of it by evaporation. Semi-permeability, in short, is the quick of life.

The theory of open systems initially distinguishes between a system and its environment. But in many cases "the environment" turns out to be composed of other open systems. An individual cell, for example, is an open system, maintaining its own patterns by importing nutrients and exporting wastes through its semi-permeable "cell wall." But the environment of the individual cell is actually the organism of which it is part. And the science of ecology shows that the individual organism in turn lives in an environment that is actually the eco-system of which it is part, composed largely of other organisms and their products. So open systems may form a hierarchy in which each system includes subsystems and is part of larger meta-systems. The theory of open systems thus becomes a theory of multilevel parts and wholes, both separated and connected by semi-permeable boundaries.

This idea has gradually taken hold in biology as an alternative to what Stephen Jay Gould describes as the Darwinian tradition that reduces "all large-scale evolutionary phenomena

[214] Bertalanffy's ideas and their historical development are presented in Ludwig von Bertalanffy, *General Systems Theory: Foundations, Development, Applications* (New York: George Braziller, 1968).

to extrapolated results of natural selection working at the level of individual organisms within populations." The alternative recognizes "genes, organisms, and species as legitimate entities in a sequence of levels with unique explanatory principles emerging at each more inclusive plateau."[215] Such models try "to understand nature as a hierarchy of interdependent levels, each coherent in itself, but each linked by ties of feedback to adjacent levels. . . No level is an ultimate reality and reference point for extrapolation; all are legitimate, interacting aspects of our natural world."[216]

Perhaps because it started with organisms, or perhaps because boundaries tend to be imagined in terms of spatial metaphors, open systems theory tended to portray systems, subsystems, and meta-systems as nesting neatly within each other. But in fact, different systems and subsystems can overlap and their boundaries can cut across each other. A migrating bird may be part of a tropical ecosystem in one season and an arctic one the next. The penis is part of both the urinary system and the sexual system. A slime mold may form a contiguous unit at one time, disperse into physically separate parts connected only by communications links, and then come back together, all the time functioning as a single organism.

The open systems idea suggests obvious parallels to human social life. Human individuals can be conceived as open systems that pursue their own "state variables" by means of their interaction with the environment. (That can include, as Dewey emphasized, "adaptation of the environment to the individual's needs and ends, rather than vice versa."[217]) That environment is composed of the social groups and organizations of which individuals are part – themselves likely to be open systems.

But the application of a systems model to society can also lead to misconceptions based on false analogies between different kinds of systems. Societies, for example, have often been compared to individual organisms. But there are problems with such a comparison. The groups and institutions that people are part of often overlap and cut across each other's boundaries, so that people are part of many different meta-systems.[218] It therefore becomes dubious to regard "a society" as a bounded and integrated whole in the same way that an organism is.

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[215] Stephen Jay Gould, "Utopia (Limited)," *New York Review of Books*, March 3, 1983 p. 23. Gould could have added ecosystems and the biosphere as a whole to the sequence.

[216] Gould, p. 25. Understanding of these levels and their interaction is developing rapidly, especially in the wake of the mapping of the human genome. The unexpectedly small number of genes that determine human beings has led to a great emphasis on the higher-level regulation of gene expression. For a taste of these developments, see Scott F. Gilbert, *Developmental Biology*, Fifth Edition (Sunderland, MA: Sinauer Associates, 1997), particularly the fascinating material on the regulation of metamorphosis, p. 733ff. See also Ernest L. Rossi, *The Psychobiology of Gene Expression* (Boston: Norton, 2002). Both Gilbert and Rossi explore the role of the environment in regulating gene expression, a phenomenon that certainly supports the view of "nature as a hierarchy of interdependent levels" more than a classic genetic determinism, as well as presenting a new dimension of the semi-permeability of organisms' boundaries. Rossi also stresses the expanding role being discovered for gene expression throughout the life of an organism, rather than just in its initial formation.

[217] Westbrook, p. 127, footnote 15.

[218] See "The abolition of society" below, particularly the discussion of Michael Mann.

Organisms are generally much more closely integrated than societies, with their parts much more intensely interdependent. Societies change in ways that individual organisms do not. And their goals are not genetically determined like those of organisms. Both may be open systems, but of very different kinds. It would be difficult to find an organism manifesting equivalents of the American Civil War or the transformation represented by the rise of industrial capitalism.

To deal with such differences, Bertalanffy proposed a meta-theory that would compare theories about different kinds of systems, to find both what they had in common and the features that made them different. He called it "general systems theory." I came to regard my own approach to social change as fitting into the general family of systems theories.

Like Norbert Wiener, Bertalanffy saw his theory as an alternative to, not an expression of, the drive to control human society from above. He closed his introductory essay on "The Meaning of General Systems Theory,"

> Human society is not a community of ants or termites, governed by inherited instinct and controlled by the laws of the superordinate whole; it is based upon the achievements of the individual and is doomed if the individual is made a cog in the social machine. This, I believe, is the ultimate precept a theory of organization can give: not a manual for dictators of any denomination more efficiently to subjugate human beings by the scientific application of Iron Laws, but a warning that the Leviathan of organization must not swallow the individual without sealing its own inevitable doom.[219]

According to systems theory, a multi-level open system reproduces its established patterns through the action of its subsystems. That seems to allow only the two possibilities of reproduction and breakdown. But there is a third possibility: The sub-systems within such a system may instead coordinate with each other – and/or with others outside the boundary of their own meta-system -- to impose new patterns different from those of the currently dominant system.

Such coalitions can lead to change that goes beyond simply reproducing the system's norms more effectively. For me, open systems theory suggested a way to understand how systems can be changed "from below." And such changes might well include the emergence of new common preservations.

[219] *General Systems Theory*, p. 52-53. Perhaps in reaction to the social manipulation facilitated by "systems analysis," both Norbert Wiener and Bertalanffy emphasized the role of individuals per se in contradistinction to society. But the same argument could apply to concerted as well as individual actors.

## The politics of connectedness

As I thought about problems like war, environmental degradation, and oppression, I had a sense that they had common roots in some deeper mentality or paradigm. People polluted the environment in part because they ignored the linkages that led DDT spraying, intended to kill gypsy moths, to wipe out the songbirds. They pursued a nuclear arms race that might lead to their own extermination because they failed to see themselves as part of a cycle of hostility that included both themselves and their antagonists. They tried to make their way economically by competition and self-advancement because they didn't see themselves as part of a class or economic system. All involved some form of misplaced reductionism -- focusing on particular elements of a situation while ignoring the effects of their interactions.

The family of approaches that made up systems theory crystallized an alternative way of looking at the world. It incorporated common themes that I had found in ecology, in conflict resolution studies, in my experience of social movements, in workers' change from an individual to a collective worldview in the course of mass strikes, in the practice of historians, and in the Marxian dialectic. I began referring to that underlying vision as the "ecological perspective" and the move to it as an "ecological shift."

My intuition was actually part of a historic shift in worldview or paradigm which was being expressed in a wide range of fields and in the popular zeitgeist. Today that approach seems far less revolutionary than it did when Rachel Carson wrote *Silent Spring* – indeed, interdependence has become a cliché. But the habit of thinking of ourselves as part of larger wholes is still applied all too little to problems like war, environmental degradation, and oppression.

Around 1972 I started trying to write a book I called *Common Preservation* – the precursor of the present version -- articulating the political significance of the shift to an ecological or systems perspective.[220] I took as my foil the ubiquitous idea of "self-preservation," to which I counterposed the idea of "common preservation." In the Introduction I wrote, somewhat overdramatically:

> Self-preservation, it is often said, is the first law of life. But the pursuit of self-preservation by individuals, groups, corporations, governments, and nations has created the capacity for human self-extermination through military omnicide and destruction of the ecosphere. Self-preservation will soon become the law of death, unless it is complemented by a second law: the law of common preservation.
>
> The law of common preservation asserts that individual organisms, people, groups, and societies are parts of larger wholes on which depend their health and

[220] Quotes from original introduction need to be checked against original to remove later revisions. Some of these formulations eventually appeared in "The 'National Question' Revisited" (*New Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (New Series) Summer, 1987).

survival. In a world of nuclear weapons and of technology which is destroying the global environment, self-preservation has become possible only through common preservation.

Long ago John Donne wrote, "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main." Today to challenge the identity of individuals, groups, corporations, and nations as fixed, isolated entities is not just a poetic vision but a necessity for survival. The "self" of "self-preservation" must be expanded to include the set of relations on which an individual's or group's life depends.

Until recently, the dominant worldview in spheres as diverse as physics and political science might be characterized as the Newtonian perspective. In this view the world is seen as a collection of entities -- individuals, states, pieces of property, or similar units -- which, whether dominating one another or peacefully coexisting, were separate and bounded. This conception leads to a perception of rigid dichotomies between individual and society, cosmopolitanism and particularism, central authority and disorganization.

While this vision no longer finds authority in the biological or physical sciences, it continues to dominate reflection on politics and society. Contemporary political discourse continues largely in terms of sovereign individuals, sovereign states, and private or government property.

Fortunately, many of the elements necessary for an alternative worldview have been developing over the past few years, in response both to the intellectual inadequacy of the Newtonian worldview and to the disasters and potential disasters which have revealed the reality of interdependence. Intellectually such an alternative worldview is seen in the proliferation of "systems theories" which attempt to deal with complex networks of interaction, and particularly in the science of ecology, which has redirected attention from individual organisms to the interaction within natural environments. Politically, even the most self-serving politicians today feel obliged to proclaim that human fates are intertwined in an era of potential mutual-annihilation; a worldwide environmentalist concern, expressed most forcefully in the Green movements, articulates the need to restructure life in light of what may be called an "ecological perspective."

In an ecological perspective, boundaries are also connections and individual entities are parts of interacting, multi-leveled natural and human systems. Such a view is now commonplace in biology. But we have only begun to see the social world with such an ecological vision, in which the boundaries of individuals and groups are only relative and in which, while retaining their own identity, they are also part of larger, many-leveled wholes and likewise contain interacting parts within themselves. We have hardly begun to reconstruct social life on the basis of such a perspective.

I tried to differentiate this approach from

> a romantic and unmediated identification with the whole world or the whole of life which marks some "New Age" effusions. An identification with larger wholes is necessary, but we need to recognize also the concrete embodiment of human life in individuals and of those individuals in specific traditions and communities, all of which mediate the relationship between human beings and "the all."

My goal was not to define

> a new ideology that will unify humanity by replacing all other traditions. The accumulated traditions of different groups of people are what we humans have to show for our two million years on earth; they are the principal resources available to us to create solutions to our problems. It is our obligation to preserve and develop our own traditions, both for ourselves and for what those traditions can contribute to others. But we must learn to do so in ways that recognize the value of each other's traditions and increase the capacity for our mutual preservation in our differences.

I portrayed the shift from self-preservation to common preservation as an obligation.

> The War Crimes Tribunal at Nuremberg established the principle that individuals are responsible for crimes against humanity perpetrated by states and organizations. Surely the destruction of the ecosphere, the preparation for nuclear genocide, and the denial of basic human rights and the means of survival to a large proportion of our fellow human beings constitute crimes against humanity. Replacing mutual destruction with common preservation is an obligation for all of us -- as well as a prerequisite to our own self- preservation.

Today I would question the extension of an already dubious "law of self-preservation" beyond its original biological realm, let alone propound an opposite "law of common preservation." And I would now think of social change, not just in terms of a transition from individual to collective forms, but also from one pattern of concerted action to another.

I now find the idea of a single grand once-and-for-all shift from a "Newtonian" to an "ecological" perspective itself rather reductionist. Such an ecological vision threatens to produce what Sartre calls a totality, in which the system or whole holds a privileged position relative to its parts. It even has the potential to become a new religion. Instead I would advocate an on-going process of reconsidering entities in the context of the developing wholes or systems of which they are part.[221]

[221] This parallels David Harvey's redefinition of the Marxian dialectic from "a necessary logical structure" to "a flow of argument and practices." (*Justice, Nature*, p. 57.) It also parallels Piaget's concept of de-centering, in which the subject enters upon "not so much an already available and therefore external universality, as an uninterrupted process of coordinating and setting in reciprocal relations." Jean Piaget,

I must have tried a dozen times over the next 30 years to complete *Common Preservation*, but I had great difficulty doing so. Instead, I wrote a series of other books on more particular topics that drew on these sources and occasionally mentioned them briefly.[222]

Perhaps the problem was that, as my father used to say about writing that expressed grand ideas without concrete content, I was trying to make "bricks without straw." I was finally able to write the present book when I realized I could use as examples the experiences and researches that already reflected its not-yet published ideas.

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*Structuralism*. p.139. (See "De-centering" below.) The difference is that de-centering applies to subject-to-subject relations, while the on-going shift from a reductionist to a systems viewpoint refers to part-whole relations. This idea might also be expressed as a practice of internalizing relations, in contrast to "internal relations" as an ontology. Gregory Bateson presents a related idea of "meta-learning," in which one learns to re-punctuate experience so that objects and events are seen not in isolation but as part of their context. (See "The Logical Categories of Learning and Communication" in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, p. 279ff.) Contextualization is, of course what historians do – or are supposed to do – all the time.

[222] The notes to *Common Sense for Hard Times* briefly mention Bateson and Piaget along with George Kelly, Ernest Schachtel, and Jean-Paul Sartre. p. 233-4. "The 'National Question' Revisited" (*New Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (New Series) Summer, 1987) briefly discusses the shift to an ecological perspective (p. 100) and references Bateson, von Bertalanffy, and radical ecologist Murray Bookchin (p. 111).

## Unhappy families

My explorations of systems approaches took me scavenging in places that were surprising – not least to myself. One of the most remote from my usual haunts – but one of the most productive for thinking about how to use systems theories in social practice – was the then-emerging field of family therapy.

Joe Eyer was part of *Root & Branch* and a grad student teaching at the University of Pennsylvania medical school. He told me about a group of psychiatrists at the Philadelphia Child Guidance Clinic who were using systems theory ideas as a basis for treating whole families rather than just individuals. He put me on to the work of Jay Haley, and from that starting point I explored the then-burgeoning literature of family therapy.

I was often uncomfortable with the family therapists' values, which frequently seemed to foster authority (implicitly or explicitly patriarchal authority) within the family and adjustment rather than challenge to the world outside. One of my political colleagues told me the only relationship we should have to family therapy was to attack it. But I found that family therapy indicated a possible way to apply systems theory to social life. Equally important, family therapists developed highly creative ways of using the theory to promote change.

In the 1950s, some American psychiatrists observed that as patients improved, their families often resisted the change and acted in ways that tended to restore the patients to their previous state.[223] From this they concluded that therapists needed to view the family as a homeostatic system and to address that system as a whole. They began holding treatment sessions with families as a group, inventing the now commonplace but then outlandish practice of "family therapy."[224]

Family therapists conceptualized families as systems of relationships -- patterns of when and how people interact with each other. When a parent tells a child to do something and the child obeys, these actions define who they are in relation to each other in that situation; regularly repeated, such actions form patterns which participants come to expect. These patterns are established by agreements, tacit negotiations, and compromises that go on over the course of time. They may reflect equality of power or more powerful persons telling less powerful ones what to do.

Such patterns may become rigid, and family members may resist change. They may make the person introducing change feel guilty for breaking the rules; retaliate by violating other rules from which they benefit; use their position of authority to forbid the

[223] D.D. Jackson, "The question of family homeostasis." *Psychat. Quart. Suppl*., 31:79-90, Part 1, 1957.
[224] This chapter is based on an unpublished 1976 paper titled "Reducing Stress by Changing Relationships" by Jeremy Brecher and Jill Cutler and our book proposal "Friends and Relations: Relationship-Based Therapies for Families and their Worlds."

change; block the activity, for example by interrupting it; or even appeal to rational or apparently rational argument.

Family therapists generally viewed social life as an assembly of interacting open systems, each including subsystems and enclosed within meta-systems. The husband and wife, for example, form the spouse subsystem. The children form a sibling subsystem, which in turn may be divided into older and younger children. Each individual is in a sense themselves a subsystem of their family. Each family member plays different parts in different subsystems. If a grandmother plays a major role in taking care of children, she may be part of the "parental subsystem"; if she is defined as a baby sitter with no right to make decisions about the children, she is excluded from it.

Some family therapists focused on subsystem boundaries as a crucial problem area. If a subsystem's boundaries are too diffuse, the result is constant interference between that subsystem and the rest of the family; different subsystems are enmeshed. Conversely, boundaries that are too rigid block communication and mutual aid among different parts of the family; subsystems are disengaged. Boundaries need to be clear but flexible.

Therapists attempted to affect family patterns by "joining" the family system in such a way that they became a new element in the situation. In one celebrated case history, a woman identified as "Mrs. Gorden" came to the Philadelphia Child Guidance Clinic because her seven-year-old daughter Mandy had twice started fires in the house while she had been left there under the supervision of her ten-year-old brother Morris.[225] The therapist, Braulio Montalvo, insisted on meeting the entire family together, including Morris, Mandy, eight-year-old Joyce, and the baby Debbie. He defined the goal not as "curing" something wrong with Mandy, but restructuring family relationships to allow more fruitful interactions.

A basic pattern of interaction appeared within a few minutes. Morris functioned almost like a second parent for his younger sisters. Further, he regularly prevented direct interaction between his mother and Mandy, interrupting them and inserting himself as a go-between. Another pattern was to blame family problems on Mandy. As such patterns gradually became clear, Montalvo defined his objective as establishing a direct relationship between Mandy and her mother, while easing Morris out of his role as go-between blocking their connection. As the session came to an end, he told Mrs. Gorden,

"I would like you to go home and get the chemistry set. And Morris can go and take care of Joyce and Debby for a while. And I would like you to take Mandy and teach her how to handle matches without burning herself."

When the family returned the next week, Mrs. Gorden reported that Mandy's problem was that she was left-handed and that she had been striking the matches backwards so that the matchbox caught on fire. While her mother supervised, Mandy demonstrated how she had learned to strike matches safely. More important, a different pattern of

[225] Salvador Minuchin, *Families and Family Therapy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974) p. 206ff.

relationship had been established: Mrs. Gorden's parental relationship with Mandy was more direct, rather than enmeshed with Morris. At the same time, Morris was encouraged to take responsibility for the other children, thus creating a new subsystem. Over time, both Mrs. Gorden and Morris were also encouraged to develop more involvement with people outside the family.

Family therapists developed many innovative approaches as a result of looking at the family as a system. Conflict, for example, is inevitable within any social group. When procedures exist for resolving conflict through negotiation, compromise, argument, or other means, conflict can play a creative role in adapting a system to its members' needs. Without such procedures, conflict can become endemic, always lurking below the surface, causing constant bickering that never leads to resolution of issues.

Family therapists often responded with a dual strategy. On the one hand, they might encourage the direct expression of conflict – to get family members to fight with each other so that indirect sniping would become less necessary and issues could be brought to the surface. At the same time they might try to improve the means of conflict resolution, for example by commenting on or blocking processes that made resolution difficult or by teaching negotiating techniques. One therapist, for example, selected an area in which the family had difficulty, analyzed the current division of responsibility in that area, and instructed family members to establish a new contract. The skills developed in negotiating an agreement in one area were then generalized to others.

Families inevitably change over time, and many problems result from difficulties in adapting to change. For example, marital fights about the intrusion of in-laws may reflect the difficulty new families have in separating from their parental families. A family therapist might respond by supporting couples in establishing rules about visits by in-laws. As adolescents grow more independent from the family, they or their parents may develop "symptoms" whose function is to make it harder for them to do so. A therapist might not address the symptoms directly, but rather build up the outside involvements of both child and parents, aiming to "wean children from parents and parents from children."[226]

Some "relationship based therapy" attempted to address the role of social units beyond the nuclear family. Network interventions brought together 40 or more people, including friends, neighbors, extended kin, and work associates. The goal was to activate this group to bring their collective resources to bear on solving a member's problems. The entire network was assembled, generational and other subgroups took turns giving their view of the problem at hand, and the organizers moved the group toward taking on specific tasks. If the problem was peculiar behavior on the part of an adolescent who was unable to separate from his family, the assembly might set up two committees, one to help the youth establish a base away from home, find a job, and make use of available social resources, the other to support the family in accepting his separation. In effect,

[226] Jay Haley, *Uncommon Therapy: The Psychiatric Techniques of Milton H. Erickson* (Boston: Norton, 1993).

network therapy aimed to create a cooperatively interacting, mutually supportive social group out of a strung-out series.

Another form of relationship therapy was dubbed "ecological intervention." Arguing that individual and family problems should be seen as part of broader social arrangements, its practitioners aimed to ally with their clients against whatever forces in the environment were dehumanizing them, with the ultimate objective of trying to change those institutions through social action. One such ecological intervention brought together groups of families with battered child syndrome. Instead of focusing on the individual motivations of the child-beaters, or even on the internal dynamics of their families, it began by focusing on the violence to which they were all subjected in their daily life. One such group decided to monitor violence on television, and then organized itself to pressure local stations to remove the most offensive programs. By attacking social sources of violence in their own lives, they began to relieve the frustration that led to their child-beating, and to see their own behavior as a response to conditions they themselves could challenge. They exemplified Norbert Wiener's idea of "feedback that would allow an individual to intervene and call a halt to a process initiated."

Despite my reservations about family therapy, both in terms of the values it embodied and its actual ability to deal with tenacious human problems, I saw it as a fruitful source of ideas for addressing broader social problems. I tried to apply the idea of solving a problem by changing boundaries and patterns of coordination to systems ranging from networks of social movements to the nation state system. There, too, homeostatic systems often tenaciously resisted change.

## Development

When I was seven, an extraordinary woman named Dorothy Lee came to Yelping Hill. She was a Greek immigrant from that rarity, a Protestant Greek family, and one of awesome academic accomplishments. She referred to herself as an existential anthropologist, although in later years she became so alienated from academe that she started calling herself an ex-anthropologist. By the time I was eleven or twelve I had wholeheartedly adopted Dorothy as a mentor. She challenged me to think, feel, and experience. Her decision to resign a position at Harvard in favor of a marginal job in a far less prestigious university had a stunning effect on me, making me realize that one could act on one's values in ways that contradicted other people's expectations and even what some might consider common sense. The next year when I turned sixteen I dropped out of high school.

In my mid-teens Dorothy told me to read *Metamorphosis* by the German émigré psychoanalyst Ernest Schachtel.[227] It was an unlikely recommendation but one that had a profound impact on me. The book traces the changes in human affect, perception, attention, and memory that take place from birth to adulthood, and there I was first exposed to the idea of development as a combination of continuity and change. As Schachtel wrote in the Foreword, "The human metamorphosis from birth to adulthood is much greater than that of man's nearest relatives in the animal kingdom. . . Yet any attempt to understand man must take into account not only the changes but also the continuities in his development, for the later stages still show the traces of the earlier ones" and "the condition of the newborn shows the seeds of, the *Anlage* for, the later developments."[228]

Scattered through the book were references to the Swiss developmental psychologist Jean Piaget. Even though it was at least a decade before I discovered Piaget's own writings, this early exposure to the idea of development no doubt helped make me receptive to his ideas when I encountered them directly. So did Schachtel's emphasis on the active character of human beings and the alternation between open receptiveness to the unique features of an object and the effort to fit it into already known patterns – for me perhaps an *Anlage* for Piaget's central concepts of accommodation and assimilation.

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[227] Ernest G. Schachtel, *Metamorphosis: On the Development of Affect, Perception, Attention, and Memory* (New York: Basic Books, 1959).

[228] P. v. Schachtel was respectful toward Freud, but also highly critical. In my copy I have notes from an early reading headed "Schachtel vs. Freud." Notations include "Organism active – reaches out for relation to world." "Affect accompanies action, is not a substitute." "Focus on modes of relatedness of person to environment and their transformation." Schachtel's emphasis on the active character of human beings certainly had a big impact on me in an intellectual environment in which Freud's views were widely accepted as dogma. Dorothy Lee also directed me to Taoism, telling me to read Alan Watts' *Nature, Man, and Woman*, which led me on toVolume II of Joseph Needham's *Science and Civilization in China*, which no doubt helped make me receptive to systems theory's emphasis on interrelatedness. Needham was an embryologist before becoming a historian of Chinese science, and he stressed the parallels between ancient Chinese philosophies and modern scientific theories of embryonic development.

In 1972 I audited Paul Mattick, Jr.'s course on Marx' *Capital*. Paul's mother, Ilse Mattick, was a professor of child development steeped in Piaget's theories. In trying to explain Marx' theory of social development, Paul pointed out similarities to Piaget's theory of child development.

I asked what to read and was referred to a standard textbook on Piaget. Intrigued but also confused, I started tackling some of Piaget's own voluminous writings. I had trouble understanding a lot of what I read; as two of his translators wrote, Piaget was "a great thinker but an inconsiderate if not downright awful writer."[229] I assimilated his ideas very selectively, disregarding most of what I didn't find useful. In fact, my relation to Piaget reminds me of a quip about a ponderous speaker: "I don't know what he said, but he must be brilliant; I get such good ideas while I'm listening to him."

Piaget used many ideas I had already gleaned from systems theory. But systems theorists often seemed preoccupied with how systems maintain themselves – with homeostasis. Piaget's primary concern was the metamorphosis in human intelligence that takes place between infancy and adulthood. His focus, therefore, was on the process of transformation.[230] And that was what most interested me.

The very possibility of transformation is often denied on the basis of "human nature." In *Common Sense for Hard Times* (written as I was first struggling to assimilate Piaget), Tim Costello and I quoted a manager we had interviewed at an auto plant in Detroit: "Someone will always have to come out on top. It's human nature, and animal nature too. It's always been that way and it always will be."[231]

From Piaget I learned ways of thinking that bolstered my intuitive rejection of such views and my intuitive sense that "human nature" could even facilitate social transformation. In *Common Sense for Hard Times*, influenced by what I was taking from Piaget, Tim and I pointed out three aspects of human nature that made it possible to transform society.[232]

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[229] Terrance Brown and Kishore Julian Thampy, "About the Translation," in Jean Piaget, *The Equilibration of Cognitive Structures: The Central Problem of Intellectual Development* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. xv. This and *The Development of Thought* are both translations of *L'equilibration des structures cognitives: Problem central du developpement*. The translations are very different and I've used both in this book. I was always struck by the fact that Piaget published *The Equilibration of Cognitive Structures* when he was nearly 80 as a reworking of a book he had written long before because "Since the models of equilibration developed there have proved inadequate, the whole problem must be reexamined." (xvii) I found it inspiring that such self-correction was central not only to Piaget's theory but also to his practice.

[230] Piaget developed his initial ideas decades before the emergence of cybernetics, but he increasingly reconfigured them in cybernetic terms. "I see a tight relationship between my models and cybernetic models. . . . I did not use cybernetic terminology when I began talking of [equilibration], but nonetheless since the beginning I have insisted that it was . . . a self-regulation. And of course today cybernetics is precisely that, the study of self-regulating models. This self-regulating kernel is at the very heart of all of the development of intelligence." (Richard I. Evans, *Jean Piaget: The Man and His Ideas* (New York: Dutton, 1973)) p.45-6. This set of interviews and documents provides some of Piaget's most accessible formulations.

[231] *Common Sense for Hard Times*, p. 7.

[232] Surely Piaget has no responsibility for the way I tried to apply his ideas to society. My friend Peter Marris puts a very different construction on the social implications of Piaget's work, treating them as

> *Human beings can change*. They are far less guided than other animals by fixed, inborn instincts which direct their action.[233] For that reason, human history has been a history of change. At any given time people's existing patterns may seem so fixed as to be immutable. Yet over and over again, people have in fact been able to transform their patterns of thinking and living when it has become clear that their old strategies no longer work.
>
> *Human beings can think*. For individuals and groups, action is not just a reflex; it is guided by people's ideas about the world in which they live. These ideas do not arise in a realm cut off from the world of action and experience; on the contrary, there is a constant back-and-forth exchange between the realm of ideas and the world in which people face and cope with the problems of daily life. The ideas on which people act are their tools for functioning in that world; they are guided by past experience and the possibilities for future action of individuals and groups.
>
> *Human beings can cooperate*. Even more than other mammals, they are social beings, interdependent and equipped with complex means to communicate with each other, to make joint plans and to modulate each other's behavior. . . The ability to cooperate is there and people can use it, if they so choose, to serve their individual needs far more effectively than they ever could alone.[234]

My view of human nature was based on what I had observed personally and learned from history, as well as showing obvious influences from Marx, Dewey, Schachtel, and others. But Piaget helped me spell out what made change, thinking, and cooperation possible.

The next chapter gives an introduction to Piaget's core concept of equilibration. The following three chapters present – in all their awful and glorious abstraction -- ideas I gleaned from Piaget regarding respectively change, thinking, and cooperation. The subsequent chapter addresses ways Piaget's approach can and cannot be used for thinking about society. The final chapter on Piaget contrasts his approach with others and tries to express why I found aspects of it so compelling. The ways I've used these ideas to understand social movements, social change, and common preservation appear throughout the rest of the book. Nobody finds Piaget's ideas easy to assimilate at first, but I've found them an irreplaceable addition to the heuristic for common preservation. If you struggle through these chapters you should be able to pick up most of what's useful in Piaget for the workshop toolkit.

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essentially conservative (though no less valid for that reason). "The process of assimilation may lead to modifications of structure (accommodation), but only within limits of continuity." He combined Piaget's idea of assimilation with the studies of attachment and loss by John Bowlby to emphasize that "we are all profoundly conservative, and feel immediately threatened if our basic assumptions and emotional attachments are challenged." Peter Marris, *Loss and Change* (New York: Pantheon, 1974) p. 9.

[233] This is a central theme of Ernest Schachtel's *Metamorphosis*.

[234] *Common Sense for Hard Times*, p. 7.

## Equilibration

In my first attempt to explain Piaget's ideas, I wrote that in trying to write historical accounts of social movements I had come up against the problem of "how is it possible to conceive of human groups, organizations, and societies which both maintain themselves over considerable periods of time, *and* are subject to radical transformation?"[235] Piaget's idea of equilibration through a combination of assimilation and accommodation, however elusive, helped me better understand that question, and became a foundation of my emerging heuristic for common preservation.[236]

Piaget got a job early in his career working on child intelligence tests, and he observed from the kinds of mistakes that children made that they think very differently than adults. He became preoccupied with explaining how a child's thinking changed into that of an adult. This development was more than just a random variation; it was a change from a less to a more adequate way of understanding and acting on the world.

This change couldn't be exclusively the result of an innate, wired in biological program; children didn't develop normally if they were deprived of experience and activity in the world. Yet it wasn't just the result of experience or teaching applied to a blank slate, either; no amount of experience or teaching could get a child to reason like an adult. It seemed that the child's own activity somehow led, over time, to the transformation of its way of thinking. But how?

Piaget's answer was that development takes place through equilibration. "Knowledge does not proceed either from experience with objects alone or from an innate program preformed in the subject but results, instead, from a succession of constructions producing new structures."[237] He developed a very abstract, very general theory of how equilibration works, and it is this aspect of his thought that I found useful for thinking not only about the cognitive development of individuals from infancy to adulthood but also about the development of social movements and the transformation of social patterns.[238]

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[235] Jeremy Brecher, "History, Society, and Genetic Structuralism." Unpublished draft.

[236] Some of Piaget's specific results have been disconfirmed or superseded by subsequent research, a normal process in a scientific field. His views have also been criticized for various forms of cultural bias. Left-wing critics have tended to see his approach as representing the values and practices of Western industrial capitalism and its technological reason. See, for example, Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon, 1964) and Susan Buck-Morss, "Socio-Economic Bias in Piaget's Theory and Its Implications for Cross-Culture Studies," *Human Development* 18: 35-49 (1975). Noam Chomsky famously challenged Piaget's view of equilibration in the development of language. While many of these criticisms have some validity, I don't think they invalidate the more abstract dimensions of Piaget's theory that I use in this book. My use of those abstract dimensions does not imply an endorsement of Piaget's own efforts to apply his theories to social phenomena.

[237] *The Equilibration of Cognitive Structures*, p. xvii.

[238] Piaget occasionally touched on such social dimensions himself. Regarding the application of the same abstract aspects of theory to individual and social phenomena, Piaget wrote, "There exist common mechanisms which are found in all domains of the human sciences. And the rules, values and signs which we take in this text to be essential social facts presuppose exactly such operational, regulatory and semiotic mechanisms." *Sociological Studies*, "Preface," p. 25.

"Equilibrium" is nothing more than a Latinate word for "balance"; equilibration is simply the process of establishing an equality or balance. Before going into Piaget's use of the concept, let me try to give you an intuitive sense of what I am trying to capture with the term.

Imagine yourself an infant learning to stand up and walk. At first when you try to stand up you simply topple over. Gradually you learn that if you start to topple in one direction you must adjust some part of your body in another direction enough to compensate. This balancing process is what Piaget calls "equilibration"; learning how to do it better he calls "improving equilibration."

If you now want to walk, you must move your leg away from your balanced standing position. To keep from "losing your balance" you again have to compensate by moving some other part of your body. As you walk, each body movement must take the others into account – the movement of different body parts must be coordinated. And to stay in balance the body as a whole must coordinate with the direction of gravity by adjusting its various parts.

Of course, learning to stand and walk are biologically determined tasks that every normal child will accomplish. But now consider learning to stand and walk upside down on your hands. While some previous coordinations can be used, many other new ones must be constructed. In fact, a fascinating study of upside-down moves in the Brazilian martial art capoeira shows that biologically-dictated reflexes like the vestibulo-spinal reflex must actually be "turned off."[239] So effective equilibration may require transforming some patterns and extinguishing others.

Equilibration is not limited to balancing your own body. Consider a young child, for example, presented with a weighing scale and a set of identical weights. You put several weights on the right pan of the scale, which immediately tips to the right. You ask the child to use the weights to make both sides of the scale level. If they are mature enough, they will probably put some weights on the left pan. If the scale doesn't move to a level position, they will add more weights until it does. If the left pan goes down and the right pan goes up, they will take away weights from the right pan or add weights to the left pan until the scale is level.

If the child is grown up enough, they can also do this equilibration mentally, "in their head." They can count the weights in the right pan and figure out that putting an identical number of weights in the left pan they can bring the scale to a level position.

Such equilibration can take place not just with weights, but with anything in which two different items can be made equal by increasing one or reducing the other. For example, if the strings on two guitars are "out of tune," their pitch can be equilibrated by tightening the low ones and/or loosening the high ones.

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[239] See Greg Downey, "Balance between cultures: equilibrium training," http://neuroanthropology.net/2008/11/30/balance-between-cultures-equilibrium-training/

Equilibration is Piaget's central concept. He used it to illuminate the development of living beings ranging from the mollusks he collected as a child in Alpine streams to the logical deductions made by late adolescents. Critics have questioned whether equilibration is too vague to be meaningful; whether it is anything more than a metaphor; and whether it is of any use for explaining concrete phenomena like human language or the evolution of philosophy. I know no answer except "the virtue of a thing is in its use." For me its use has been to help construct a heuristic for common preservation.

## Pattern and change

Piaget started out studying biology, and the biological concept of adaptation is reflected in all his work. Like John Dewey, he considered thinking to be one form of the general process by which organisms adapt to their environment.[240] His theory of equilibration is designed to explain how that process works.

Piaget starts from the general features of living organisms and other systems or wholes that reproduce themselves through their own action and their interaction with their environment. Such actions form a cycle that, if successful, reproduces their established patterns. Reproduction of the system is the ultimate purpose of such actions. What is necessary for such reproduction defines the system's needs. This is a more or less common sense concept of a living organism and very much like Bertalanffy's concept of an "open system."

Living organisms maintain and reproduce themselves, but to do so they must also adapt to their environment. So they must combine stability and change. Stability is maintained by a process Piaget calls assimilation. Adaptive change results from a process he calls accommodation. Piaget's theory of development tries to show how assimilation combined with accommodation can lead to transformation.

Assimilation is the action by which any system or organism incorporates elements of the environment into its own structures. "When a rabbit eats cabbage, he is not changed into cabbage but, on the contrary, the cabbage is changed into rabbit."[241] This is similar to the idea of an "open system" that maintains its own structure (stays rabbit) by importing material from the environment (eating cabbage and changing it into rabbit). Assimilation might involve external action (finding and eating the cabbage) or internal action (digesting the cabbage into elements that can be incorporated into rabbit).

The general pattern of any action through which a system assimilates the environment Piaget calls a scheme. A scheme embodies the general features of the activity, those that would be present every time the pattern is applied.

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[240] Piaget expresses common pragmatist themes, such as the role of problems, the centrality of action, and a loop between theory and practice. As a youth, long before he started studying cognitive development in children, Piaget wrote a "Sketch of a Neo-Pragmatism" which he stated in an autobiographical article "presented an idea which has since remained central for me . . . that action in itself admits of logic (this contrary to the anti-intellectualism of James and Bergson) and that, therefore, logic steps from a sort of spontaneous organization of acts." ("Jean Piaget, An Autobiography" in Evans, p. 113.)
In one of his last works, Piaget notes the possibility of synthesis of his genetic structuralism with "the functionalism found in the work of J. Dewey . . . In the functionalist perspective, all mental activity, in particular cognitive activity, proceeds from a tendency to satisfy needs. Needs themselves consist of momentary disequilibria, and their satisfaction consists of reequilibrations." Needs are manifested in terms of "interests." Interest is "a relationship between the subject's needs and the object's characteristics. Something becomes "interesting" to the degree that it answers some need, a form of compensation." Interest also "frees the subject's energies and incites action in the direction of the object." It is thus a "positive feedback regulation." *The Equilibration of Cognitive Structures*, p. 68.

[241] *Child and Reality*, p. 70.

Because a scheme includes only the most general features of an action, it must be adapted to work in different concrete situations. Piaget calls that process accommodation. "The scheme to grasp, for example, does not apply in the same manner to very small and very large objects."[242] It needs to be accommodated differently to hold a pin and a beach ball.

But accommodation also changes the initial scheme. "The entire scheme of assimilation must alter as it accommodates to the elements it assimilates; that is, it modifies itself in relation to the particularities of events." In short, there is a feedback loop by which the results of actions in concrete circumstances change the initial scheme. If there is no cabbage in sight, a hungry rabbit may try a carrot instead; if the results are satisfactory, its "search for food" scheme may be modified to include "search for carrots."[243]

In such a model, continuity and change are interdependent. Each action includes assimilation to an existing scheme, but also accommodation of that scheme. Paradoxically, an existing pattern preserves its continuity by modifying itself.

Such a system is different from a "closed system" like a pendulum or a solar system that maintains equilibrium through a static balance of forces. It is also different from a homeostatic system in which feedback simply reestablishes a pre-existing balance – a steady state or equilibrium. Piaget contrasts these with the process he calls "equilibration," and even more with the improvement of equilibration that occurs with development.

An open system capable of assimilation and accommodation can produce such improving equilibration. In explaining why, Piaget emphasizes *im*balance, *dis*equilibrium, and *contradiction* more than many systems theorists. Nonbalance alone can "force a subject to go beyond his present state and to seek new equilibriums." Nonbalance "produces the driving force of development." The real source of progress is to be sought in "both the insufficiency responsible for the conflict and the improvement expressed in the equilibration."[244] It is the child who starts to teeter over who learns how to stand upright by adjusting parts of their body to gravity.

Piaget breaks down the cycle of improved equilibration into the initial gap, the adjustment that corrects it in a concrete instance, and the process that thereupon changes the guiding pattern. Let us examine each in turn.

Nonbalance or disequilibrium reflects a gap between what the existing scheme can do and what it needs to do to accomplish its goal or meet its needs. Such gaps are overcome by means of compensations. A compensation is "an action in a direction opposite to a given effect which thus tends to cancel or to neutralize the effect."[245] This is another way of expressing the cybernetic idea of pursuing a goal by counteracting that which deviates

[242] *Development of Thought*, p. 7.
[243] This is my example, not Piaget's.
[244] *Development of Thought*, p. 12-13.
[245] *Development of Thought*, p. 26.

from it. The steersman compensates for the gap between where the boat is currently headed and where the steersman wants it to go by moving the rudder to create counter pressure that shifts the boat back toward the intended course.

Piaget describes such compensations as coordinations. The steersman's rudder coordinates the desired course of the boat with its current momentum. This idea of coordination is familiar from the physical development of children: Clumsy and awkward movements become precise and graceful through the improved coordination developed through practice. As Piaget puts it, the result of improving equilibration is "a system of coordinated movements functioning for a result or an intention."[246] Thus equilibration is a practice of solving problems by acts of coordination.

For Piaget, compensation is the basic process underlying equilibration. As a bicycle begins to tip in one direction, the rider compensates by leaning in the opposite direction, thus reestablishing equilibrium. Compensation makes it possible to maintain stability and pursue goals in a changing world. Compensation can involve the construction of new and very different patterns – remember the capoeristas who had to suppress existing schemes and develop new ones to walk on their hands. Or remember the women who had to unlearn patterns of gender subservience and develop the women's liberation movement in order to realize social advancement.

But how does a system produce the needed compensations, rather than simply actions taken at random? They are constructed by means of what Piaget calls regulation. This is essentially the process we have previously described as feedback. In regulation, the result of an action has the secondary effect of modifying the subsequent performance of a similar action.[247] A feedback loop carries the result of an action back to where it can be used to correct the scheme that initially produced it. Successful actions are reinforced; unsuccessful ones corrected. News about how well the products of a workshop are performing is sent back to the workshop and used to guide product improvement.

Regulation, then, is what allows systems to produce improved equilibration. When a scheme accommodates itself to new objects, it is transformed, becoming able to assimilate a wider range of objects. The grasp of a child who can only pick up a hand-sized object must be transformed if they are to pick up a pin or a beach ball.[248]

Every regulation, like every equilibration, is thus both a preservation of existing structure and a modification of it.[249] Regulation makes it possible for schemes to improve in the sense of changing in ways that allow them to compensate for conditions under which they

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[246] *The Child and Reality*, p. 63. Piaget is discussing the way praxis or action results from "the internal operations of equilibrium which expresses a regulation or a stabilization acquired from coordination."
[247] *Development of Thought*, p. 18.
[248] In my view, such change can only be considered improvement relative to a particular set of problems or objects. The modified scheme may be no better or even be worse for solving some other problem or assimilating some other object. Piaget often ignores this because he is primarily concerned with the development of logic, which in principle can be applied to all objects. But equilibration can be found in areas far beyond the development of logic.
[249] In Piaget's view, even reinforcing a scheme modifies it.

were previously unable to reach their goals. The feedback cycle regulates the development of the initial pattern so that it is better able to equilibrate. The child discovers a way not to totter and that learning becomes incorporated in the patterns that guide their future movement.

Regulations can become objects of other regulations, thus forming a hierarchy of regulations. For example, a set of physiological processes maintains normal human body temperature at 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit. However, this is regulated by the immune system, which raises the temperature higher in the case of infection. This in turn is governed by a still higher regulation if a doctor administers aspirin to reduce the fever. The investment decisions of an individual firm are partly regulated by the rate of economic growth, which is regulated in part by the cumulative investment decisions of firms but also by the policies of economic regulators, which in turn are regulated by political decisions. (In this case the hierarchy is also circular, since political decision makers are partially regulated in turn by the political influence of firms and groups of firms.)

Improvement at a higher level of this hierarchy can lead to reorganization at lower levels. What I call the "ecological shift," for example, in which attention is redirected from an isolated entity to its broader context, illustrates how a higher-level regulation can reorganize more concrete material at a lower level.[250] Once an arms race is perceived as the result of an interaction between countries, for example, the specific policy decisions to build more armaments appear very differently: not as unilateral aggressive acts, but as responses of a subsystem to changes in the system of which it is part.

In contrast to homeostatic systems reproducing a pre-established equilibrium, Piaget's idea of equilibration portrays a process "leading from certain states of equilibrium to others, qualitatively different, and passing through multiple 'nonbalances' and reequilibrations."[251]

This process takes place via cycles of assimilation and accommodation. At any given time there are established schemes or structures, but they are always subject to further equilibration. Thus, "the being of structures consists in their coming to be, that is their being 'under construction.'"[252] And since equilibration leads from one structure or pattern of coordination to another, it is essentially a process of reconstruction, re-coordination, or even transformation. Such processes have sometimes been described as "self-organizing systems."

Piaget's approach provides a way of explaining emergent properties like the tendencies toward solidarity, self-assertion, and self-management I found appearing in mass strikes.

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[250] For a related but different approach to cognitive hierarchies, see Gregory Bateson's brilliant essay "The Logical Categories of Learning and Communication," in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, p. 279ff. Bateson uses Russell and Whitehead's theory of logical types as his starting point.

[251] *Development of Thought*, p. 3. Stephen Jay Gould's idea of "punctuated equilibrium" in paleontology presents a similar idea. The relation between this idea and the dialectical approaches of Marx and others will be discussed in "No dress before the iron" below.

[252] *Structuralism*, p. 140.

Accommodation of existing patterns to a particular instance to meet a practical necessity can lead to better patterns with increased capacity to compensate for deviations from goals.

Equilibration helps explain why, as we wrote in *Common Sense for Hard Times*, “People can change.”

## Thinking

In studying labor history I observed that workers were often able to act intelligently and appropriately without necessarily being able to articulate what they were doing in a way that demonstrated a clear conscious awareness. Conversely, I learned that the clearest verbal assertions might not represent an intent that people would or could act on. I therefore put my main emphasis on what workers actually did. As a result, *Strike!* was often criticized for ignoring the "role of consciousness."

In responding to such critics of *Strike!*, I wrote,

> The ideas on which people act are not necessarily the same as those they express verbally. The German working class before World War I, to take a classic example, was more committed to and educated in the ideas of Marxian socialism than perhaps any other in the history of the capitalist world. The manifestoes of the Socialist International, in which the Germans were the leading party, declared that workers would never slaughter workers, and that the working class would prevent the ruling class from making war. Yet when war was declared, the German workers, like those of France, England, the United States, and other countries, went to the front and toiled in the factories with little effective protest, while their "revolutionary socialist" leaders extolled the nation's superior civilization and voted war credits. . . . The fact that people espouse socialist, communist, anarchist, or other radical ideas is no indication that they possess the consciousness necessary for social revolution, any more than the conversion of Constantine's warriors to Christianity made them fit to pass through the Pearly Gates.[253]

Piaget's ideas about equilibration helped me untangle my thinking about the relationship between action and thought, between what an individual or group can do and what they can consciously express.

For Piaget, intelligence originates not in conscious thinking but in action. Indeed, some of his most provocative experiments show that children can perform acts with great skill without being able to describe accurately what they are doing. Learning by trial and error can be observed in pre-verbal children, animals, and other open systems. It continues to guide a large proportion of adult action. Such learning produces what has come to be known as tacit knowledge.[254]

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[253] "Preface" to the 1977 edition of *Strike!* pp. xii-xiii. Action based on tacit knowledge and tacit communication raises issues for approaches that aim to understand the human world purely in terms of discourse.

[254] Such tacit knowledge lies at the core of Friedrich von Hayek's argument against the "social engineering state." For a critique of his use of this idea, see my "Affairs of State," (a review of Hilary Wainwright, *Arguments for a New Left: Answering the Free-Market Right*) *The Nation*, March 6, 1995.

As they move beyond infancy, human beings also begin to develop a symbolic or semiotic function, the ability to represent the world through signifiers like delayed imitation, pictures, and above all language. Piaget observes that such representation allows equilibration to be carried to a whole new level.

The semiotic function allows children to represent their own schemes and the actions they produce. They can apply its schemes to their representations of objects – that is, they can perform "thought experiments" on virtual or imaginary objects. Such actions on virtual objects Piaget calls "operations": "Interiorized actions . . . no longer carried out materially but from within and symbolically."[255]

Interiorizing actions – performing them symbolically -- makes it possible to discover what the results of an action would have been without actually performing it. They can know – without conducting the experiment – that putting equal weights on the two pans of a weighing balance will lead the two pans to move to the same level. People thereby can learn without correction by trial and error in the real world: The trials can be performed "in their heads" on mental representations. This allows "pre-correction" of errors. Much of Piaget's work was devoted to discovering how operations can be applied to more and more abstract objects, until they finally result in logic, in which operations give results applicable to any content whatsoever.

Operations themselves can become the object of other operations. This process, thinking about thinking, Piaget calls "reflective abstraction." Such self-awareness consists of "a reconstruction on an upper level of what is already organized in another manner on a lower level."[256] Someone who engages in reflective abstraction is "reflexive" in the sense that they reflect on themselves or represent their own operations. Reflective abstraction includes at least some of what people mean when they speak of "consciousness" and "self-consciousness."[257]

In sum, it is by representing its own action that a subject becomes capable of mental operations – aka thinking. And by representing its own mental operations it becomes capable of self-consciousness.

This approach assorted well with my own observations of social action. New forms of action do not generally start from a completely thought out plan. Rather, they originate from a response to a concrete situation. As people reflect on the actions they have taken, they come to a new understanding of themselves and their potentials. They may in turn incorporate that understanding in future action. As Akron rubber workers began participating in quickie sit down strikes to challenge immediate grievances in individual departments, they gained a new understanding of their power over production and their

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[255] *The Child and Reality*, p. 13.
[256] *The Child and Reality*, p. 40.
[257] Piaget treats reflective abstraction as a special case of the regulation of regulations. What is happening at a lower level is assimilated and reconstructed at a higher level.
The recent development of new technologies for studying the functioning of the brain make it likely that arguments about human consciousness will develop in radically new ways in the foreseeable future, possibly rendering a great deal of past speculation obsolete.

capacity for cooperation, which in turn led them to engage in massive company-wide factory occupations.

Piaget stressed the lineage linking tacit intelligence and abstract thought. The former involved action on real objects, the latter on virtual objects. But Piaget was enamored of "higher," abstract, logical thinking. I always thought his enthusiasm overdone. I saw a useful role for both action and thought, for both learning by trial and error and by operations on representations. Both are important for human life. Each has its own advantages and pitfalls. (The combination of narrative and analysis in this book reflects my penchant for both "experiential" and "insight" learning.) The problem is to use each appropriately, to coordinate them, and especially to use each of them to correct the other.

I never thought of social movement action as something that occurred without discussion, reflection, and deliberation. Yet I always resisted the idea that "consciousness" had to be created by intellectuals and then implanted in workers or others "from outside."[258] This struck me as an intellectualist approach that often had led to elitism within social movements and ultimately to justifying a new domination in post-revolutionary societies. My concern led many people to interpret *Strike!* as advocating some kind of unreflective, knee-jerk "spontaneity."

Although Piaget himself may have suffered from an "intellectualist" bias, his theories provide the basis for a very different approach, one closer to John Dewey and Rosa Luxemburg. Ordinary people produce and use intelligence all the time in the process of living in the world. That intelligence is embodied in patterns that have developed through trial and error learning – through feedback. People can also reflect on those patterns through reflective abstraction. Such reflection is not a necessary condition for intelligent, appropriate action, though it may be a useful means for improving the thinking that guides people's action.

People who specialize in abstract knowledge – intellectuals – may bring something useful to social movements. But their knowledge is not the necessary condition for effective social action. To repeat Rosa Luxemburg's formulation, "The errors committed by a truly revolutionary movement are infinitely more fruitful than the infallibility of the cleverest Central Committee."[259] The ability of ordinary people to think and act is the necessary basis for democracy.

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[258] See "Learning by doing" above. See also Stu Porman (pseudonym for Jeremy Brecher), "Intellectuals and Class Consciousness," *Root & Branch* #4 (no date). See also Takis Fotopoulos' critique of "hierarchical divisions within the liberatory movement between those 'who know' the 'laws' of social movement and can therefore derive the necessary strategic and tactical conclusions and those at the other end who simply have to implement the policy prescriptions drawn by the 'theory experts.'" Takis Fotopoulos, 'Systems Theory and Complexity: A Potential Tool for Radical Analysis or the Emerging Social Paradigm for the Internationalized Market Economy' , *Democracy & Nature* 6(3): 421-446 p. 2.

[259] "Organizational Question of Social Democracy" (also published as "Leninism vs. Marxism") in *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, p. 130.

## De-centering

How do people move from an individual to a collective response to their conditions? That question lay at the core of my effort to understand social movements and common preservation. Piaget added a new layer to my understanding of the answers.

When Piaget's early work on child development appeared, it was criticized by the Soviet psychologist L.S. Vygotsky for ignoring the role of society and human interaction in development. Piaget accepted much though not all of Vygotsky's criticism and began to add more of a social dimension to his own work.[260]

Thinking about the relation between individuals and collectives tends toward two poles. It is possible to view societies and social groups as collections of atomic individuals, simply the sum of separate individual personalities and actions. An example would be economic theories that regard individuals as unconnected until they are brought together by the market. Alternatively, groups and societies can be seen as fully integrated wholes, in which human individuals are merely subsystems determined by the self-reproducing cycle of the whole. Examples include "functionalist" and "systems analysis" style sociologies and those versions of Marxism in which individuals are nothing but the manifestation of social forces.[261]

Piaget provides an alternative to this either/or. He criticizes an "atomistic" conception of society that starts from individuals regarded as unconnected to society. But he also rejects views that would give the group or society a reality separate from that of the transactions that make it up. He criticizes Durkheim's view that society is "the origin of logical thought and of truth itself" which "imposes these on the minds of individuals by means of intellectual and moral 'constraint.'"[262]

Piaget proposes instead to think of individuals and the groups they compose as engaged in an on-going process of coordination. As he rather obscurely put it, the relationship between individuals and the social group comprises "a relational totality in which individual operations and cooperation form one inseparable whole in such a way that the laws of the general coordination of actions are, in their functional nucleus, common to inter- and intra-individual actions and operations."[263] Let me try to put what he is trying to say less obscurely: Individuals to achieve goals must coordinate actions, like the child who coordinates eyes and hand to grasp an object it sees. An equivalent "coordination of actions" is required for different people to work together to realize an objective.

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[260] For an account and evaluation of Vygotsky and related criticisms of Piaget, see the "Introduction" to Jean Piaget, *Sociological Studies*, p. 5ff.
[261] This "individualist" versus "collectivist" dichotomy can apply to descriptions of reality, to a goal or ideal, or both.
[262] *Biology and Knowledge*: 98. See also *Structuralism*: 76ff and "Explanation in Sociology."
[263] *Biology and Knowledge*: 98. See also *Structuralism*: 76ff.

Consider the handling of a small sailboat. One person may manage the tiller with one hand and the sail with the other. Alternatively, one person may manage the tiller and another person the sail. But in either case the same coordination will be needed between tiller handling and sail handling to get the boat to its destination. One case is "intra-individual," the other is "inter-individual," but they both exhibit the "general coordination of actions."

We usually think of a "subject" as an individual person. But Piaget defines a subject more broadly as an entity "able to transform the world physically or virtually." So defined, a subject may be inter-individual ("collective") as well as individual. The sailing duo coordinating the tiller and sail are transforming the world by moving their boat toward their destination; they therefore constitute a collective subject. So did the American farmers who showed up at public meetings and eventually turned themselves into the American revolutionary army which drove the British out of North America.

A subject, whether individual or collective, must be constructed. In the infancy of the individual "there is no subject." There is no differentiation between subject and object. "Gradually the subject's actions are differentiated, diversified, and coordinated together." As long as interactions between subject and object are made up of "isolated, uncoordinated actions," there are "neither objects nor a subject." "To the extent that these interactions give rise to coordinations" then there is a "construction of the subject."[264] When hand and eye begin to coordinate, for example, they become able to transform the world by deliberately moving an object from one place to another.

Collective subjects, similarly, are constructed by engaging in coordinated action to affect the objects with which a group interacts.[265] When a group of workers gradually construct a method to prevent speed-up by setting maximum output rates on piece rate jobs, they have become, in Piaget's sense, a collective subject. So do oppressed peasants who form secret local guerilla groups that gradually develop the capacity to link up and coordinate their actions over regions or entire countries. So do the denizens of a workshop who collaborate to produce a joint product.

Individual subjects emerge out of their own activity and experience. As a result, they embody what Piaget calls an egocentric point of view. In order to construct a collective subject, they need to assimilate and accommodate to each other's viewpoints. Piaget

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[264] Piaget in Evans: 19-20. Some attempts to apply systems theory to society try, on the contrary, to abolish the subject. In the forward to Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995) Eva Knodt wrote, "Systems theory turns away from the knowing subject to a reality that consists solely of self-referential systems and their 'empirically' observable operations." p. xvii. (Quoted in Takis Fotopoulos, "Systems theory and complexity," in *Democracy and Nature*, www.democracynature.org/dn/vol6/takis_complexity.htm)
Piaget, in contrast, accepts the existence of a knowing subject. He further argues that its character and development can be studied experimentally. Critics from a more phenomenological perspective argue that such study is inherently reductionist and cannot capture the ineffable essence of subjectivity. (Introspection is sometimes offered as an alternative method.)

[265] While Piaget focuses on the cognitive aspect of this process, the formation of collective subjects also involves emotions, culture, values, and other less purely cognitive aspects of life. This theme is developed by such thinkers as E.P. Thompson and Raymond Williams.

calls this process "de-centering."[266] It allows individuals to transcend the idiosyncratic results of their personal development and become part of a community that can function as a collective subject:

> The subject's activity calls for a continual 'de-centering' without which he cannot become free from his spontaneous intellectual egocentricity. This 'de-centering' makes the subject enter upon, not so much an already available and therefore external universality, as an uninterrupted process of coordinating and setting in reciprocal relations.[267]

Such an "uninterrupted process of coordinating" reflects a condition in which the collective subject and the individual subjects who compose it are not in persistent conflict. It represents an "ideal equilibrium" in which the relation of individual and group is based neither on social constraint nor on egocentricity. [268]

According to Piaget, to internalize an "external universality" is to accept "social constraint." Conversely, failing to engage in mutual assimilation and accommodation with other viewpoints embodies the "unconscious egocentricity of the individual," that is, "the mental attitude of young children who do not yet know how to collaborate or to coordinate their points of view." Ideal equilibrium -- "the reciprocal preservation of the whole and of the parts" -- means "cooperation between individuals who become autonomous by this very cooperation."[269] People who meet, discuss, and decide by free consent can be autonomous; people who simply accept ideas imposed by others, or who act without regard to what others think, cannot.

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[266] De-centering can be aided by the capacity for virtual mental operations. Representations of possible situations, proposed actions, and anticipated results – i.e. "thought experiments" -- can be communicated among different individuals and groups while remaining reversible. So can proposed alternatives and final agreement on a joint course of action. It is this capacity for shared thought experiments that makes uncoerced but purposeful collective determination of coordinated action possible.

[267] *Structuralism*: 139. Piaget says this formulation applies "On the plane of knowledge (as, perhaps, on that of moral and aesthetic values)."
This process is surprisingly close to Sartre's concept of "de-serialization." (See for example *The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre* by Wilfrid Desan, Chapter 6, "From Seriality to Group." (Sartre, unlike Piaget, puts this process in the context of interests as well as cognitive viewpoints.) While Piaget was quite hostile to Sartre's early existentialism (see *Insights and Illusions of Philosophy* throughout), he later defended the "constructivism" of the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, and even observed that Sartre's remaining "subjectivist difficulties" are "the remains of his earlier existentialist phase." *Structuralism*, p. 121. There is also a parallel between Piaget's distinction between an "external universality" and "a process of coordinating and setting in reciprocal relations" on the one hand and Sartre's distinction between "totality" and "totalization" on the other.

[268] Piaget's concept of ideal equilibrium, and his research on the "moral development of the child," have sometimes been used to assert an objective value hierarchy in which the stages of progressive development define an ethical or moral standard. Whether or not there is any validity to this idea, and whether Piaget himself adopts it, it has proven extremely susceptible to ethnocentric and egocentric interpretations. It would be exceptional to find expositors of such views who do not believe their own society, and people like themselves, are somewhere near the pinnacle of the hierarchy.

[269] Evans, p. 125.

Unlike individual subjects, collective subjects are composed of people who are already subjects themselves. So the construction of collective subjects does not require the long development Piaget describes as prerequisite for logical thought in individuals. Rather, it involves features that allow coordinated action, such as communications channels, networks and other social relationships, and shared mental operations and representations.[270]

I found Piaget's approach to group formation congruent with what I had discovered in the course of writing *Strike!*. Group formation and collective action do not necessarily start from a concept of the group as a group. A collection of people will often act in concert in response to a common problem without first having a strong consciousness of themselves as a group. As participants observe themselves acting in concert, they begin to take note of what they have in common, and to construct a conception of themselves as collective actors. Their action may be rational and purposive from the start, but consciousness of themselves as a group may only develop subsequently by an act of reflective abstraction.[271] It is their actual ability to coordinate their action that constitutes them as a collective subject since, as Piaget says, any social group is a subject to the extent that it is able to transform the world physically or virtually.

I found this general approach useful when I tried to give an account of the rise of what is often called the global justice or anti-globalization movement and which I refer to as "globalization from below." I described how economic globalization was creating problems for a wide range of people and movements around the world. In response, counter-movements began from many diverse starting points, "ranging from local campaigns against runaway plants to union organizing in poor countries, and from protection of indigenous peoples to resistance to corporate-engineered food." As they began to act on their objectives, participants started asking each other for solidarity and support. The resulting cooperation was in effect the beginning of constituting a collective subject as many participants began "recognizing their commonalities and beginning to envision themselves as constructing a common movement."[272] Only as a result of that process did globalization from below as an entity emerge.

Piaget's analysis of de-centering and the formation of collective subjects became a key element of my emerging heuristic for common preservation.

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[270] Collective subjects, unlike living individual subjects, can also dissolve into their constituent parts and cease to exist as subjects.

[271] The interpretation in this paragraph follows Piaget's analysis of individual development. For Piaget, individual thought is a product of mental operations in which the schemes developed in action are applied to representations of objects rather than to the real objects themselves. Therefore, the development of action schemes, of the capacity to act, is a prerequisite for thinking, defined as the ability to manipulate representations of the world mentally, and thereby to perform thought experiments which allow alternatives to be considered and courses of action selected without direct trial and error in reality. Such an operational capacity in turn is a precursor to that reflection on one's own operations by reflective abstraction often called consciousness. In this approach there is a dialectic of action and thought, in which action precedes thought and provides both a means and an object of reflection.

[272] *Globalization from Below*, p. 10,15. See Part 6 below.

## Plundering Piaget

There are big differences between studying the development of the human individual and studying any social process. Can Piaget's ideas be usefully applied to society?

My answer is yes. But let's start with some of the differences.

Individual human development is guided by the human genome to produce an adult human being in a way that has no social equivalent. As Piaget put it,

"In individual evolution, beginning with birth and ending with the adult state, or death, intellectual and affective equilibrium appear as the end-point of development itself. . . In a society, whose death is only metaphorical, and whose apogee could only be compared in a literary way to human adulthood, the questions of the relation between equilibrium and development are differently posed."[273]

However, the idea of equilibration, in which the problems produced by a pattern generate a search for a better pattern, can apply to social as well as individual development. The difference is that social equilibration does not have anything guiding it to a genetically pre-determined conclusion.

While Piaget recognizes the possibility of conflicts and contradictions within the thinking of individuals, that is a very different matter from the kinds of social conflicts manifested for example in wars, civil wars, and revolutions. His approach to equilibration must at the least be supplemented by some kind of conflict model like Marx' discussed in "Robbing Marx" above.

Piaget developed ingenious modes of observation and experiment for probing cognitive development. Such methods are rarely available for studying social change, however, especially change on a large scale. Even when experiments can be made, the problem of adequate controls to isolate independent variables is usually insurmountable. So scientific investigation of society usually must depend on the kind of historical evidence and the logic of its interpretation discussed in "What is history?" above.

Many if not most of the phenomena of human society are socially and historically constructed. But as I wrote in one of my early struggles with Piaget, "He seems to have no real conception of historical change, to believe that behind societies there stands Society with universal traits," and to have "no grasp of what [Karl] Korsch calls Marx' 'principle of historical specification'" which comprehends "all things social" in terms of "a definite historical epoch."[274]

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[273] "Explanation in Sociology," *Sociological Studies*, p. 48.

[274] Jeremy Brecher to Wolf Heydebrand, December 21, 1979. For the "principle of historical specification," see Karl Korsch, *Karl Marx* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963) p. 24.

Despite these differences and others, I repeatedly found myself drawing on Piaget's ideas as I struggled to understand different kinds of social change.[275] A few examples will indicate how.

Piaget distinguishes three forms of equilibration through which systems achieve their goals by changing themselves.[276] Schemes are coordinated with their objects by assimilation and accommodation. Schemes are coordinated with each other by reciprocal assimilation and accommodation. Parts are coordinated with the whole by differentiation and integration. I found these categories useful for thinking about different kinds of social change.

Coordination between schemes and their objects requires that the scheme of assimilation be accommodated to the object. The child tosses a ball too hard and overshoots the basket, then tosses it more gently. Strikers find they are being replaced by strikebreakers, so they "strike on the job" by sitting down in the workplace.

Coordination also occurs among schemes. For example, the motor system of an infant may possess the scheme "to grasp" while the visual system may possess the scheme "to gaze at." But the two may not be coordinated, so an infant may know how to grasp an object and be able to see the object but not be able to move its hand to a position where an observed object can be grasped. To correct this, each subsystem must assimilate the other to its own schemes and accommodate those schemes to coordinate with the other's.

Such reciprocal assimilation and accommodation leads to what Piaget calls "mutual conservation." This occurs when schemes have adapted to each other enough that they can coordinate their action without needing additional change. I applied this idea to the coordination of social activity. It was exemplified by one brass worker who told me how, in the 1930s, workers in his factory developed ways that each could warn the others of the approach of managers; as he put it, "We had a signal, just like Paul Revere." Such coordination allowed them to look busy or stop talking about forming a union when the foreman came around.

Finally, coordination may occur between parts and wholes -- between systems and their subsystems. The system as a whole needs to achieve its goals, that is, to complete its cycles and to reproduce itself. To do so it may differentiate itself into distinct parts.

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[275] It is a little-known fact that in his youth Piaget developed his ideas about equilibration under titles like "Biology and War" and "Letter to Young Socialists." A compelling social purpose drove his thinking. For selected examples, see Howard E. Gruber and J. Jacques Voneche, *The Essential Piaget* (New York: Basic Books, 1977) "Part II: From Biology to Philosophy." Piaget wrote in "Jean Piaget, an Autobiography" that "I had completely forgotten the contents of these rather crude, juvenile productions" but that, "in spite of their immaturity, they anticipated in a striking manner what I have been trying to do for about thirty years." (Evans, p. 105.) By letting its origin become unconscious, he was able to present his work as pure scientific exploration. No doubt I sensed this subtext and that it was part of what has made Piaget so compelling for me.

[276] *The Equilibration of Cognitive Structures*, "The Three Forms of Equilibration and the Correspondence between Affirmations and Negations," p. 7ff.

However, these parts need to be integrated with each other in such a way that each can function and that the needs of the whole are met. Think of a workgroup which, in order to gain free time for its members, divides itself between some members who continue production and others who make use of their time for other purposes.

Piaget distinguishes two kinds of gaps that part/whole equilibration may have to overcome. The first is constraint of the parts by the whole. The second is the inability to coordinate. I use this distinction to define two different kinds of social problems, which I call "problems of domination" and "problems of disorder." Imperialism and the domination of workers by employers illustrate problems of domination. Uncontrolled arms races and financial crashes illustrate problems of disorder. Marx' "undisputed authority of the capitalist over men, that are but parts of a mechanism that belongs to him" represents a problem of domination. His "anarchy of the market" represents a problem of disorder.

Piaget indicates that the alternative to atomic individualism or social domination is an "ideal equilibrium" based on free coordination. Of course, most actually existing social organization is very far from that ideal – and the resulting gaps may indicate where and what kind of further equilibration may be needed.[277]

To me, Piaget's approach implies that we are not faced with an ineluctable either/or between domination and disorder. It's not necessarily a zero-sum game: Improved patterns may reduce both. It may well be impossible to fully realize "ideal equilibrium" based on free coordination outside of the realm of thought, but that doesn't mean we can't move toward it by "progressive or improving equilibration." The formation of the European Union, for example, increased human rights guarantees of individual freedom at the same time that it reduced rivalry among nations.

For social movements, this means that they are not faced with an either/or choice between internal authoritarianism or chaos. For society it means there is not an either/or choice between state command and other forms of domination or unregulated markets and other forms of disorder. The process of de-centering described by Piaget provides the basis for a very different form of social relations in which individuals voluntarily share knowledge and coordinate their action to achieve common goals. Networks and other forms of free coordination provide an alternative toward which social organization can develop.[278]

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[277] By focusing on mutual compensations as the basis of coordination, Piaget suggests a frame in which coordination can be conducted under the mutual control of those whose activity is being coordinated, rather than of a separate coordinating authority.

[278] Some economists now recognize "networks" as a third form of organization, alongside hierarchy and markets. Network forms differ from markets in that cooperative information sharing eliminates the "blindness" of market-based decision making. See Diane Elson, "Market Socialism or Socialization of the Market?" *New Left Review*, November-December 1988. See also Jeremy Brecher, "Affairs of State," *The Nation*, March 6, 1995.

Equilibration thus suggests that the quest for free coordination is not simply a chimera or an impossible utopian fantasy, but rather something toward which progress can be made in concrete situations. Such progress, however, can only be relative to a concrete goal. This theory doesn't provide an ultimate human end or purpose or goal.

Piaget's distinctions among different kinds of disequilibrium and the different kinds of equilibration required to correct them provide a set of tools that I have come to use repeatedly in the common preservation workshop. Coordination of schemes and their objects, schemes with schemes, and schemes with the larger systems of which they are part are distinct elements of the process of equilibration. So are the overcoming of domination and disorder. Each is a pattern that contributes to a heuristic for common preservation.

In the traditions of working class radicalism, a choice was always posed between "revolution" and "reform." Revolution represented a rupture with the status quo and the creation of a "new society" completely different from the existing one. Reform, on the other hand, simply reinforced the existing society by eliminating some of its abuses.

Piaget's approach to equilibration provides an alternative way of thinking about social change. Stability and change, far from being opposites, are interdependent. Every successful act combines assimilation and accommodation. Social change cannot be understood in terms of a simple either/or between continuity and rupture. The processes of change are much more varied and the interactions of conservation and change much more complex.

Those who have studied revolutions in France, Russia, and elsewhere have often observed how much continuity is hidden within apparently total rupture. Conversely, the modern world has gone through colossal changes that did not include the kind of discontinuity represented by political revolution. The magnitude of historical change does not necessarily depend on or correlate with the magnitude of rupture.

Today, faced with a status quo that threatens to destroy the basis for human life itself, the "conservative" goal of human survival requires an unprecedented "accommodation" of the way we organize our life on earth -- a radical shift to common preservation.

## No dress before the iron

At the end of Tillie Olsen's haunting story "I Stand Here Ironing," an exhausted mother doing chores after a long workday asks one thing for her daughter:

"Help her to know – help make it so there is cause for her to know – that she is more than this dress on the ironing board, helpless before the iron."[279]

In *Common Sense for Hard Times* Tim Costello and I wrote, "To be like that dress, a pure object to external forces, compelled to do whatever they command – a number, a thing – no human being should tolerate." Part of what appealed to me so deeply in some versions of systems theory, and especially in Piaget's theory of equilibration, was a way to understand how it might be possible for people to actively shape their own lives and conditions.

To understand why this was significant, it helps to contrast this approach to some of the dominant paradigms of that time, including behaviorism, genetic and cultural determinism, Freudianism, structuralism, and structuralist Marxism. I consider myself anything but an expert in such matters, so the following discussion should be taken as the work of an autodidact, not of a trained and thorough scholar.

Piaget rejected behaviorist psychology's concept of conditioning. For behaviorism, an environmental stimulus, S, causes an organism's response, R. (Pavlov was the arch-behaviorist, and it was his kind of stimulus-response approach to which David Montgomery had compared the reductionist tendency in *Strike!*.) But, Piaget argued, an organism at any given time has a tendency to respond in one way and not another. It actively assimilates a stimulus to its already existing schemes. It interprets the stimulus, defines its meaning, in terms of those pre-existing patterns. It is active, not just reactive. It is not a blank sheet on which experience writes. It is more than a dress before the iron.

Open systems theory explains how such activism is made possible for a time -- despite the law of entropy -- by the import of order and energy across a semi-permeable boundary. This made unnecessary the idea, sometimes attributed to Freud, that the goal of organisms is stasis or death and that their primary motivation is "need drive reduction." The cybernetic concept of active, selective, variable compensation indicates how action can be effective in changing the world.

If, according to behaviorism, people were like dresses before the iron, who or what was the iron? In the dominant theories of the day, the iron was "the system," "society," a totality that shaped individuals to meet its own need to maintain and reproduce itself.

In functionalist versions of this idea, society is determined by something like Cannon's homeostasis. The social system possesses a balance of forces which interact in such a

[279] *Common Sense for Hard Times*, p. 228.

way that the system as a whole is maintained; there is feedback, but the feedback simply restores the *status quo*. Change can only result from change in the environment, not from within the system.

In structuralist versions, society is seen embodying rules under which every change simply restores the pre-existing structure.[280] Change in the structure is impossible, or can only result from an unexplainable "rupture."

Such a view of society, which appeared to me and many others as embodying a totalitarian nightmare vision, reached its acme in sociologist Talcott Parsons' grand synthesis, structural-functionalism. Daniel Bell's "end of ideology" – a foundational foil for the New Left -- represented a similar view of a society reproducing itself without serious conflict and with need for only marginal adjustments. The same idea is summed up in the popular saying, "You can't beat the system." The trend of thought referred to as post-modernism and deconstruction has had this kind of structuralism as a major target.[281]

I always rejected this view with a kind of existential rebellion – I, as an individual, make an arbitrary existential choice not to bow down to the system. But individualist existentialism was never satisfactory to me. It was never able to answer such questions as, why not make an existential choice for fascism? And if I possess an arbitrary existential freedom, why not ignore the lessons of historical experience, the predictable consequences of my action, and their effect on other people who make up the human community? An existentialist work like Sartre's *The Flies* seemed at best to dodge such questions. Some versions of post-modernism and deconstruction run a similar risk.

Piaget is often described as a structuralist, and he called his broader theory genetic structuralism, but his approach contrasts sharply with conventional structuralists. He dissociated himself from "static forms of equilibrium" and emphasized instead the process of equilibration, and especially "increasing equilibrations."[282] These require

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[280] Remarkably, a variety of theorists who proclaimed themselves Marxists actually tried to interpret Marxism as such a structuralist theory. Others, like E.P. Thompson and the later Jean-Paul Sartre, challenged this interpretation, striving to maintain a place for individual freedom within Marxism.

[281] Piaget's views contrast as well with a variety of other paradigms that portray human life as determined by something other than human beings. One is the crude Darwinism in which the "selfish gene" determines all of human life. This idea found its expression in a sociobiology in which the huge variations of human culture and history were allegedly explained by unchanging genetic structures. Noam Chomsky's views on the biologically "wired-in" character of human thought and language are someties interpreted in this way.

Freudianism, at the time a ubiquitous feature of both academic and popular discourse, combined determinism by biology and by early childhood experiences.

Cultural determinism, an idea common in anthropology, was akin to behaviorism's "blank slate." It was summed up in the phrase "culture is a blueprint for life"; human beings live by simply following their culture's blueprint.

Economistic versions of Marxism found determination in the economy, although what was determined was change rather than fixity. Such Marxism declared things like "The handmill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steammill, society with the industrial capitalist." In all these approaches, predetermination made equilibration superfluous.

[282] *Development of Thought*, p. v.

active construction. "*There is no structure apart from construction*,"[283] he thundered in italics in his book *Structuralism*.

Conventional structuralism involves only assimilation to existing structures. In Piaget's genetic structuralism, change becomes possible because those structures also accommodate. And in order to function they have to accommodate – to change -- because their real context is imbalance, disequilibrium, and contradiction.

This view has evident affinities with the Marxian dialectic, and Piaget acknowledged the similarities.[284] Interpretations of Marx vary so widely, however, that it is difficult to evaluate his similarities and differences from Piaget. My understanding is that Piaget's approach is compatible with less reductionist forms of Marxism but not with more reductionist ones.[285] Anti-reductionist Marxists like E.P. Thompson and Jean-Paul Sartre have large areas of overlap with Piaget's approach and little definite contradiction.

I took from Piaget what I wanted, and a thorough intellectual historian would no doubt come up with a different account of his views. In a rough draft for an essay on Piaget and Marx written in the early 1970s, I compared Piaget with the heterodox Marxist theoretician Henri Lefebvre:

> "There is a close tie between Piaget's and Lefebvre's critiques of structuralism. Structures cannot be "eternities," reproducing their conditions of existence under all circumstances, unless they are capable of compensating for all possible fluctuations of the environment. Only a "structure of all structures" could possess this capacity. In the absence of such an entity, no structure can be completed; every structure is actually a transitional state from one structure to another; or, as Piaget puts it, the being of a structure is its construction. This is equivalent to

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[283] *Structuralism*, p. 140.

[284] Admittedly, Piaget's acknowledgement could be somewhat diffident: "If there are definite points of convergence between my interpretations and the dialectic, as L. Goldmann, M. Rubel, C. Nowinski, and others have noted, I would like to make it clear that it is a matter of convergence and not of influence. . . . Either the dialectic is a metaphysics like any other, which claims to direct science, and this can only harm science as well as itself, or its strength is due to the fact that it converges with all manner of spontaneous scientific ideas, and the only thing to do therefore is to work in complete independence." *Insights and Illusions of Philosophy*, p. 204. This contrasts in spirit with Piaget's usual drive to coordinate his ideas with those of others.

In other context he is notably favorable to some of Marx' ideas. This is clear in the papers published in English for the first time in 1995 as *Sociological studies* (London and New York: Routlege, 1995). See, for example, "Explanation in sociology." "With the explanatory model of Karl Marx, we find in contrast [to Durkheim and Pareto] an example of analysis focused on interactions as such, and striking a better balance between causal and interactional elements." (p. 55) "In contrast to the idealist realism of Durkheim and the individualism of Tarde, Marx's essentially concrete conception of the problem of ideologies and logic (leaving aside the political passions attached to a name which has become symbolic, and taken in turn as that of a prophet and of a sophist) fits exceptionally well with the actual facts of both psychology and sociology." (p. 77)

[285] One self-proclaimed Marxist, A.J. Durak, writes that "Piaget has a right-wing version of 'dialectics,' not based on contradiction, but on the supposed tendency of living things to move to ever higher stages of equilibrium. This view is the direct opposite of Marxist dialectics." (A.J. Durak, "Piaget and Marxist Philosophy" http://tomweston.net/piagetweb.htm.)

> Lefevbre's statement that there are no structures; there are only more or less effective strategies, i.e. sets of means which are able to compensate for deviations from the condition of existence to a greater or lesser extent."[286]

Today this seems like a rather unprovable argument to me. I'm not sure how one would test any statement about "every structure." But I am confident that seeking more effective strategies is more useful for people facing a tough situation than seeking structures that are eternal.

I'd also say that that Piaget uses the tools of systems theory, cybernetics, and the like, which were unavailable to Marx, to fill in some of what Marx intuitively grasped, but lacked the means to articulate. These tools do not necessarily provide a different philosophical position than the Marxian dialectic. But they provide mechanisms by which things that appeared paradoxical become explicable, much as Mendel's genetics provided a mechanism for previously puzzling phenomena of evolution.

Piaget's approach is profoundly non-reductionist in that its depends on interaction, relations between parts and wholes, feedback loops, and other properties of systems that cannot be reduced to simple chains of cause and effect. Yet it finds human activity not random but meaningful. Equilibration provides a non-nihilistic alternative to all deterministic approaches, whether biological or social. Human action is patterned, but people construct and reconstruct their own patterns.

Equilibration may not explain in some ultimate, theological sense why there is freedom or action or life, but it can help us understand how control can be internal without being unchanging. As Piaget put it, "Man can transform himself by transforming the world and can structure himself by constructing structures; and these structures are his own, for they are not eternally predestined either from within or from without."[287] We are not predestined to be a dress before the iron. We can pick up the iron and we can even invent new and better ways to use it.

Piaget writes that "the distinctive feature of man" is "constantly to accomplish a task, a *praxis* as Marxism puts it."[288] I don't know or particularly care what the "distinctive feature of man" is; I'm happy to let the question be explored as long as humanity continues to exist. But there is one thing of which I am sure: That existence will be nasty, brutish, and short unless humanity – we – take on the task of setting our life on earth on a different course. Piaget helped me think about how to undertake that task.

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[286] Notes headed "Piaget and Marx." N.d.
[287] *Structuralism*, p. 119.
[288] *Insights and Illusions of Philosophy*, p. 162. Surely we can hear the voice of John Calvin echoing down through Geneva's centuries. The Protestant hymn my mother used to sing floats through my mind: "Work for the night is coming!" No doubt this perspective on "man" has something to do with Piaget's staggering productivity, for which I, for one, am grateful. But Piaget's failure to acknowledge the roots of his statement in a specific historical tradition also reveals his tendency to ignore the "principle of historical specification."

## The abolition of society

The conventional approach to applying systems theory to human social life has been to define societies as systems -- bounded entities whose different structures fitted more or less tightly together to form integrated wholes. Marxist, Weberian, and most other sociologists accept one or another version of this framework. It was summed up by Walter Buckley in the compendium *Modern Systems Research for the Behavioral Scientist*: "Society" as a "complex adaptive system."[289]

I was already backing away from this idea of "society" in *Common Sense for Hard Times*, but I didn't know how to formulate an alternative. It was a breakthrough when one day in a bookstore I picked up *The Sources of Social Power* by British historical sociologist Michael Mann.[290] Mann provided me an alternative vision: "Since the rise of civilization, human existence is structured primarily by power networks -- states, markets, military organizations, and ideologies -- whose boundaries do not necessarily or even normally coincide and which do not form the kind of system normally thought of as 'a society.'"[291] (He goes so far as to say, "If I could, I would abolish the concept of 'society' altogether."[292]) The development and interaction of such networks provided a different way to translate the abstract schemas I had been struggling with into an interpretation of concrete social processes.

Mann starts from the idea that human beings have many goals and set up many networks of social relationships for pursuing them. The networks established for raising children, for meeting material needs, for finding meaning in life, and for protecting against attack or pillaging others do not normally coincide; in fact, they are far more likely to overlap and intersect. Such networks tend to be "promiscuous," drawing on many kinds of economic, political, military, and ideological resources.[293]

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[289] P. 490. For a more recent attempt to apply systems theory to society, see Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995). For a critical review, see Takis Fotopoulos, "Systems theory and complexity: a potential tool for radical analysis or the emerging social paradigm for the internationalized market economy?" cited above.

[290] I won't try here to summarize all of Mann's conceptually rich approach, only those aspects that I use as part of my own. In particular I leave to the side his attempt to classify power networks in terms of Ideological, Economic, Military, and Political power. It is difficult to see the validity of such categories independent of a particular purpose. For Mann's project of a history of power they play a useful role, but he immediately admits that "Real institutionalized networks of interaction do not have a simple one-to-one relationship to the ideal-typical sources of social power." They are "functionally promiscuous." Vol. I p. 17. For purposes of social change, recognizing their promiscuity is crucial. For as Mann later acknowledges, "Actual social movements normally mix up elements of most, if not all, power sources in more general power configurations." (Mann, p. 523)

[291] Mann, p. 2.

[292] Mann, p. 2. However, he in fact adopts a definition of a society as "a network of social interaction at the boundaries of which is a certain level of interaction cleavage between it and its environment. A society is a unit with boundaries, and it contains interaction that is relatively dense and stable; that is, it is internally patterned when compared to interaction that crosses its boundaries." (p. 13) This would surely correspond to some definitions of an open system.

[293] Such networks are, in Piagetan terms, collective subjects whose coordination allows them to transform the world actually or virtually. If one wanted to put a cybernetic foundation under Mann's approach, one

According to Mann, bringing about cooperation is the essence of a power source. "Collective power" arises when persons in cooperation can enhance their joint power over third parties or over nature.[294] As I learned from my own experience and study of social movements, power originates in coordination.

Mann points out that collective power can be distributed unequally. The result is "distributive power" – the power of some people over others within a system of coordinated action.[295]

Collective power itself tends to foster distributive power:

> In implementing collective goals, social organization and a division of labor are set up. Organization and division of function carry an inherent tendency to distributive power, deriving from supervision and coordination. . . . Those who occupy supervisory and coordinating positions have an immense organizational superiority over the others.[296]

Another way to put this is that coordination provides collective benefits. People therefore comply with those who provide coordination. But those who control coordination may be able to extend their power to pursue their own interests rather than collective ones.[297] People may campaign for a politician who proposes programs that are in their interest, but the politician may use their office to enrich themselves at the expense of their constituents, for example.

Collective and distributive power are usually intertwined. This helps explain why distributive power is so often acquiesced in by those who are distributed less of it. "The masses comply because they lack collective organization to do otherwise, because they are embedded within collective and distributive power organizations controlled by others. They are *organizationally outflanked*."[298]

How then can social change possibly occur?[299] Mann proposes that the characteristic way that new solutions to social problems emerge is neither through revolution nor reform. Rather, a new solution develops in what he calls "interstitial locations" – nooks and crannies in and around the dominant institutions. Those who were initially marginal

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might say that for historical analysis the significant entities are those that are capable of variable compensation.

[294] P. 6, citing Parsons. I generally prefer to speak in terms of "coordination" rather than "cooperation" because "cooperation" may carry the connotation that a coordination is voluntary and mutually beneficial. Such terms as "coerced cooperation" and "exploitative cooperation" sound paradoxical, but unfortunately they reflect real phenomena.

[295] See discussion above of the similar distinction of two kinds of power in *Strike!*.

[296] P. 6. Whether "inherent tendency" implies "inevitability," and how such a tendency may be countered, are critical question for democracy.

[297] See Lindbloom, *Politics and Markets*, for the concept of "extended authority."

[298] Mann, p. 6-7.

[299] This and following paragraphs based on GfB p. 24-5. Mann states explicitly that his is "a developmental, thought not an evolutionary or a teleological, history." P. 31.

then link together in ways that allow them to outflank the dominant institutions and force a reorganization of the status quo.

At certain points, people see existing power institutions as blocking goals that could be attained by cooperation that transcends those institutions. So people develop new networks that outrun them. Such movements create subversive "invisible connections" across institutional boundaries.[300] These interstitial networks translate human goals into organizational means. In short, they establish new patterns of coordination.

To link groups with disparate traditions and experiences, such networks use what are variously referred to as shared worldviews, paradigms, visions, frames, or ideologies. Such belief systems unite seemingly disparate human beings by claiming that they have meaningful common properties:

"An ideology will emerge as a powerful, autonomous movement when it can put together in a single explanation and organization a number of aspects of experience that have hitherto been marginal, interstitial to the dominant institutions of power."[301]

The emerging belief system becomes a guide for efforts to transform the world. It defines common values and norms, providing the basis for a common program. When a network draws together people and practices from many formerly marginalized social spaces and makes it possible for them to act together, it establishes an independent source of power. Ultimately, new power networks may become strong enough to reorganize the dominant institutional configuration. If they do, common preservation has transformed society.

The rise of labor and socialist movements in the 19th century and of feminist and environmental movements in the 20th century in many ways fits this model of emergence at the margins, linking, and outflanking. So, ironically, does the emergence of economic globalization.

Self-organization in marginal locations can be intimately linked to changing dominant institutions. The rising European bourgeoisie both created their own market institutions and fought to restructure the feudal political system in ways that would allow markets to develop more freely. Labor movements both organized marginalized workers into unions and forced governments to protect labor rights, which in turn made it easier to organize unions.

Mann's approach to social change easily fit the kind of systems approach I was developing. It starts from a gap between goals and the present organization of society. That gap leads actors to seek new patterns of coordination. They do so by constructing shared representations of their identity and situation. These become the basis for coordinating actions that transcend the status quo and may eventually transform it.

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[300] Mann, p. 522.
[301] Mann, p. 21. Mann uses "ideology" in the sociological, not the Marxian, sense.

Mann points out that the problems faced by humanity today -- the familiar laundry list of ecological, military, and economic calamities -- require fundamentally new solutions. They are not the problems which existing institutions developed to solve; therefore existing institutions are unlikely to be effective at solving them.

Mann says this has been a common situation in human history. As a result, major social change usually comes from social locations that are interstitial to existing institutions. Such locations can exist precisely because society is not a unitary whole, but rather is composed of overlapping networks whose boundaries do not normally coincide.

In *Globalization from Below*, I and my collaborators explicitly used Mann's analysis to propose a strategy for the emerging movement we called "globalization from below." After paraphrasing "invisible connections" between "interstitial locations" as "linking the nooks and crannies," we wrote:

"Social movements may lack the obvious paraphernalia of power: armies, wealth, palaces, temples, and bureaucracies. But by linking from the nooks and crannies, developing a common vision and program, and withdrawing their consent from existing institutions, they can impose norms on states, classes, armies, and other power actors."[302]

We called it the "Lilliput strategy."

[302] *Globalization from Below*, p. 25.

## How to solve it

I don't remember it myself, but there's a story in my family that at a certain stage I, like many children, drove everyone crazy by asking "why?" all the time. Finally someone asked my why I asked "why?" all the time. "Why," I'm told I answered, "is the word I use to find things out." Like every child who asks a question, I had invented heuristics.

Many years later on a shelf of discarded books in the Yelping Hill community building I chanced to pick up a tattered copy of *How to Solve It: A New Aspect of Mathematical Method* by the mathematician G. Polya. It was originally published in 1945 and is now recognized as a classic, perhaps the first modern book on heuristics. Directed primarily to math teachers, it provided a set of questions designed to elicit "mental operations typically useful for the solution of problems."[303]

To my surprise, I found Polya's approach to heuristics helpful for the problems I was struggling with. It gave me a way to understand and organize the unguided groping that I went through in my own mind as I approached a problem. But it also gave me a way to think about the problem solving process more generally. As a historian, I found it provided a way to think about what happened when people in the past faced problems and attempted to find solutions to them. As a person struggling with today's social problems, it gave me a strategy for searching for solutions.

Polya warns that finding "infallible rules of discovery" will "never be more than a dream."[304] Solving problems is a "practical skill" like swimming. It is acquired by imitation and practice.[305] It even involves "unconscious work"[306] and a dimension of luck.[307]

As with Dewey, Piaget, and others in their tradition, Polya's approach starts with identifying a gap – in a math problem, the "unknown." It is "an unsolved problem, an open question." It can be represented as "a gap across which we have to construct a bridge."[308]

Polya's strategy is to take a pattern with which a problem solver is already familiar and apply it to the problem at hand. "Look at the unknown! And try to think of a familiar problem having the same or a similar unknown." This is what anyone is likely to do when faced with a problem. "Are you hungry? You wish to obtain food and you think of familiar ways of obtaining food. . . . You wish to construct a triangle and you think of familiar ways of constructing a triangle. Have you a problem of any kind? You wish to

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[303] G. Polya, *How to Solve It: A New Aspect of Mathematical Method*, Second Edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971) p. 2.
[304] Polya, p. 172.
[305] Polya, p. 4.
[306] Polya, p. 198.
[307] Polya, p. 12.
[308] Polya, p. 73.

find a certain unknown, and you think of familiar ways of finding such an unknown, or some similar unknown."

Such an approach comes naturally to anyone who is "seriously concerned with his problem and has some common sense." But such a person may not wish or be able to express what they are doing "in clear words." Polya's heuristic questions are intended to make that possible.[309]

Of course each problem is different, so the method that solved a previous problem must be modified to solve a new one. "We have to vary, to transform, to modify the problem." Indeed, Polya advises, "If you cannot solve the proposed problem, try to solve first some related problem."[310] If we can find and solve such a problem, "We have a model to follow."[311] Only beware the danger that we may "stray so far from our original problem that we are in danger of losing it altogether."[312] To speak Piagetan, we must accommodate our schemes without changing them in ways that prevent them from performing their intended function.

I found Polya's discussion of solving practical problems particularly appropriate to social problems. He points out several ways that practical problems are different from normal mathematical problems. Practical problems typically involve not one but many "unknowns," many different conditions that the solution must meet, and vast amounts of potentially relevant data. A plan for a dam, for example, must specify a wide range of dimensions, materials, and locations. It must meet multiple conditions, such as providing electric power and water for irrigation, while helping control floods; at the same time it must disturb the environment as little as possible and take as little time and money as possible to construct.

Practical problems require "much knowledge which has not yet reached a precise, scientific level." The solver of practical problems has "a multitude of data and conditions: we take into account as many as we can but we are obliged to neglect some."[313] This is very like the historian, who must select out of a mass of facts the most relevant ones.

Problem solving for Polya involves both intuitive and formal reasoning. We may grasp a point either by concentrating upon it "till we see it so clearly and distinctly that we have no doubt that the step is correct" or we may derive it "according to formal rules." Both "insight" and "formal proof" have their place in problem solving.[314] "Our nonmathematical knowledge cannot be based entirely on formal proofs. The more solid part of our everyday knowledge is continually tested and strengthened by our everyday

[309] Polya, p. 2-3.
[310] Polya, p. 10.
[311] Polya, p. 40.
[312] Polya, p. 10.
[313] Polya, p. 149-152
[314] Polya, p. 13.

experience."[315] I felt encouraged by Polya in my belief that formal, propositional argument and more tacit, intuitive, experienced-based practices can be synergistic in solving problems.

Problem solving involves what Polya calls "hearuistic" "plausible reasoning."[316] The conventional demonstrative syllogism states, "If A then B." If B is false then A is false. A "heuristic syllogism" states "If A then B" If B is true, then we conclude not that A is true, but that A is more credible. The degree of credibility remains a judgment call, and it can never amount to certainty.[317]

If there is such a thing as "historical logic," surely it is based on such "plausible reasoning." As I had put it in *History from Below*, "You can't prove what happened in the past the way you prove an answer in mathematics; all you can do is construct the most likely account of what happened. It's like a courtroom, except that often you have to be satisfied with 'the most probable account' even if it can't be proved 'beyond a reasonable doubt.'"[318]

I found Polya's ideas complemented Piaget's and provided a way to make them operational. Polya, like Piaget, portrays thinking as mental action.[319] A problem is essentially a gap that we need to bridge. The solution is a construction that closes the gap. The process involves mobilizing the relevant facts and combining them in new ways. This "adapting and combining activity" is "organization"[320] or, as Piaget might say, assimilation, accommodation, and coordination. This results in a reorganization of the way we conceive the problem – in Piaget's terms, an accommodation of our initial pattern.[321] This process closes the gap by constructing a whole that is well adapted to the problem.

I use Polya's ideas to reconstruct how people changed their patterns of action in the past. I start by examining the problems they faced and why their existing patterns couldn't solve them. Then I look for evidence of other experiences or observations they may have drawn on to solve the problem. If workers have never organized a union, have they perhaps organized a church social group? If they've never stopped a rubber factory, have they perhaps stopped a baseball game? Did they hear from a foreign relative about factory occupations in a distant land? Finally, I look at what accommodation of those experiences and observations was necessary to apply them to the problem people faced. How did women have to modify a kaffeeklatch to turn it into a consciousness-raising

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[315] Polya, p. 61. Indeed, Polya notes that scientific knowledge is based on experiments and measurements combined with mathematical reasoning, and asserts that even mathematical knowledge rests on "a broad experimental basis" that is "broadened by each problem whose result is successfully tested. (p. 61)
[316] Polya, p. 188.
[317] Polya, p. 188.
[318] *History from Below*, p. 13.
[319] Polya, p. 2. Polya, like Piaget, portrays internalized operations and dialogue with others as instances of the same functional nucleus. Polya describes thinking as "mental discourse, as a sort of mental conversation of the thinker with himself." (p. 133.)
[320] Polya, p. 157.
[321] Polya, p. 157-8.

group? This approach doesn't prove how the innovative action was constructed – after all, there could always have been another process that we don't have the evidence for. But it does provide a plausible reconstruction of how and why action changed.

I use this same approach for thinking about how people can solve the problems they face today. I start by identifying people who face an unsolved problem. I ask, what have they done in other circumstances? Then I think about how they could vary familiar actions in ways that might solve the problem. This does not prove that they will solve the problem in that way, or at all. But it does indicate one or more available paths through which they plausibly might do so.[322]

Polya urges that after solving a problem, students look back at the completed solution, "reconsidering and reexamining the result and the path that led to it" in order to "consolidate their knowledge and develop their ability to solve problems."[323] This is the process that Piaget describes as "reflective abstraction." It can lead to "compiled hindsight." It's what I'm trying to do in this book.

[322] Polya points out that there are often multiple routes to a solution. Checking a solution is essentially a question of re-solving the problem by a different route. (Polya, p. 15.)
[323] Polya, p. 14-15.

## Part 4: Discovering ways of thinking about change: Conclusion

New common preservations are instances of that observable but elusive thing, change. But how does change occur? What forestalls it? What determines its form, direction, and results? How can it be promoted? And how can it be guided to a constructive result? I looked for answers wherever I might find them.

From studying history, I discovered that it is possible to learn something from one situation that can be applied to another. Historical knowledge can be organized in a way that can be a useful to guide future action. But for that purpose, history can't just be a sequence of events; it must identify patterns that go beyond particular situations to represent more general regularities. Yet the historical process is only quasi-regular at most, so the patterns we perceive must constantly be tested, revised, and tested again in the light of evidence and argument about particular situations – the "feedback loop" of the historian's practice.

Marxism provides one such way of interpreting history and its meaning for the future. But I never accepted Marx' fundamental proposition that the essence of history is a series of class struggles each of which has led via revolution to a new social system constituted by a new ruling class. Nor did I accept the primacy of economic production in determining society. I certainly drew on Marx' dialectical paradigm of change through conflict within a system leading to a crisis and reconstitution. But I didn't accept the idea that such change was "revolutionary or nothing." I found one-sided the idea that change can be assumed and only stability needs to be explained. I found it confusing to take concepts that normally describe objects and use them to describe processes. Constant change in the meaning of key concepts didn't seem to me like a good way to understand or control change. Historians deal with change all the time, but by constructing concepts that include change as part of their definition, not by constantly changing the definitions of their concepts.

Nonetheless, Marx' interpretation of differentiation and integration of roles among social groups has been central to my thinking. The division of labor among different kinds of workers makes them dependent on each other for producing a product. So does the class division between those who possess capital and those who possess only their own capacity to labor. This can lead to two kinds of problems. One is domination, illustrated by the tyranny of the capitalist over the worker in the workplace. The other is disorder, illustrated by the war of all against all that produces the anarchy of the unregulated market.

Domination and disorder, often combined, create problems that are shared by those they affect. Those affected begin to challenge those responsible for their problems. The contestation starts with individual, then local efforts that grow in scale over time. The need for mutual aid tends to unify these struggles, though they rarely reach the "one national struggle between classes" Marx described in the *Communist Manifesto*. This

process of group formation through differentiation-based conflict can be applied far beyond the realm of social class – for example to the emergence of national consciousness and national resistance movements in colonies and the rise of modern feminism. Marx's portrayal of differentiation leading to conflict and group formation reveals a process of social change that is all too often underplayed in non-Marxist interpretations.

From the pragmatism of John Dewey – more from diffuse secondary influences than directly from Dewey himself – I took the idea of human action and human thought as an extension of the biological process by which organisms adapt to their environment. I also took Dewey's often-neglected idea that such adaptation includes not just submissively conforming to the environment but also actively transforming it.

I absorbed Dewey's idea that the search for new patterns of action originates from problems in existing patterns. I also incorporated the idea of a cycle of "learning by doing" in which experimental actions lead to learning by trial and error. I warmed to Dewey's idea that the capacity of all people to engage in this process is what makes democracy possible. I found in it support for the idea of people reconstructing their worlds for themselves and a good argument against the assertion that they could only address their problems effectively through instruction from some special group of intellectuals distinct from those who experienced the problem that needs to be solved.

From cybernetics I absorbed the idea of a feedback loop. An entity aims to achieve a goal. It acts. Information about the result of the action is "fed back" to a "control devise" that compares the result to the initial aim and corrects subsequent action to compensate for any deviation from goal. Feedback makes possible the pursuit of goals in a changing environment by means of a response that varies with the results of previous action.

A system with feedback loops requires a different kind of explanation than one with simple causal chains. A cybernetic system produces a particular result because it negates deviations from that result. This suggested a way of understanding complex systems without reducing them to simple causal chains. From cybernetics I glimpsed the possibility of regulating social processes from below by means of feedback correction.

The theory of open systems developed a similar idea in some additional directions. An open system, such as a living organism or a community, is able to maintain its patterns by varying its actions to counteract variations in its environment – in effect, through feedback loops. It is able to counteract the tendency toward disorder known as "entropy" because it has a semi-permeable boundary that allows it to selectively import materials and information that it can use to maintain its patterns and to repel and expel that which might disorganize it. Such a boundary both separates the system from and connects it with its environment.

Such open systems can contain part or all of lower-level systems within them and may be part of one or more higher-level systems. So they may form part of a multi-level system

with multiple semi-permeable boundaries that may nest or may instead overlap and intersect.

I found in the idea of open systems the basis for an "ecological shift" of perspective in which individuals, groups, and other entities would cease to be seen as separate, independent beings but rather as part of larger wholes with which their fates are entwined. From systems-theory oriented family therapy I got a glimpse of how to challenge the tendency of systems to reproduce even their dysfunctional patterns by blocking self-reinforcing homeostatic loops and introducing and supporting actions that might become new, self-reinforcing patterns.

From Jean Piaget I learned how to apply these ideas in a way that had wide application yet based on a common core. Like Darwin, Piaget saw living beings as maintaining their patterns by adapting to their environment. Like Dewey, he extended this idea beyond genetics to thought and action.

A subject – an entity able to transform the world physically or virtually -- assimilates its environment to its established patterns. It also accommodates its established patterns to new experiences with its environment. It thus maintains itself by changing itself and changes itself in order to maintain itself.

A subject operates by means of schemes that embody the general features of a pattern of physical or mental action. It realizes a goal by acting in a way that counteracts or compensates for a gap between that goal and the situation that exists. The results of its action are "fed back" to modify or reinforce the guiding pattern. This loop "regulates" the subject's action by correcting its deviations from its goal. Such regulations can in turn be the object of other, higher-level regulations.

People can represent actions and objects by language and other signs. This allows actions on virtual objects or "thought experiments." People can also use signs to represent and reconstruct their own thinking, a process Piaget calls "reflective abstraction." Reflective thought is a development from the regulation of action schemes, but one that allows "pre-correction" by thought experiments to replace after-the-fact correction by trial and error.

Signs also allow individuals to share their representations of the world and their actions on it. To do so they must engage in a process of "de-centering" through which individuals assimilate each others' viewpoints and adapt their viewpoints to each other's. They thereby construct a collective subject that is able to think and act in a coordinated way.

Piaget distinguishes three types of equilibration or coordination that overcome three kinds of gaps. Schemes can be better coordinated with their objects. Different schemes can be better coordinated with each other. The elements of a pattern or whole can be differentiated and integrated in a better way.

Problems or gaps may result from the inability of subjects to coordinate their viewpoints or actions; that may be overcome by mutual decentering. They may, alternatively, result from the domination of subjects by the system or society of which they are part; that may be overcome by critical reflection and testing through experience.

Piaget's way of thinking emphasizes the active character of subjects. Human beings are not wholly determined either by external forces or by genetic ones. We transform the world and in the process transform ourselves. Stability and change are interdependent: We transform our structures to preserve them and we preserve our structures by transforming them.

From Michael Mann I learned ways to apply such ideas to human social life without falling into the misconception that societies are systems that are similar to organisms. Mann's approach doesn't start with "societies" as unitary wholes or systems. Rather, it starts with people who have goals. These goals lead them to form a variety of networks through which they coordinate their action. These networks may range from very decentralized institutions like markets and languages to very centralized ones like armies. Far from neatly nesting into bounded entities called societies, these networks generally overlap and intersect. Collective power originates in the coordination of action through such networks.

Coordination may be enhanced by differentiating roles. But some roles, especially those that control the coordination process itself, may give more power than others. Those who control the coordination process may use that control to their own benefit and to increase their own power. Those they coordinate may acquiesce in this because of the benefits provided by better coordination and/or because they are "organizationally outflanked" and have no means to resist it.

This doesn't mean that change is impossible, however. Because societies are not unitary, new solutions to social problems that existing social institutions can't solve may hatch in "interstitial" locations -- in the nooks and crannies in and between existing institutions. People in such locations may form "invisible networks" that create new coordinations across the existing boundaries of states and institutions. These networks translate human goals into organizational means. They may create new belief systems that link the experiences and goals of different groups. They may become an independent force. And they may force changes that reorganize the dominant institutional configuration.

From Polya's heuristics I gleaned a way to understand both how people solve problems and how to develop a mental strategy for creating new solutions. For Polya, as for Piaget, a problem is a gap. Polya's core strategy for solving a problem is to find a solution to a similar problem and modify it – assimilating the new problem to an existing scheme and accommodating the scheme to the new problem.

Polya advocated using both formal and more intuitive reasoning. He described a form of plausible or reasoning that could not prove or disprove a proposition but which could render it more or less credible. He maintained that his approach could be used not only

for abstract mathematical problems but also for practical ones, although the solutions to practical problems are inevitably less precise. Polya's heuristics gave me a way to understand how people might turn to common preservation to solve their problems. They also gave me a way to interpret my own practice – particularly my dalliance with abstract matters like parts and wholes and stasis and change -- as the construction of a heuristic for common preservation.

All these ideas, along with many others, went into the formation of my own way of thinking about social problems and social change. But as I have applied them they have mingled and interacted so much that they may be almost beyond recognition. Like old metamorphic rocks, they have been fragmented, mixed, squeezed, reconfigured, and displaced. In the process new features may have emerged from them that are not to be found in the original.

As I worked on research and action problems over the past few decades, I would often rummage through these ideas, trying them out in various circumstances and seeing if they would help identify significant problems or develop new solutions. I assimilated them as tools for my workshop and accommodated them to the needs of the jobs at hand. Out of them – as well as from my own observation and experience – a heuristic for common preservation gradually emerged.

I applied this emerging heuristic to understand social change in a variety of ways that are illustrated in the next three Parts of this book. Ideas like feedback loops and decentering were already present in nascent and tacit form in the interpretation of mass strikes I describe in Part 3. In Part 5 I show how I used such ideas as changing relations of wholes and parts, semi-permeable and changing boundaries, patterns, gaps, domination, disorder, and unintended consequences to understand the contemporary process of economic globalization. There I also show the use of such ideas as decentering, compensation, interstitial emergence, and the "ecological shift" to understand the new and often unexpected forms of common preservation that emerged in response to it.

I have also drawn on this emerging heuristic as I initiated or participated in a variety of "social experiments," as I describe in Part 6. For example, when I helped create a community-based labor history project in Connecticut's "Brass Valley," I envisioned it as adding a feedback loop that returned to the working class communities it described, and others like them, their own lost history so it would be available to help guide their future action. The ethnic music project we created there served in part as a means for promoting decentering and mutual assimilation and accommodation among the region's often antagonistic ethnic groups. Chapters on community coalitions, employee buyouts, cooperative companies, and an economic development agency explore possible ways of shifting power and reducing domination.

I also used this emerging heuristic for more far-ranging "thought experiments" about possible future action. For example, I used such concepts as multi-level open systems and countering domination and disorder to think about possible ways to restructure the American labor movement. In Part 7, I use many aspects of that emerging heuristic to

conduct an extended thought experiment on the problems and possibilities for developing a movement for human survival.

This heuristic continues to evolve and I hope it will continue to do so. My current version is presented in the "Interim report: A heuristic for common preservation" below – an "Interim report" because it is a work in progress. I hope that if others find it useful they will not only apply it to new problems but further modify it to make it better.

# PART 5: THINKING ABOUT CHANGE: GLOBALIZATION

## Introduction: Thinking about change: Globalization

In 1980, I was just finishing a collaborative project on the history of the workers in the Naugatuck Valley of western Connecticut. Once the thriving center of the American brass industry, the "Brass Valley" was becoming an "outpost of the rustbelt" before our very eyes. As I strove to understand the deindustrialization of the region, one of my collaborators insisted that we had to look at the global economy in order to find the explanation. I initially rejected the idea; we were doing a local history and the global economy would just distract from our real purpose. But I gradually realized that she was right. Local brass companies had become subsidiaries of international copper companies and then of global oil companies. Local brass producers couldn't compete against foreign ones. Workers were being told to accept lower wages or their work would be moved to foreign countries. I had accidentally stumbled onto the phenomenon that a decade later would come to be known as "globalization."

I soon began noticing impacts of globalization on social movements at home. Unions were accepting unprecedented concessions because their bargaining power was undermined by the ability and willingness of their employers to shut up shop and move to "offshore" locations abroad. On the other hand, I was hearing about new expressions of cross-border solidarity, for example new collaborations between workers in the US and Mexico.

I gradually realized that I had to understand what this new thing was. In doing so I used what I had learned about social change from my own experience and my study of workers movements. But I also used the ways of thinking about change I had absorbed from my more theoretical study.

Both globalization and the movement to counter it seemed like good candidates for applying such ways of thinking. Globalization was a process in which a system was being transformed by the actions of many different actors and by the interactions of those actions. I tried not to impose my emerging ways of thinking about change on the facts as a pre-established schema, however, but rather to use them as a heuristic to guide me to important questions, facts, and themes and to help organize what I found.

I eventually collaborated on two books about economic globalization. The first, *Global Village or Global Pillage*, written with Tim Costello, focused on economic globalization itself. The second, *Globalization from Below*, written with Tim and Brendan Smith, focused on the emergence of transnational social movements embodying what we called "globalization from below."

The emergence of a global social movement in response to globalization was hardly more than a hope (and a desperate need) when we finished *Global Village or Global Pillage* in

1994. Five years later, it was a burgeoning global revolt whose massive demonstrations famously brought the World Trade Organization meetings in Seattle to a grinding halt.

In Part 5, I use the approach I developed to economic globalization and the opposition to it as an example of applying my emerging heuristic for common preservation to a concrete situation. I use this example both because globalization presents a wide range of problems regarding system change and the development of social movements, and because I used that heuristic to guide the way I went about trying to understand globalization.[324]

My emerging heuristic called attention to such matters as patterns of action; individual and collective actors capable of pursuing goals by counteracting deviations from them; coordinations, differentiations, and dependencies among such actors; and unintended side and interaction effects. From the practice of history I retained the idea of a dialogue of theory and evidence in which accounts have to be tested by "historical logic" for their fit with the evidence and the standards of coherence.

Working from my emerging heuristic, I looked at globalization as a process arising within an out-of-balance global system. I looked for patterns that were produced and reproduced in repeated cycles, so that they appeared to be stable structures. I tried to discover how such structures had originated and how they were maintained. I looked for problems with those patterns that led parts or the system as a whole to have trouble reproducing themselves and reaching their goals. I traced variations in those patterns, made both by elites and by social movements, intended to compensate for such gaps, including new forms of coordination and changes in the differentiation and integration of part-whole relations. I looked for unanticipated side effects and interaction effects and their consequences. I saw globalization as transforming the global economy without ever bringing it to a new equilibrium.

This is a developmental approach. It starts from the things people are already doing, the problems they face, and how they might vary their action to achieve their goals. It is also a "cybernetic" approach in that it interprets action as a way to correct or compensate for or equilibrate an undesired situation. This approach provides a non-reductionist way to explain why people have acted as they have in the past. It does not provide a way for predicting the future. But it does provide a way to look at the future and clarify what variations on present action might be possible – and what their effects might be. It

[324] This requires a sort of "self-deconstruction" of the books to reveal the method of their construction. The role of these ideas is not explicit in the books themselves, because after I'm done using these heuristic tools I normally eliminate their obvious traces, as a carpenter kicks away the scaffolding after completing a building. If the work is well done, it doesn't need the scaffolding when it is completed. This meets the needs of someone of who wants to use the building, but not of someone who wants to learn how to build such a building. Part 5 shows how I use my emerging heuristic to construct understandings of concrete situations and what to do about them. Of course, like most mental work, a substantial part of the process is unconscious, so that even my own formulation of how it was done is itself a reconstruction, hopefully a "rational" one in the sense that it focuses on what can be generalized to other situations.

therefore provides a means for constructing solutions and evaluating strategies for realizing them.[325]

These books were written with the idea in mind that emerging social movements have to construct representations of their situation and conduct "thought experiments" regarding their ends and means. As we wrote in the Introduction to *Globalization from Below*, "No movement is born knowing what it thinks, what it wants, and how to achieve its goals. That takes a process, both of experimental action and of thought and discussion." Any movement "develops a self-understanding, whether a tacit set of assumptions expressed primarily in action, a formalized theory, or something in between."[326] We conceived these books not as scholarly observation from outside the movement but rather as a contribution to the movement's own developing understanding of its situation and prospects.

This approach -- echoing Rosa Luxemburg's idea of a movement developing and correcting its ideas as it emerges – embodied my understanding of people's "consciousness" as the product of their action and their shared reflections on it:

> Conventionally, basic values are the province of priests; policy the province of officials; and strategy the province of the top brass. But in a social movement, people must act on their own initiative and on the basis of their own convictions. So values, policy, and strategy cannot be handed down on a transmission belt from on high, but must be something that people make day by day in the process of determining their own actions.[327]

Part 5 tells how my emerging heuristic served as a tool for constructing an understanding of globalization and a strategy for addressing it. The first six chapters address the elite globalization we called "globalization from above." "Constructing wholes: The race to the bottom" shows how the idea of interaction within a system proved critical for understanding the dynamics of globalization. "The relativity of boundaries: globalization" shows how understanding globalization required a notion of semi-permeable and changing boundaries. "Constructing an account: patterns, gaps, actions, and effects" shows how I used my heuristic to organize a historical analysis of globalization. "Domination: The restructuring of global governance" presents an example of the creation of new forms of domination within a system. "Disorder: Unintended consequences" describes the creation of new forms of chaos within the global system. "Differentiation and integration: The restructuring of production and labor" uses my emerging heuristic to explore the reorganization of corporations and labor relations in the era of globalization.

The following two chapters show how my heuristic helped analyze the response of social movements to globalization. "Responding to change: A new labor internationalism" describes changes in the US labor movement in response to globalization. "De-centering:

[325] See "How to Solve It" in Part 4 above.
[326] *Globalization from Below*, p. xii.
[327] *Globalization from Below*, p. xi.

Globalization from below" describes the emergence of what is often referred to as the "anti-globalization movement."

The final two chapters show how I used my heuristic to help define desirable objectives, strategy, and organization for those movements. "The Lilliput strategy" shows how I used it to analyze the strategy for globalization from below. "Countering the problem: Constructing a program" shows how I used it to clarify what kinds of changes might actually solve some of the problems created by globalization.

One caveat: Part 5 is not an attempt to summarize the approach to economic globalization developed in *Global Village or Global Pillage* and *Globalization from Below*, let alone to address the broader challenges of the era of globalization. Rather, it is an effort to reveal the method by which their interpretations were constructed.

## Constructing wholes: The race to the bottom

My attempt to understand economic globalization dates to 1980. As my collaborators and I were interviewing, videoing, and writing about the history of brass workers in Connecticut's Naugatuck Valley, the brass industry was collapsing around us. Employers were threatening to shut down local plants and move the work elsewhere -- even to foreign countries -- unless workers gave radical concessions on wages and working conditions. The local press, the companies, and much of the public regarded the workers as pigheaded, greedy idiots because they refused to accept concessions to save their own jobs. Nonetheless workers repeatedly drew a line and went on strike.

The workers had a radically different perspective, indeed, a different paradigm, which was certainly not understood by and was perhaps incomprehensible to their critics. It was expressed by one rank and file worker we interviewed on the picket line. We asked him why workers decided to strike, even though it might cost them their jobs, rather than accept wage cuts to save their jobs. He replied, "If we accept these cuts here, and then other workers accept them other places, there will just be more and more cuts and where is labor going to end up at?"[328]

For me, this remark embodies what is characteristic of a holistic or systems approach. Critics of the strike viewed the local situation in isolation. Would local workers make concessions to save their jobs? But workers like this one saw the issue as part of a larger system and a larger process. If they allowed their conditions to be driven down, that would create pressures for others elsewhere to do the same. And that in turn would rebound to put pressure on them for further cuts. By making the sacrifice of resisting concessions -- by going on strike -- they were protecting other workers from this process. And if other workers did the same, that in turn would protect them. Local media, failing to understand that local workers were part of a larger system, were unable to anticipate the side effects and interaction effects to which competitive wage cutting would lead. And they did not grasp that workers were expressing a long-established and hard-won strategy of common preservation.

This insight, this "ecological shift" from a self-centered to a systems viewpoint, lies at the heart of the development of solidarity in labor and other social movements. The development of solidarity through a recognition of reciprocal and common interests that I had described in *Strike!* reflects an epistemological as well as a social transformation.

The striking brass workers saw the action of their employers as taking place within a larger system. They saw the side effects that their own concessions might have and that might interact with the actions of others, reverberate through the system, and rebound to hurt them. And they saw the potential for coordinating their action with others to provide positive rather than negative synergistic effects.

[328] *Brass Valley* movie. Check quote.

Brass workers clearly understood that the effort to force them into competitive wage cutting with workers elsewhere was not just a national but a global phenomenon. A Waterbury brass worker originally from Puerto Rico who worked for a company owned by the multinational oil corporation Arco told us,

> They're investing in Asia, Saudi Arabia; they just built a plant there for twenty million dollars. They've got people working there for a dollar-and-a-half an hour, doing the same work we're doing here. That's what we can call runaway shops. They just get out of Waterbury, leaving the people of Waterbury without hope, without work.[329]

The elements of these workers' approach – reconceiving local economies as part of a larger, indeed, global whole, noting the interactions revealed by such a reconceptualization, and seeking to coordinate efforts to affect those interactions -- became guiding ideas as I began to grapple with what would soon come to be known as "globalization." The interactive downward spiral described on that Waterbury picket line I learned to refer to as the "race to the bottom." I used it as an instrument to explore the inner dynamics of globalization.

[329] *Brass Valley*, p. 230.

## The relativity of boundaries: globalization

My father was an old New Dealer and a Keynesian. He stressed to me that trade and the international economy were relatively unimportant to the U.S. As I began to inquire for myself in the 1960s, the small proportion of the US economy then formed by trade persuaded me he was right.

As I studied the history of the brass industry in the Naugatuck Valley of western Connecticut for the Brass Workers History Project, I found this view confirmed. In colonial times, the US brass market was dominated by Britain, but by the mid-19th century the Valley's brass companies had driven British competition out of the American market. As far as I could see, since then the Naugatuck Valley brass industry had been primarily part of a national, not an international, economy. There were exceptions, of course: exports had soared in wartime; the closely related local clock industry was a large exporter; and the copper companies that owned much of the brass industry owned mines in Chile and Mexico. But in general the boundaries of the US brass industry and market corresponded to the boundaries of the nation.

When, as we approached the completion of the Brass Workers History Project in the early 1980s, one of my collaborators, Jan Stackhouse, said, "We have to deal with the international economy and its impact on the brass industry," I was highly resistant. "We're doing a local project about the people who live here, their lives and their experiences," I told her. "Besides, the US is pretty much a self-contained national economy; the international aspect just isn't that relevant."

I felt passionately that our project should focus on the often-neglected local working class community. I wanted community members to be able to tell their own stories and to weave those stories together to give a portrait of the changing experience of ordinary working people. I wanted to avoid imposing an external theoretical or ideological view on their experience – to avoid reducing it to something else.

But even while we were documenting its workers' history, the Naugatuck Valley brass industry was collapsing. When I tried to understand why, I was forced to acknowledge Jan's point. Many of the causes seemed to lie outside US national boundaries. The resurgent economies of Europe and Japan were taking over much of the American brass market. They had invested heavily in modern equipment while the owners of the old Naugatuck Valley mills had milked their profits and failed to modernize them. Foreign labor costs were far lower – in part because Europe and Japan followed social policies that gave workers a stake in their national economies' growth. High energy costs were another big part of local companies' competitive disadvantage – a result in part of the global oil crisis centered in the Middle East.

Meanwhile, US copper corporations, which had owned many of the Valley's brass mills since the 1920s, had been acquired by global oil giants. A look at the oil corporations' annual reports showed that they treated the world as a single field for investment and that

they regarded their Naugatuck Valley brass mills as little more than specks on their balance sheets. The result was to put Naugatuck Valley brass workers directly in competition with foreign workers; they were being told to accept lower wages or their plants would be shut down and their jobs would be moved to foreign countries along with the capital their labor had generated.

It turned out that what I had thought of as a quite strongly bounded national economy was being transformed. Of course national boundaries didn't disappear, but they were becoming far more permeable to economic and other forces. Institutions, such as corporations, that had once largely coincided with national boundaries, increasingly cut across them.

The word "globalization" had not, so far as I knew, ever been uttered. But we were witnessing the early stages of the globalization process.

National economies had been relatively isolated systems. They were strongly bounded. They were intensively integrated internally. Internal actors were much less integrated with the world beyond the national border. Globalization meant that the differentiation between nations decreased and the integration of their economic processes increased. European labor policies and Middle Eastern oil politics and Arco's global investment options came to have far more impact on whether or not workers had jobs in Waterbury. Within a decade production would be so integrated across national borders that it came to be referred to as the "global assembly line."[330]

Grasping this emerging reality required that I go through an "ecological shift" myself. It meant seeing the global economy as a developing system that was less and less a collection of separate national economies that just traded with each other. As I struggled to understand this process, the abstract ideas I had absorbed from systems theory and Piaget provided me with important heuristic tools. I used the idea of systems with relative and changing boundaries to interpret the transformation of relatively isolated national economies into a globalized economic system. In *Global Village or Global Pillage,* Tim and I used the idea of changing relations of wholes and parts, manifested in changing forms of differentiation and coordination, to understand how globalization was changing the lives of people who lived in the same – but also a radically altered – geography.

As the globalization process was increasingly recognized, some interpreters began to argue it meant the end of the nation state and the rise of a "borderless world." Their critics belittled the significance of globalization, pointing out that nation states were obviously still present and that some of them – notably the United States – were more powerful than ever. A systems framework that assumed the relativity of boundaries and the possibility of changing part-whole relations within a system facilitated a more nuanced approach. For such an approach there could be simultaneously an emerging

[330] I believe the first time I ever saw the phrase "global assembly line" was in Barbara Ehrenreich and Annette Fuentes, "Life on the Global Assembly Line," *Ms*, January, 1981.

global economic integration via capital mobility and the persistence of the nation state system – although the process of change might be riven with conflict and might end in catastrophe.

*Global Village or Global Pillage* argued that the failure to recognize the transformation of boundaries being wrought by globalization led to colossal confusion in debates on public policy. Although by the early 1990s globalization had become a buzzword, public discussion generally continued as if the US were still a predominantly national economy. The issues raised by globalization were defined as issues of "trade," meaning the export and import of goods and services between countries. The debate was defined as the classic conflict between "free trade" and "protectionism."[331] It often remains so, left, right, and center, even today.

On the ground, globalization transformed the reality to which such concepts were supposed to refer. As corporations become global, goods and services are increasingly produced in "global networks" of large corporations and their dependent suppliers. The "American" or "Japanese" cars and computers that "U.S." or "Japanese" companies "trade" are actually produced in dozens of countries by corporate networks that include companies in both the countries that are supposedly 'trading' with each other. If a 'US' company owned by investors all over the world contracts with producers in Japan, Indonesia, Columbia, and China to make and assemble an athletic shoe, which it then sells in 100 countries, who is trading with whom? It became illusory to portray national economies as separate units that produce goods and services and then trade them with each other.[332]

The main issues raised by globalization could not even be considered within such a "trade" framework. Increased trade was indeed one aspect of globalization, but no more so than investment, transnational governance, democracy and self-government, labor and human rights, regulation, environmental protection, and international finance. In all these areas, processes that had once been focused within the boundaries of nation states increasingly cut across them.

When we wrote about these changes in *Global Village or Global Pillage*, the end result appeared simply as a narrative of what was happening around us and why. But the ideas about how systems and their boundaries change that I had assimilated from Bertalanffy, Mann, and others furnished heuristic tools that I found invaluable for interpreting the emergence of globalization.

[331] *Global Village or Global Pillage*, p. 67ff.
[332] *Global Village or Global Pillage*, 68-9.

## Constructing an account: patterns, gaps, actions, and effects

Factory shutdown was only one of many, apparently unrelated, expressions of globalization that gradually became manifest over the course of the 1980s. The rise of the "Eurodollar market," the "recycling of petrodollars," the growth of "off-shore export platforms," the imposition of "structural adjustment," and the propagation of "monetarism" and "supply-side economics" often appeared to be separate and unrelated phenomena. These seemingly peripheral developments gradually interacted in ways that changed virtually every aspect of life and defined globalization as a new global configuration.

As I observed the effects of these changes on the Naugatuck Valley and on the American labor movement, I felt I had to take up my collaborator's challenge – to understand the changes that were occurring in the global economy and their impact on the people and movements with which I was concerned. I used my emerging heuristic to organize my understanding of the history of globalization. More specifically, I used Piaget's idea of equilibration as the movement from an established pattern or structure through disequilibrium to a new structure with its own elements of disequilibrium to compose an account of globalization.

The first step was to review the previously existing patterns, how they evolved, and how they were reproduced. In this case the relevant pre-established patterns were national economies and national governments. The second step was to identify conflicts and contradictions – gaps that made it difficult for actors and/or the system as a whole to reproduce themselves and reach their goals. The third step was to examine their efforts to respond. The fourth step was to review the effects of their actions – including unintended side effects and interaction effects. These effects defined the new stage of the system. Then the process could be repeated, reviewing the gaps within the new stage, the efforts taken to address them, the consequences of those efforts, and the new state of the system and the new disequilibriums that resulted.

*The pre-globalization economy*. The decades following World War II were often referred to as the "golden age" of modern capitalism. With much of the world's industrial infrastructure destroyed by war, the US dominated the markets of the world. Countries followed "Keynesian" policies that used government spending to ward off the recessions that had plagued capitalism from its inception. Internationally, the "Breton Woods system" helped countries adjust to exchange rate problems without the ruinous deflation and "beggar-your-neighbor" policies that had generated a downward spiral in the Great Depression of the 1930s.

*The crisis of the pre-globalization economy*. The post-war system experienced an unprecedented period of sustained economic growth from World War II through the

1960s. But in the early 1970s capitalism entered a worldwide crisis. Global economic growth fell to 2.5 percent, half its former rate. Profit rates in the seven richest industrialized countries fell from 17 percent in 1965 to 11 percent in 1980.[333] In 1973, an economically troubled US renounced the Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates.

Economists are still debating the causes of this crisis. In part it can be understood as simply one more example of the periodic downward spirals that have marked capitalism from its inception. The return of periodic crises reflected the exhaustion of the Keynesian fix for the traditional problems of capitalism: Government spending reached the point where it was perceived as a threat rather than a support to the profitability of the private economy. The crisis also reflected major changes among national economies as war-devastated Europe and Japan revived, over a hundred former European colonies became politically independent nations, international competition intensified, and the US lost its dominant position in world markets.

*Correcting the gap*: Different actors promoted a variety of responses to this crisis. Third world countries initiated a "North-South Dialogue" to forge a "New International Economic Order" that would encourage constructive economic development through a reform of international trade patterns. The International Monetary Fund created "Special Drawing Rights" -- "paper gold" -- to provide a new form of international liquidity. US President Richard Nixon, a conservative Republican, declared himself a Keynesian and cut the link between gold and the US dollar. Representatives of internationalized capital, notably the Trilateral Commission, advocated expanded international economic integration – what became known as globalization. In the last two decades of the 20th century this was the solution that won out.

Globalization first became apparent less in the realm of policy than of corporate direct action. Corporations experienced the crisis as an intensification of international competition and a fall in their profits. They began experimenting with strategies to increase their profits by reducing their labor and other costs. These strategies included building and buying their products in low-wage third world countries; transforming their own structures to operate in a highly competitive global economy; and challenging government policies that increased their costs. Only gradually did they develop a new system of global governance to support their other strategies.

At the core of the new strategy was capital mobility – the ability to move work and wealth around the world. Corporations increasingly came to view the entire world as a single market in which they bought and sold goods, services, and labor. The growth of off-shore production created the basis for a "global assembly line" in which the components of a shirt or car might be made and assembled in a dozen or more different countries.

[333] Bennett Harrison, *Lean and Mean* (New York: Basic Books, 1994) pp. 125-126.

When *Global Village or Global Pillage* first appeared in 1994, we reported the amazing fact that the foreign exchange market processed $1 trillion per day; four years later the second edition reported the figure had grown to $1.5 trillion.[334]

Globalization has often been portrayed either as a natural and inevitable process or as a specific political project. My emerging heuristic provided an alternative to this unsatisfactory either/or. Globalization was the result of deliberate human action, but action taken in response to a crisis with limited insight into what would actually result. Globalization was not the result of a plot or even a plan. It was the result both of deliberate efforts by various actors to solve their problems and of unintended and unanticipated side effects and interaction effects. It was partially created by the coordinated global action of businesses and their representatives, for example in promoting the policy agenda of the Trilateral Commission.[335] But it also resulted from the uncoordinated responses of corporations and investors to uncontrolled market forces.

*Contradictions in globalization*: Globalization produced a global economic system in the strict sense of a system: No element of the global economy can now be understood independently of its interaction with the other elements and the global economy as a whole. But that system is far from a stable and balanced whole. Globalization has instead produced a system that is full of contradictions.

Globalization promotes a destructive competition in which workers, communities, and entire countries are forced to cut labor, social, and environmental costs to attract mobile capital. When many countries each do so, the result is a disastrous "race to the bottom" in which all seem to get ahead, but in fact all lose.

The race to the bottom has brought impoverishment, growing inequality, economic volatility, degradation of democracy, and destruction of the environment.[336] It globalized, rather than solving, the traditional problems of unregulated market economies.

These problems generated a crisis in globalization. As we wrote in *Globalization from Below*, the new regime

> violates the interests of the great majority of the world's people. It lacks political legitimacy. It is riven with divisions and conflicting interests. It has the normal crisis-prone character of capitalist systems but few of the compensatory non-market institutions that helped stabilize pre-globalization economies. And it has few means to control its own tendency to destroy the natural environment on which it – and its species – depend.[337]

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[334] *Global Village or Global Pillage*, second edition, p. xvii.
[335] David C. Ranney, *The Evolving Supra-National Policy Arena* (Chicago: University of Illinois at Chicago, Center for Urban Economic Development, 1993).
[336] Details are spelled out in *Globalization from Below*, pp 6-9.
[337] *Globalization from Below*, p. 9-10.

*Backlash*: One of the unintended consequences of globalization has been a vast and diverse worldwide backlash against it. This has taken a variety of forms, ranging from "IMF riots" and other expressons of mass violence to nation-wide general strikes against neo-liberal economic policies and from Seattle-style confrontations with international economic organizations to globally-coordinated policy initiatives like the campaign for AIDS drugs for poor countries. Many of these strands began coordinating with each other in a "globalization from below" that has attempted to provide alternative solutions to the world's economic problems.

*Beyond globalization*: *Globalization from Below* predicted that globalization in its present form was unsustainable, but that what will come after it is far from determined.

> It could be a war of all against all, world domination by a single superpower, a tyrannical alliance of global elites, global ecological catastrophe, or some combination thereof. Human agency – what people choose to do – can play a role in deciding between these futures and more hopeful ones.[338]

This story as a whole represents the pattern-action-gap-feedback-revised pattern-new action-new gap cycle of my emerging heuristic.

This approach provides an alternative to two others that often characterize discussion of globalization. One is that globalization either does not exist or is nothing new, but rather is just a continuation of the same established processes of imperialism and capitalism. The other is that globalization changed everything, replacing the nation state system with a new system that makes national borders irrelevant.

My emerging heuristic recognized that, as Piaget maintained, transformation and preservation go hand in hand. Globalization indeed reflected the effort of corporations and their representatives and controllers to preserve and expand their power and profitability. But in their attempt to do so they transformed the entire global economy and its relation to the nation state system, creating a new set of problems and possibilities for themselves and for the world's people.

This approach also provides an alternative to the conventional view of globalization as part of the story of inevitable capitalist progress and the Marxist view of globalization as a step on the way to the inevitable collapse of capitalism and the transition to socialism. Unlike deterministic Marxism, this approach doesn't claim to know what the ultimate telos for any social process will be. It does not situate historical development in a pre-established theory or myth of the transition from capitalism to socialism. But unlike theories that deify the existing organization of society, it does not assume that the status quo is the telos of social development and that homeostasis or perfection of the present

[338] *Globalization from Below*, p. xiv.

structure is the goal of human history. It does not claim to know "the end of history," but it does not assume that the present embodies it. It portrays a system in crisis with multiple possible outcomes, shapeable at least in part by human choice.

## Domination: The restructuring of global governance

While globalization was proceeding through a myriad decentralized initiatives, a deliberate effort to support globalization through public policy was also emerging. Actors like the Trilateral Commission promoted a global agenda, now widely referred to as neoliberalism, whose goal was to ease the way for the mobility of capital. This agenda was developed over time through give-and-take among major global economic actors. Eventually its implementation became an explicit common objective of pro-globalization players all over the world.

This agenda was implemented in a variety of ways. In the case of trade, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), an institution that was little more than a framework for negotiating trade deals, was replaced by the World Trade Organization, which was based on rules binding on nations, authoritative decision-making procedures, and a bureaucracy empowered to enforce its decisions. A new regional structure, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was negotiated for the US, Mexico, and Canada.

In the case of the World Bank and IMF, existing institutions changed their policies and transformed their missions to pursue new purposes. The IMF abandoned its role in supporting the ability of countries to follow Keynesian policies at a national level. Instead it tried to force countries to drop national control of currencies and open themselves to globalization. Both the IMF and the World Bank took advantage of the indebtedness of poor countries to assert far greater control over their economies, demanding that they accept radical "structural adjustment" policies of privatization, deregulation, and austerity.

The power of the IMF and World Bank was based on the dependence of poor countries on a steady supply of new loans to keep their economies afloat. This dependence was intensified by the decision of major lenders to base further lending on the acceptance of IMF "conditionalities." Dependence was parlayed into domination.

The growing power of the WTO, NAFTA, IMF, World Bank, and similar international economic institutions provoked debate over the nature of the changes that were occurring. Some portrayed them -- with either satisfaction or alarm -- as the development of a world government that was superseding national sovereignty. Others argued that the nation state was unchanged as the core political institution of the modern world.

My emerging heuristic allowed a more nuanced view. Rather than eliminate national governments, this new system of global economic governance adds another institutional layer – one that at times conflicts with national governments and at times has to bow to them. It lacks the police and military organizations for dominion at home and war abroad that have characterized states from their origin. But its ability to impose its rules on its subordinate parts proved effective – at least for a time.

This new system of global governance was formally authorized by the world's governments, but it is not based in any meaningful way on the consent of the governed. It has no effective institutional mechanism to hold it accountable to those its decisions affect. As one unnamed WTO official quoted by the *Financial Times* put it, "The WTO is the place where governments collude in private against their domestic pressure groups."[339] Indeed, it is an exquisite example of "extended authority," in which authority ostensibly granted for one purpose is applied to another one – in this case, not so much to benefit the holders of governmental authority as the global corporations and investors whose interests they largely reflect. It should not have been surprising that this emerging system of undemocratic power would call forth global opposition.

[339] Susan George, "Network Guerillas," *Financial Times*, April 30, 1998.

## Disorder: Unintended consequences

While the new structure of global governance embodied in the WTO, IMF, World Bank, NAFTA, and their kin was a deliberate construction, globalization also involved uncoordinated initiatives among thousands of actors that resulted in unanticipated and often catastrophic side effects and interaction effects.

One obvious example is global financial destabilization. Neoliberal financial deregulation reduced barriers to the international flow of capital. Before the turn of the millennium, $1.5 trillion was flowing across international borders daily in the foreign currency market alone.

These huge flows easily swamped national economies. In 1998, for example, an apparently local crisis in Thailand ricocheted around the globe. In the following two years, Malaysia's economy had shrunk by 25 percent, South Korea's by 45 percent, and Thailand's by 50 percent. Indonesia's economy had shrunk by 80 percent; its per capita gross domestic product dropped from $3,500 to less than $750. As former World Bank chief economist Joseph Stiglitz commented, "Capital market liberalization has not only not brought people the prosperity they were promised, but it has also brought these crises, with wages falling 20 or 30 percent, and unemployment going up by a factor of two, three, four or ten."[340]

Another example of unintended and uncontrolled global interaction is the "race to the bottom" in which different workforces and countries compete to attract capital by providing subsidies and accepting lower wages, social standards, and environmental conditions. Each participant in the race to the bottom intends to improve their own situation by attracting international capital. But the combined result is simply to drive down the conditions of all.

The race to the bottom has had numerous unanticipated side effects in turn. Whole industrial zones in the United States were turned into "rust belts" as a result of jobs moving to countries like Mexico and Taiwan. Then the maquiladora zone on the US-Mexico border to which so many of them moved was decimated by the migration of jobs to China. In 2001 alone, 100 maquiladoras shut down and 200,000 maquila workers lost their jobs.[341] And Taiwan had the steepest drop in GDP in a half century as "tumbling electronics exports slashed companies' profits and accelerated their flight to China, where costs are lower."[342] As labor costs rose in China, jobs there began running away to Vietnam, Cambodia, and Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, the cumulative effect of producing more and more products with cheaper and cheaper labor has been to create global oversupply and a global lack of effective demand.

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[340] Joseph Stiglitz, "Worker Rights Key to Development, *Reuters*, January 8, 2000.
[341] Ginger Thompson, "Fallout of U. S. Recession Drifts South Into Mexico," *New York Times*, December 26, 2001.
[342] Bloomberg News, "Taiwan: Economy Slumps," *New York Times*, February 23, 2002.

This was a, if not the, primary cause of the global recession and deflationary crisis of the early 21st century. In response, the United States and some other countries began turning to economic nationalist policies designed to increase exports and reduce imports through currency and trade policies – the classic "beggar your neighbor" policies that exacerbated the Great Depression of the 1930s. The result is a global downward spiral in which each country tries to displace the effects of recession onto the others. This was one cause of the "Great Recession" that began in 2007.

Another unintended effect of globalization has been both local and global environmental degradation. Countries are forced to compete for investment by lowering environmental protections in an ecological race to the bottom. Countries rewrote their mining codes to encourage investment. Corporations promoted untested technologies, such as pesticides and genetic engineering, in poor countries that lack the democratic controls and environmental protections that might limit them in more developed countries. Desperate poverty lead to desperate overharvesting of natural resources. The cumulative effect of uncontrolled economic development accelerated the release of carbon dioxide leading to global warming.

These results are all consequences of intentional human action. But they are not the result of actions coordinated with the intent of producing such results. Rather, these results are the unplanned, unintended, unanticipated side effects and interaction effects of actions undertaken for other purposes.

## Differentiation and integration: The restructuring of production and labor

As corporations sought to counteract declining profits through capital mobility, they restructured themselves to operate in the new global economy. Their restructuring became another aspect of the globalization process.

In the era of national economies, most US industries were dominated by a handful of large corporations. These firms pursued a strategy of "vertical" and "horizontal" integration. Through vertical integration they sought to control all phases of production from raw material through final product; as one copper company put it, "from the mine to the consumer." Through horizontal integration they sought to fill every product niche in the industry market. The large corporation was the very model of what economists called a "hierarchical organization," with decision-making organized from the top, a clear chain of command, and an effort to organize the whole as an integrated system of production and distribution.[343]

As corporations oriented less toward the national and more toward the global economy, they began to restructure. Corporations abandoned the quest for vertical and horizontal integration and pursued only those endeavors that they hoped would "maximize stockholder value" in the short run. They replaced the classical organizational hierarchy with what came to be known as a core-ring structure. They "downsized" and concentrated on their core functions and capacities. All other functions were "outsourced" to a surrounding ring of suppliers dispersed around the globe. These suppliers were often captives of or at least dependent on the core corporation, making them formally outside the boundaries of the firm but very much part of the larger system it dominated. Supplier companies in turn became part of transnational supplier chains, with their own differentiation and integration.

Corporations increasingly formed "strategic alliances" with other corporations, thus making even more ambiguous the boundaries of the firm; they still competed with each other, but they also cooperated. As globalization proceeded, international mergers became more and more common. The cumulative result of these changes was what economist Bennett Harrison called "networked production."[344]

The character of these changes was widely debated. Some economists proclaimed the death of the large corporation and the resurgence of small business to a dominant position in the global economy. Others saw only an increase in global concentration.

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[343] The classic analysis of this corporate structure is Alfred Chandler, *The Visible Hand* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Belknap, 1977).

[344] Bennett Harrison, *Lean and Mean*, is the classic analysis of the transformation from vertical and horizontal integration to the core/ring structure of networked production.

From the perspective of my emerging heuristic, the result was not so paradoxical. If firms are viewed as potentially part of larger systems, and the boundaries of each firm are presumed to be semi-permeable and subject to change, systems of "networked production" can produce both a transfer of production to smaller firms and their increased dependence on core corporations. As Bennett Harrison aptly put it, the "decentralization of production" was combined with the "concentration of control."[345] The capitalist economy remains a system of differentiation and integration, but one based on the "dis-integration" of the classical corporation into the pattern of networked production.

These changes transformed the organization of the labor process. Large integrated corporations had large workforces organized as "internal labor markets" in which workers could expect long-term employment. As corporations downsized, they divided their workforces into a small core who remained internal to the firm and a large group who were either laid off or redefined as external to the firm, hired on a contingent basis or through subcontractors. What had been in part a hierarchical relationship became increasingly a market relationship. This represented a "re-commodification of labor" in which workers increasingly lost all rights except the right to sell their labor power and corporations lost all responsibilities to their workers. To support this development, employers tried to eliminate public policies that mandated job security, work rules, worker representation, healthcare, pensions, and other obligations that required them to treat labor as something more and other than a commodity.

Globalization was thus producing at least two major changes in class relations. It was transforming the division of labor from a primarily national to a global system. And it was changing the relation of labor to the firm from one involving long-term mutual commitments to one based on short-term market contingencies.[346]

Neither the classic integrated corporation and internal labor market nor the subsequent dis-integrated corporation and the re-commodification of labor can be explained by the general characteristics of capitalism alone. Each of course reflected a desire to increase profits, but that led to very different results due to the strategies adopted by people pursuing their interests in specific historical conditions.

[345] Harrison, *Lean and Mean*, p. 9, 171.
[346] The is an illustration of the way that my heuristic incorporates, rather than disregarding, concepts of class relations expressed in the traditions of the radical workers movement.

## Responding to change: A new labor internationalism

Globalization created new problems for American labor. Strategies that had evolved to provide institutional stability for unions and a rising standard of living for workers grew less and less effective in the face of corporations willing and able to close operations and move them abroad if their demands were not met. The response of organized labor illustrates how, under changing conditions, feedback plus reflection may lead to change in strategies and even in goals.

From World War II until the 1960s, most of organized labor was closely allied with the international political and economic policies of the US government. The AFL-CIO supported and aided Cold War efforts to combat Communism around the globe. And it was a strong supporter of economic liberalization. "Foreign competition" seemed little threat to American workers because American industries dominated the markets of a war-devastated world. American military and ideological supremacy allowed American corporations to sell products abroad that could be produced only in war-spared America. Military expansion "primed the pump" at home while it secured the global "free market" for American products – to the apparent benefit of those who produced them.

Starting in the 1970s, as international competition undermined US economic hegemony, many unions switched from free trade to protectionism. Faced with massive loss of jobs in auto, steel, garment, and other industries, the labor movement increasingly campaigned for tariffs and other barriers to imports designed to "save American jobs." Decisions by American corporations to relocate production abroad were often characterized as "foreign workers stealing American jobs." Toyota-bashing became a Labor Day attraction and the employees of "foreign competitors" became objects of hate campaigns.

Yet Toyota-bashing proved ineffective as a strategy for saving American jobs and preserving decent wages in a world of global corporations. Globalization made economic nationalist strategies less and less credible. Hence pressures increased at every level of the labor movement to develop an alternative.

Organized labor increasingly moved toward demanding reform of the global economy as a whole, symbolized by demands for labor rights and environmental standards in international trade agreements to protect all the world's workers and communities from the race to the bottom. Its official objective became an "upward harmonization" of global standards that would take labor and the environment out of competition. Organized labor's participation in the 1999 Seattle WTO protests opened a new page in US labor history.

This change required an "ecological shift" in the way the situation of workers in the global economy was conceived. Globalization had to be seen not just as a question of competition between US workers and workers in some other country, but rather an overall change in the differentiation and integration of labor worldwide.

A shift to what was implicitly a systems perspective helped open a way to address problems that had seemed insolvable. If workers defined their problem as beating foreign competition, the solution would be to accept lower wages. But then foreign workers would accept still lower wages, leading to a vicious circle of destructive interaction. Recognizing the systemic character of the problem made it possible to break out of such self-reinforcing and self-defeating loops. In this case, the recognition of common interests among workers in countering the race to the bottom became the basis for new forms of international solidarity.

In order to resist the race to the bottom, at least parts of the US labor movement gradually developed new objectives and new alliances. Ford workers in St. Paul visited Ford plants in Mexico and became involved in supporting Ford workers there. Unions in Massachusetts fought the suppression of labor rights in Burma by supporting a statewide boycott of Burmese products and investments. Trade unionists formed alliances with environmentalists and added demands for global environmental sustainability to their demands for international labor rights.

The international positions of US unions remain varied and at times contradictory. The recessions of the early 21st century, marked by huge losses of industrial jobs and expanded "off-shoring" of high tech and other white collar jobs, revived the labor movement's economic nationalism. But that only further illustrates the way in which organized labor's approach to the global economy is not something fixed, but rather something shaped by a combination of experience and reflection on it.

## De-centering: globalization from below

How do patterns of coordination change? I had plenty of opportunity to ponder this question as I watched social movements and popular organizations that had been born and bred in the era of national economies confront the realities of globalization. Because I wanted to understand and participate in that process, I had to clarify, test, and correct my developing views about the process of change.

By the late 1970s I saw plants closing and unions decimated in my home state of Connecticut and throughout much of the US. Globalization was adversely affecting millions of people around the world. The new powers of the IMF and the World Bank were already undermining the well-being and self-government of many third world countries. New trade agreements like NAFTA and the WTO, then on the drawing boards, threatened to further paralyze democratic self-government. Meanwhile, the unintended effects of globalization, like financial instability and the race to the bottom, were also having devastating effects on people and the environment.

It was hard to see what might counter globalization. There were, it is true, numerous revolts against these early expressions of globalization, such as the "IMF riots" that broke out in many countries to protest the austerity imposed by structural adjustment policies. But such activities were almost entirely uncoordinated with each other. Their participants had little sense that they might share interests or concerns with others who were in other countries or focused on other issues. Workers were being played off against each other around the world. I wondered if there was any way workers in different countries could get together to forestall the race to the bottom.

It was often said that capital was becoming global but labor was inherently national. I knew that the labor and socialist movements had once articulated an internationalist anti-war rhetoric, but that in World War I they had nearly all ended up supporting their own national governments against their national enemies, even though it meant killing "fellow workers." I had read AFL president Samuel Gompers' observation that "One of the most wholesome lessons that the war taught labor" was that "the ties that bind workingmen to the national government are stronger and more intimate than those international ties that unite workingmen of all countries."[347] Much of the US labor movement accepted the common belief that "internationalism" was the opposite of "Americanism." And labor movements all over the world seemed to be closely tied to their national governments and economies.

The kinds of internationalism I was most familiar with had never been too attractive to me, and they seemed largely irrelevant to this situation. Whatever the loyalties of individual Communists, the official internationalism of the Third International seemed little more than a cover for the domination of parties and unions by the Soviet Union and

[347] Samuel Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor* (New York: E.P Dutton, 1957) p. 280.

those serving as its agents.[348] The internationalism of the AFL-CIO was an anti-Communist mirror image, complete with subservience to US foreign policy and its own vehicle for the subversion of foreign labor movements through its government-funded International Affairs Department.[349] The official organizations of labor internationalism – the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and the World Federation of Trade Unions – seemed little more than a pair of bookends upholding the two sides of the Cold War. Starting with the Vietnam War, many opponents of US foreign policy had cultivated an internationalism that consisted in little more than supporting whatever foreign regimes the US was attacking, from Ho Chi Minh to Saddam Hussein.

Tim Costello and I began scanning the horizon for anything that might hint at where a new form of cooperation among workers in different countries might come from. The first breakthrough we learned about was in 1988, when 1,200 workers struck a factory in Juarez, Mexico, owned by a U.S. subsidiary of a Swedish corporation. The workers were gassed, clubbed, arrested, fired, and blacklisted. Unexpectedly, an "expeditionary force" of teamsters, steelworkers, communications, and sheetmetal workers from El Paso crossed the Mexican border on the Fourth of July, bringing several thousand pounds of food as a gesture of support for the strikers. The organizer of the Juarez action was the president of the AFL-CIO in El Paso, a city that had lost 14,000 jobs to Mexico since 1980. He said, "A lot of people [in the U.S.] say that Mexican workers are the enemy. But we can't blame [the loss of U.S. jobs] on the workers. We have to blame it on the corporations."[350]

I made a few research phone calls around the country and turned up a few other diminutive straws in the wind. Paul Garver, the head of a Chicago local of the Service Employees union, filled me in on one of them. Labor movement opponents of Reagan administration policies in Central America had developed direct ties with a militant labor federation in El Salvador that was not aligned with either side in labor's global cold war. When top union officials demanded that SEIU locals obey the AFL-CIO policy of "shunning" all but the most definitively anti-Communist unions, the activists mobilized at the SEIU convention and forced a resolution condemning US policy and renouncing the "shunning" doctrine. By the end of the convention a top SEIU official was sporting the activists' button reading "Labor Solidarity Has No Borders."[351]

Joe Uehlein of the AFL-CIO's Industrial Union Department told me how some International Trade Secretariats (the organizations linking unions in the same industries around the world, now known as global union federations) had begun actively organizing

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[348] The subservience of the US Communist Party is documented in Theodore Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia* (New York: Viking Press, 1960) and has been confirmed by subsequent scholarship.

[349] See Beth Sims, *Workers of the World Undermined: American Labor's Role in U.S Foreign Policy* (Boston: South End Press, 1992). Ironically enough, the International Affairs Department was long dominated by former Communist internationalists like Jay Lovestone.

[350] Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello, "Labor Internationalism," *Z,* November, 1988.

[351] "Labor Internationalism." The National Labor Committee on El Salvador, which led labor criticism of US policy in Central America, eventually evolved into the National Labor Committee, a pioneer of the campaign against international sweatshops.

strike support among unions in different countries. One of them set up an international computer network to link members in different countries – a technology then so new that our article had to explain to our readers what a computer network was. An Amsterdam-based group called Transnationals Information Exchange organized international conferences for rank-and-file workers; one brought together 30 auto workers from Mexico, Spain, Brazil, Belgium, Britain, Germany, Japan, South Africa, and the US. A coalition of labor and human rights groups had successfully lobbied for a clause in the US Trade Act protecting international labor rights.

I searched libraries and bookstores for research, historical or contemporary, on labor internationalism. I found slim pickings until I saw a brief announcement of a book published in the Netherlands called *The Old Internationalism and the New: A Reader on Labour, New Social Movements and Internationalism*[352] edited by Peter Waterman. Peter, whom I later got to know, had been a Communist and actually worked for the Third International itself, but he had developed a cutting critique of Communism and all other top-down forms of organization.

Peter's essays on internationalism made two related points that set me on a very different track for thinking about responses to globalization. First, he pointed out that most of the recent international campaigns addressing labor issues were not conducted primarily by labor organizations, but rather by coalitions that might include unions but were likely to have other social movements and civil society groups at their core. He described the campaign to support workers at the Coca Cola bottling plant in Guatemala City, many of whose leaders had been murdered or disappeared. Church groups had begun an international support campaign. They were joined by Amnesty International, the food workers international trade secretariat, and Coke workers in Mexico, Sweden, Britain, and elsewhere. After nine years of strikes, occupations, and international campaigns, Coke was forced to make substantial concessions to its Guatemalan workers. Second, Peter argued that such a new internationalism was less likely to be organized by the official institutions of labor internationalism than by international communications networks that he saw emerging among a wide variety of social movements all over the world.

Tim and I took these ideas very much to heart. In our first article on the emerging labor internationalism, we wrote:

> The new labor internationalism is marked by close ties with religious, human rights, women's, development, and other movements, often drawing on their far more extensive international networks.[353]
>
> Whatever the future of labor internationalism, it is unlikely to look like the First, Second, or Third Internationals, in which large national labor movements came together in a centralized world organization designed to confront world

[352] Peter Waterman, ed., *The Old Internationalism and the New* (The Hague: International Labour Education, Research and Information Foundation, 1988).
[353] "Labor Internationalism," p. 103.

> capitalism. It is far more likely to look like a developing network of transnational links among groups from many kinds of movements and along many axes.[354]

This change of perspective opened my eyes to a series of responses to globalization that did not define themselves as labor internationalism. For example, in 1986 a group of environment and development NGOs formed a People's Network for Eco Development and began holding protest gatherings at the annual joint meetings of the IMF and World bank to coordinate North/South resistance to World Bank/IMF policies. By the1990 meetings, delegations from more than 50 countries were participating. Meanwhile, large, complex international campaigns against the destruction of the Amazon rain forest and India's Narmada Dam were developing. In 1992, 900 NGOs from 37 countries threatened to initiate a campaign to cut off World Bank funding unless it halted its support for the Narmada Dam. Apparently they had found the way to the Bank's heart: The next year it cancelled its loan for the project.

In 1986, international trade negotiators began the "Uruguay Round" to establish what eventually became the World Trade Organization. I heard that there was an organizer named Mark Ritchie who was trying to develop a campaign around it. Mark had helped organize family farmers during the farm crisis of the 1970s and had also worked on the Nestle boycott. I got in touch with him and learned that a network of advocates for small farmers around the world had been holding counter-meetings at the trade negotiations.

Mark told me, "We learned to reverse the old slogan, 'Think globally, act locally.' We learned you have to act globally to succeed locally – you have to go to Brussels to save your farm in Texas. It was really important for farmers in different parts of the world to see their common circumstances and to develop win/win approaches, rather than being played off against each other."[355]

International opposition came to a head with a huge demonstration at what were supposed to be the final Uruguay Round negotiations in Brussels in December, 1990. Mark told me,

> So far as I know it was the first really global demonstration, with farmers, environmentalists, and consumer representatives from every continent organized to affect a global process. There were more than 100 farmers from North America, 200 from Japan, and delegations from Korea, Africa, and Latin America. There were a thousand busses from all over Europe, Norway to Greece – more than 30,000 people. The result was that Thursday night, when the United States made its big push for a free trade agreement, South Korea, Japan, and Europe all said no and they decided to adjourn.[356]

Over the ensuing decade, these early shoots were followed by a massive growth of new forms of transnational social movement collaboration. From the campaign against

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[354] "Labor Internationalism," p. 104.
[355] *Global Village or Global Pillage*, p. 96.
[356] *Global Village or Global Pillage*, p. 97.

NAFTA to the anti-WTO demonstrations that shut down the World Trade Organization negotiations in Seattle to the formation of the World Social Forum, a new and largely unanticipated global phenomenon emerged.

This huge global groundswell has come to be known, rather misleadingly, as the "anti-globalization movement." Far from being against globalization in general, it is, in the words of Naomi Klein, "the most internationally minded, globally linked movement the world has ever seen."[357] And rather than being a single movement, it is more a global process through which myriad movements and organizations are creating new patterns of coordination that I call "globalization from below."

Globalization from below illustrates the emergence of new forms of coordination that cross old boundaries. Prior to globalization, popular movements and organizations primarily pursued the interests of particular constituencies within a national framework, national politics, and national economies. Throughout the 20th century, nationally based social movements placed limits on the downsides of capitalism. Workers and communities won national economic regulation and protections ranging from environmental laws to union representation and from public investment to progressive taxation.

Globalization undermined this adaptation for many movements, as we saw in the previous chapter for the US labor movement. Corporations could outflank the controls governments and organized citizens once placed on them by relocating their facilities around the world. Groups found that separately they were powerless against the forces of global capital. They began seeking new strategies. They gradually discovered that, in the new global context, they had common enemies and common interests both with other constituencies and with people in other countries. They began to explore new potentials for mutual aid and coordinated action. They began to develop shared representations both of the situation they faced and of their capacity to address it in concert. In short, the coordination patterns of popular organizations and movements were transformed.

This process involved "de-centering." People needed to assimilate the ideas and experiences of others and incorporate them into their own thinking. In 1990, for example, garment union economist Ron Blackwell did something previously improbable: Before preparing testimony on US trade policy, he went to Mexico to talk with Mexican trade unionists and "to see how the world looks from the other side of the border." He noted that such exchanges had become common: "Everybody is talking to everybody."[358]

I had used the idea of de-centering to explore how individuals become part of a social group – for example, how workers develop informal workgroups and how housewives, confronted with the sharp inflation of the early 1970s, organized a national meat boycott. Globalization revealed another twist on the same process. In response to globalization, a wide range of established organizations and movements around the world found themselves unexpectedly assimilating and accommodating to each others' views.

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[357] Naomi Klein, "Rebels in Search of Rules," *New York Times*, December 2, 1999.
[358] "Labor Goes Global I," *Z*, January, 1991.

At the Seattle demonstrations against the WTO at the end of 1999 I saw how this process had broadened identities and viewpoints beyond previous limits. For example, the US labor movement, as we saw in the previous chapter, went through significant changes in response to globalization. While conflict between organized labor and the environmental movement had been chronic, the largest Seattle rally was actually co-sponsored by the AFL-CIO and the Sierra Club. When a large contingent of environmentalist youth appeared in Seattle wearing turtle costumes, the new alliance found expression in the slogan, "Teamsters and turtles, together at last!"

The US labor movement had often tended to see globalization as an effort by foreign workers to "steal" American jobs. As it moved toward advocating international solidarity to raise labor conditions in poor countries, however, it found itself allying with unions in the countries where US jobs were moving. This too found a symbolic embodiment in the Seattle WTO demonstrations: US trade union leaders brought to the podium and presented as heroes and heroines workers from around the world who were fighting to organize unions over the opposition of their own governments -- and often against US corporations backed openly or tacitly by the US government. These changes did not require organized labor to abandon the identity or interests of American workers, but they did require overcoming the limitations of narrow issue and national perspectives, moving beyond limiting traditions, and in some cases giving up long-established antipathies.

Globalization from below illustrates common patterns in the emergence of new social movements. They often first appear in small, scattered pockets among those who are unprotected, discriminated against, or less subject to control by the dominant institutions. These nascent movements reflect the specific experiences and traditions of the social groups among which they arise. In periods of rapid social change, such movements are likely to develop in many such milieus and to look very different from each other as a result. In the case of globalization from below, for example, mobilizations ranged from French chefs concerned about preservation of local food traditions, to Indian farmers concerned about corporate control of seeds, to American university students concerned about school clothing made in foreign sweatshops.

The convergence of these disparate groups and their disparate itineraries into globalization from below illustrates Michael Mann's concept of the emergence of new solutions by people in diverse "interstitial locations"; their linking through networks that create subversive "invisible connections"; their development of shared representations that unify them in their diversity; their emergence as an independent power; and their "outflanking" of existing institutions in ways that force a reorganization on the status quo.

This aptly describes the emergence of globalization from below. In response to globalization from above, movements emerged all over the world in locations that were marginal to the dominant power centers. They linked up by means of networks that cut across national borders. They began to develop a sense of solidarity, a common belief system, and a common program. As a result of their new patterns of coordination, they

became recognized by the world's governments and corporations as an independent power, and one to be reckoned with.

## Power and dependence: The Lilliput strategy

In Jonathan Swift's satiric fable *Gulliver's Travels*, the tiny Lilliputians, only a few inches tall, captured the marauding giant Gulliver, many times their height, by tying him down with hundreds of threads. Gulliver could have crushed any Lilliputian under the heel of his boot – but the dense network of threads tied around him left him immobile and powerless. Similarly, facing powerful global forces and institutions, participants in globalization from below made use of the relatively modest sources of power they possessed and combined them with often quite different sources of power available to other participants. We dubbed their emerging approach the "Lilliput strategy."

*Strike!* had emphasized that workers, though powerless as individuals, were powerful collectively because employers depended on their labor. Strikes turned this dependence into effective power. My emerging heuristic generalized this idea. Power relations are maintained by the active support of some people and the acquiescence of others. It is the activity of people – going to work, paying taxes, buying products, obeying government officials, staying off private property – that continually re-creates the power of the powerful.

Bertold Brecht dramatized this truth in his poem "German War Primer":

> General, your tank is a strong vehicle.
> It breaks down a forest and crushes a hundred people.
> But it has one fault: it needs a driver.

Such dependence gives the apparently powerless a potential power over adversaries – but one that can be realized only if they are prepared to withdraw their support and acquiescence from *the status quo*. Social movements – including the movement against economic globalization -- can be understood as the collective withdrawal of such support and acquiescence.

Specific social relations imply particular forms of consent and therefore of its withdrawal. The World Bank depends on raising funds in the bond market, so critics of the World Bank organized a campaign against purchase of World Bank bonds, modeled on the successful campaign against investment in apartheid South Africa. WTO trade rules prohibit city and state selective purchasing laws like the Massachusetts ban on purchases from companies that invest in Burma – making such laws a form of withdrawal of consent from the WTO, in effect an act of governmental civil disobedience. (Several foreign governments threatened to bring charges against the Massachusetts Burma law in the WTO before it was declared unconstitutional by the US Supreme Court in June 2000.)

Just the threat of withdrawal of consent can be an exercise of power. Ruling groups can be led to make concessions if the alternative will ultimately prove costly. The movement for globalization from below demonstrated this repeatedly. For example, the World Bank

ended funding for India's Narmada Dam when 900 organizations in 37 countries pledged a campaign to defund the Bank unless it canceled its support. And Monsanto found that mounting global concern about genetically engineered organisms so threatened its interests that it agreed to accept the Cartagena Protocol to the Convention on Biological Diversity allowing GEOs to be regulated.

The threat to established institutions may be a specific and targeted withdrawal of support. For example, the student anti-sweatshop protestors made clear that their campuses would be subject to sit-ins and other forms of disruption until their universities agreed to ban the use of their schools' logos on products made in sweatshops. Or, to take a very different example, in the midst of the Battle of Seattle President Bill Clinton, fearing loss of electoral support from the labor movement, endorsed the use of sanctions to enforce international labor rights.

The threat may, alternatively, be a more general social breakdown, often expressed as fear of "social unrest." For example, under heavy pressure from the World Bank, the Bolivian government sold off the public water system of its third largest city, Cochabamba, to a subsidiary of the San Francisco-based Bechtel Corporation, which promptly doubled the price of water for people's homes. Early in 2000, the people of Cochabamba rebelled, shutting down the city with general strikes and blockades. The government declared a state of siege and a young protester was shot and killed. Word spread all over the world from the remote Bolivian highlands via the Internet, partly through the efforts of my friend Jim Schulz, a young American working in an orphanage there who had extensive experience as an organizer back home. Hundreds of e-mail messages poured into Bechtel headquarters from all over the world demanding that it leave Cochabamba. I got to hear local a protest leader who was smuggled out of hiding to Washington, DC, where he addressed an international rally against the IMF and the World Bank. In the midst of local and global protests, the Bolivian government, which had said that Bechtel must not leave, suddenly reversed itself and signed an accord that included every demand of the protestors. There is little doubt that it did so out of fears of social unrest. (One of the leaders of the protest, an indigenous coca farmer name Evo Morales, was elected President of Bolivia in 2005 and sponsored the International People's Summit on Climate Change in Chchabamba in 2010.)

The slogan "fix it or nix it," which the anti-globalization movement often applied to the WTO, IMF, and World Bank, also embodied a threat. It implied that the movement would block the globalization process unless power holders conformed to appropriate global norms. And in fact the global movement did block significant elements of the globalization process; in 1998, for example, a massive multinational campaign by civil society groups killed the OECD's proposed Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI). Such action constituted neither revolution nor conventional "within the system" and "by the rules" reform. Rather, it constituted a utilization of dependence to bring about a change in the balance of power.

While the media focused on global extravaganzas like the Battle of Seattle, these were only the tip of the globalization from below iceberg. The Lilliput Strategy primarily involved the utilization of dependences by people acting at the grassroots. For example:

When the Japanese-owned Bridgestone/Firestone (B/F) demanded 12-hour shifts and a 30 percent wage cut for new workers in its American factories, workers struck. B/F fired them all and replaced them with 2,300 strikebreakers. American workers appealed to B/F workers worldwide for help. Unions around the world organized "Days of Outrage" protests against B/F. In Argentina, a two-hour "general assembly" of all workers at the gates of the B/F plant halted production while 2,000 workers heard B/F workers from the US describe the company's conduct. In Brazil, Bridgestone workers staged one-hour work stoppages, then "worked like turtles" – the Brazilian phrase for a slowdown. Unions in Belgium, France, Italy, and Spain met with local Bridgestone managements to demand a settlement. US B/F workers went to Japan and met with Japanese unions, many of whom called for the immediate reinstatement of US workers. Five hundred Japanese unionists marched through the streets of Tokyo, supporting B/F workers from the US. In the midst of this worldwide campaign, B/F unexpectedly agreed to rehire its locked out American workers.

When South Africa tried to pass a law allowing it to disregard drug patents in health emergencies, the Clinton administration lobbied hard against it and put South Africa on a watch list that is the first step toward trade sanctions. But then, according to the *New York Times*, the Philadelphia branch of ACT UP, the AIDS direct action group, decided

> to take up South Africa's cause and start heckling Vice President Al Gore, who was in the midst of his primary campaign for the presidency. The banners saying that Mr. Gore was letting Africans die to please American pharmaceutical companies left his campaign chagrined. After media and campaign staff looked into the matter, the administration did an about face

and accepted African governments' circumvention of AIDS drug patents.[359]

For AIDS activists, this was only one victory in a long campaign. Writer Esther Kaplan describes a packed meeting in a stultifying room in a former church in North Philadelphia, "an area of falling-down porches and abandoned storefronts," for a group that might be expected to find the global economy a rather remote concern – recovering drug addicts. But John Bell of ACT UP/Philadelphia, a former war veteran with AIDS, was recruiting for a "Stop Global AIDS" march. He began, "Hi. My name is John, and I'm an addict and an alcoholic." According to Kaplan, "As he went on to talk about his gratitude for his lifesaving med[icine]s, it seemed only natural that he'd invite the 100 or so assembled to stand up for HIVers worldwide who don't have access to the same meds." A few weeks later, 12 packed buses from Philadelphia rolled up in front of the United Nations in New York, turning the march into "an energetic African-American protest rally." According to Bell, they were "making the connections between local and

[359] Donald G. McNeil, Jr., "As Devastating Epidemics Increase, Nations Take on Drug Companies," *New York Times*, July 9, 2000.

global in terms of health care and AIDS. We have been preparing people to be not only US, citizens, but citizens of the world."[360]

An international coalition including Doctors Without Borders and religious networks around the world generated thousands of letters to drug companies and the US government demanding they stop trying to use patent laws to keep people from getting AIDS drugs in poor countries. And there were some results. An April 2001, article in the *Christian Science Monitor* headlined "Drug Firms Yield to Cry of the Poor" reported, "39 international pharmaceutical companies unconditionally withdrew a lawsuit against the South African government aimed at barring the country from importing cheap anti-AIDS drugs." And in June, 2001, the *Financial Times* reported that the US government "dropped its complaint against Brazil's patent law at the World Trade Organization, dealing a fresh blow to the leading global pharmaceutical companies' business in the developing world."

Before the November 2001 meetings of the WTO in Doha, Qatar, AIDS activists, NGO representatives, and third world officials met and drew up a declaration stating that nothing in the WTO rules covering patents could prevent governments from safeguarding public health. Daniel Berman of Doctors Without Borders reported the results from Doha:

> Since Seattle there has been a seismic shift. Two years ago many developing countries felt they were powerless against the will of the wealthy countries and their drug companies. Here in Doha more than 80 countries came together and negotiated in mass. It was this solidarity that led to a strong affirmation that TRIPS [Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights] 'can and should be interpreted in a manner to protect public health.' In practical terms, this means that countries are not at the mercy of multinationals when they practice price gouging.[361]

All these examples of the Lilliput strategy involve utilizing one or another form of dependence. The Bolivian government backed down on privatizing Cochabamba's water because it seemed to be the only way to end the disruption of the life of the country – and perhaps because Bechtel itself wanted to escape the huge damage to its image that the global protests were causing. Bridgestone/Firestone rehired its fired American workers largely because it feared the disruption of its labor relations in Japan and in subsidiaries all over the world and the emergence of coordination among its workers worldwide. Vice-President Al Gore feared that loss of support among African Americans on the issue of AIDS drugs for Africa might lose him the Democratic nomination for President. Pharmaceutical companies feared that if they were too visible in their gouging of poor AIDS victims it might cause a backlash against them that would lead to more regulation of their lucrative markets in the first world.

The movement's ability to prevail in such conflicts depends primarily on drawing together sufficient forces to impose negative consequences on opponents and on dividing

[360] Esther Kaplan, "The Mighty Act Up Has Fallen: The Philadelphia Story," *POZ*, November, 2001.
[361] "How to Save Lives Without Even Trying," *Frontline* (India), November 24-December 7, 2001.

and undermining opponents' support. This is what the theorist of nonviolent struggle Gene Sharp calls an "indirect strategy."[362] It reflects the cybernetic idea of achieving a goal by counteracting the forces that prevent its realization.

The idea of the Lilliput strategy was a description of what globalization from below activists were actually doing. But it was also a way of representing a pattern that could be used in thought experiments about future action.

[362] Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*. Sharp's approach to "indirect strategy" drew heavily on the ideas of military theorist Liddell Hart.

## Solving problems: Constructing alternatives to economic globalization

Social movements often find it easier to say what they are against than what they propose. It is difficult to get beyond extremely general objectives like peace, freedom, and justice. Alternatives to what exists may be conceived in terms of an ideal world in which such general objectives have been realized. But such alternatives, while they may stimulate the imagination and motivate action, often have little connection to what currently exists. That makes it hard to see how they can actually be realized. They are utopian in the sense of being based purely on what we might want the world to be, without taking account of what it currently is.

My emerging heuristic provided a means for formulating alternatives to what exists that are based on transformations of current patterns and on action that make use of capacities that people already possess. In this chapter I will show some of the ways I used it to clarify alternatives to economic globalization. The examples I give are only meant to illustrate the process of constructing solutions; the versions presented here are not intended to be valid or persuasive, let alone sufficient, in their own right.

This approach starts with the current situation and its problems. It asks what changes would be necessary to correct those problems. This approach is based on the cybernetic idea of counteracting or compensating for deviations from goals.

The next step is to ask what changes in existing patterns of action and coordination would be necessary to produce those corrections. This is, in effect, a thought experiment: "What if…?" "What would be necessary . . .?" We can try to imagine actions that are variations of what people already are capable of doing that would close the gap between what exists and what is desired.

As I began trying to understand globalization, I discovered that it involved both problems of domination and problems of disorder. As we saw in the chapter on "Domination" above, the IMF, World Bank, WTO, and their regional equivalents imposed new forms of authority that had little or no accountability to those they affected. Their actions might result in the destruction of a community by a dam, or the doubling of the cost of water for a home through privatization, or the shutting of a region's farms or factories due to economic policies they impose on a national government.

But as we saw in the chapter "Disorder: Unintended consequences" above, not all the problems of globalization result from such domination. Many result from uncoordinated side effects and interaction effects that were intended by no one. The race to the bottom is not anyone's intent; It is the result of myriad decisions taken simply to maximize profit. The same goes for global warming and the environmental contamination of the maquiladora region on Mexico's border with the US.

Correction of both domination and disorder requires coordinated action by those affected and their allies. Both require that opponents make use of dependencies in order to force change. But the type of change that would solve the two types of problems is somewhat different.

In the case of domination, the solution is essentially to set limits on the capacity of actors to perform unacceptable actions. Such limits may be very specific: Critics of the World Bank and IMF have drawn up detailed lists of actions they should be prohibited from performing. Or they may involve general reductions in capacity, such as proposals for major reductions in the World Bank's budget. Or they may involve the ultimate limit on an institution – abolition.

Such restrictions raise the often controversial question, what will happen to the functions that are being restricted? The choices fall into several categories.

The functions can be moved to another institution. Some critics of the IMF, for example, propose that it be abolished and replaced by a new UN agency.

The functions can be decentralized. For example, Walden Bello proposed that the functions of the IMF, World Bank, and WTO be devolved to a network of regional organizations and specialized agencies dealing with such topics as health and the environment.[363]

The functions can remain in the present organization but be subject to new forms of accountability. These may be from below. For example, there are various proposals to give local communities affected by World Bank loans a veto power over them. The new accountability may also be to a higher authority. Some have proposed that the IMF and World Bank be made subject to a revitalized UN Economic and Social Council.

Alternatively, the functions can simply be abandoned. The Bush administration proposed, for example, that the "rescue operations" of the IMF be severely curtailed. If countries became insolvent, the problem would simply be left to them and their creditors to resolve. Of course, the predictable result would either be even more catastrophic global financial crises or greatly restricted lending to countries that are poor credit risks. Some anti-globalization activists, notably David Korten, argue that the latter would be a desirable result, forcing a return to national self-sufficiency[364]; others see it as leading only to new forms of disorder and impoverishment.

In the case of disorder, solutions are likely to be rather different. They require the construction of new patterns of coordination where uncontrolled interaction reigns. Such new patterns of coordination require new practices, norms, rules, laws, and/or institutions. Formulating generally acceptable proposals for these has been much more

[363] Walden Bello, "Reforming the WTO Is the Wrong Agenda," in Kevin Danaher and Roger Burbach, eds., *Globalize This!* (Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 2000) p. 177ff.
[364] David Korten, *When Corporations Rule the World* (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2001).

difficult for the critics of globalization. However, without such new patterns of coordination, the result of change is likely to be nothing but more disorder.

A case in point is the race to the bottom. Abolishing the IMF, World Bank, and WTO would do little to reverse it. Competition would still drive corporations to search the world for cheap production sites and to press governments and workers for cheap labor, lax environmental protections, and subsidies. Solutions to problems of disorder must transform, not just the actions of particular actors, but also destructive patterns of interaction.

In trying to figure out how to address the global race to the bottom, Tim and I followed Polya's advice to look for a solution to a related problem. We started by considering the earlier race to the bottom that was once a common dynamic within national economies. Local workforces competed by working for lower wages and sub-national governments competed by reducing public interest regulations, just as national workforces and governments do in the face of global competition today. In the late 1920s, for example, the garment industry ran away from high-wage, highly-regulated, unionized New York City, to low wage, union-free towns in surrounding areas in states with little industrial regulation, notably my home state of Connecticut. (I learned about this process when I interviewed some of the garment workers who, as teenage girls a half-century before, had organized the first unions in the companies that had run away to New Haven.)

In many industrial countries, the internal race to the bottom was successfully countered starting in the 1940s by a series of measures fought for by workers and their allies. Unions bargained for uniform wages in each industry. This removed wages as a factor in competition among companies. It also protected workers from demands to accept wage cuts to keep their jobs from moving to lower wage locations. Laws setting minimum wages, maximum hours, and other labor standards established a floor under labor conditions. National policies used public employment and fiscal and monetary stimulus to promote full employment, thereby giving workers more leverage at the bargaining table. To realize these conditions, workers fought for the basic democratic rights to organize, bargain collectively, and participate in the political process.

We looked for parallel strategies for the global economy. An obvious starting point was labor organization. International labor cooperation, international solidarity support for workers struggles, and protection of labor rights worldwide formed a significant aspect of globalization from below. These were not only important for their own sake, but also as critical means for reversing the race to the bottom.

While there was no global equivalent to national law, there were many possible means for setting minimum standards that could put a floor under labor conditions. The European Union's "Social Dimension" provided minimum standards for job security, occupational safety, unemployment compensation, union representation, and social security benefits. The "Just and Sustainable Trade and Development Initiative," proposed by unions and social movement organizations in Mexico, Canada, and the US, described in detail a continental development treaty that would establish rights and

standards for North America. The Maquiladora Coalition established a code of conduct for corporations in the US-Mexican border region. Such codes might start by being enforced by public pressure, but could ultimately be made enforceable by national laws, international institutions, and agreements among governments.

Proposals for a global equivalent to national full employment policies had to recognize that there were no global equivalents to national budgets, treasuries, or central banks. A starting point might be the elimination of policies of the World Bank, IMF, G-8, and US Treasury Department that prevent most countries from pursuing their own full employment policies by requiring that they run their economies to maximize exports to service their debts. Increasing the buying power of the world's poor and working people via unionization and minimum labor standards would increase demand for worthwhile forms of economic development.

Some form of "global Keynesianism" could counteract global cycles of boom and bust. For example, the IMF once created Special Drawing Rights – "paper gold" – to support international liquidity. We advocated consideration of this tool – something that was in fact adopted on a massive scale in 2009 in response to the "great recession." In the 1990s, the UN Development Program proposed a new global central bank "to create a common currency, to maintain price and exchange-rate stability, to channel global surpluses and deficits, to equalize international access to credit – and to provide the liquidity and credits poor nations need."[365]

Achieving such changes would require a global process of democratization. Global institutions like the World Bank, IMF, and WTO would have to be replaced or radically democratized. Global corporations would have to be brought under democratic control. The global economy would have to be reshaped to encourage rather than impede democratic government at all levels. National and local governments would have to be recaptured from the global corporations.

Far from being mutually contradictory, these various changes could be combined. For example, the IMF and World Bank could be put under a higher UN authority; many of their functions could be devolved to regional organizations and specialized agencies; and local communities could be given veto power over actions that affect them. Labor organizations could be organized locally and nationally but coordinate globally through global bargaining councils. Minimum labor rights and standards could be set by global institutions like the International Labor Organization but monitored and enforced by local and national governments and by organized workers and communities themselves. A global central bank could operate primarily by coordinating national central banks and channeling resources to local development efforts. Such a multilevel approach reflects my emerging heuristic: Social life is made up not of sovereign entities but of multiple interacting levels that can be subject to multilevel equilibration.

[365] United Nations Human Development Program, *Human Development Report 1992*, (New York: Oxford, 1992) p. 78-9

# Part 5: Conclusion: Thinking about change: globalization

In the years following the publication of *Globalization from Below*, "globalization from above" entered a deepening crisis. The race to the bottom proceeded apace, with jobs that had once flooded into Mexico and Thailand migrating again to China and then to still lower-wage Vietnam and Bangladesh. Global economic growth slowed by some measures to the lowest level since the 1930s. Many countries, notably the US, abandoned the pursuit of global economic rules and moved instead to blatant beggar-your-neighbor economic nationalism.

In the Introduction to *Globalization from Below*, we indicated that globalization in its present form was "unsustainable." We suggested that the possibilities for what might come after it included "world domination by a single superpower."[366] The administration of US president George W. Bush indeed tried to implement this solution to the problems and contradictions of globalization. Bush's *National Security Strategy* document laid out the intention. It asserted that there is "a single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise." And it threatened that the US "will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self-defense by acting preemptively" and by "convincing or compelling states" to accept their "responsibilities." Globalization, once touted as the manifestation of advancing freedom, turned out to be big with the child of global repression.

Meanwhile, globalization from below, aka the anti-globalization movement, burgeoned. The Seattle demonstrations that closed down the WTO were replicated at elite international gatherings all over the world. The World Social Forum became a venue for dialogue, networking, and coordination among social movements from all over the world. Lilliputian linking of grassroots struggles reached a scale we had never even imagined a few years before.

The Bush administration's global juggernaut provided a significant challenge for globalization from below. As the US attack on Iraq loomed, the same networks and organizations that had protested elite globalization rapidly mobilized to oppose it.[367] The result was the largest global wave of protest demonstrations in history. In their wake, the *New York Times* wrote, "The fracturing of the Western alliance over Iraq and the huge antiwar demonstrations around the world this weekend are reminders that there may still be two superpowers on the planet: the U.S. and world opinion."[368]

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[366] *Globalization from Below*, p. xiv.
[367] Jeremy Brecher, *Terminating the Bush Juggernaut*, (*Foreign Policy in Focus* May, 2003), p. 10.
[368] Patrick E. Tyler, "Threats and Responses: News Analysis; A New Power in the Streets," *New York Times*, February 17, 2003.

The "Great Recession" that began in 2007 represented the worst global economic crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s. It demonstrated that globalization had produced not a new order, but a new disequilibrium.

Perhaps the most common criticism of *Globalization from Below*, expressed in a variety of ways, is that it did not link the movement against globalization with a broader project of social change.[369] And indeed, as we wrote in the book's conclusion:

"Ultimately, the problem is not to 'solve' globalization. The problem is to develop social practices that can address the evolving challenges of life on Earth. We envision globalization from below melding into a more general movement for social change."[370]

I hope this book will contribute, at least in a small way, to that process.

[369] See, for example, Chuck Morse, "Theory of the Anti-Globalization Movement," *New Formulation* Vol. 1, no. 1 (November, 2001) 22-31. Morse writes that the authors "basic theoretical commitments are fundamentally antagonistic to the goal of revolutionary transformation" and that the authors "do not want such a transformation." P. 51. See also Jeremy Brecher, "Reply to Chuck Morse," *New Formulation*, VBol. 2, No. 1 (February, 2003).
[370] *Globalization from Below*, p. 122.

# PART 6: SOCIAL EXPERIMENTS

## Introduction to Part 6: Social experiments

As Karl Marx wrote long ago, philosophers have interpreted the world in various ways but the point is to change it. Part 6 describes some efforts to make change that I've been involved with, and, more importantly, my attempts to learn from those efforts by considering them as social experiments.

I first heard the term "social experiment" from Arthur Waskow and Marcus Raskin, my mentors at the Institute for Policy Studies. They used it to describe their various projects and initiatives, including their biggest project of all, the Institute itself.[371]

I resisted the idea. I felt that I and others had to act from passion and conviction, and that to consider such action as mere experimentation was too tentative, trivialized, and detached. It wasn't experiment; it was for real.

More important, it seemed to me that such an approach implied a liberal individualism in which people are presumed free to do what they want and therefore are able to freely test social possibilities. It disregarded social constraints. It failed to recognize that society was a unified whole, while the "experimenters" lacked the power to affect anything but small parts. If I had known the concept, I might have said that society was a homeostatic system that countered partial changes through repression and cooptation. I suspect I would have added that real change required revolution, and that revolution was irreversible. It couldn't be an experiment; it had to be for keeps.

Today I feel no less passionate about the concerns that drove me to action forty years ago. But I've lost the "close your eyes and jump" mentality I had in my youth. Instead, I want my action to be part of a loop in which, whether it succeeds or fails, I can learn from it how to act better in the future. In other words, to see it as in part an experiment. I'm not so much committed to a course of action as to the purpose that underlies the action – a purpose that may actually be better realized by a different course.

Today I don't see societies as unitary wholes that can only be changed via revolutionary "big bangs." But that doesn't mean I see them as composed of isolated, unconstrained individuals. Individuals live within social relations that involve coordination and differentiation and therefore both potential power and dependence and constraint. Social experiments, far from relying on the power of isolated individuals, consist largely in

[371] Marcus Raskin discusses the social application of the experimental method in *Being and Doing*, p. 241. No doubt his approach is rooted in the thought of John Dewey. The idea of framing personal initiatives as experiments provided the frame for Gandhi's *Autobiography: The Story of My Experiment with Truth* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).

testing new forms of concerted action. They are a normal aspect of what social movements do.[372]

"Experiment" conjures up a scientist in a laboratory answering a question about how things work by mixing chemicals in a test tube. Social experiments are similar in that they try to answer a question about how society works by acting in a particular situation presumed to be a microcosm of more general conditions.

However, social experiments don't happen in test tubes; they happen in the dense, tangled web of relations that constitutes real human life. So the problem of controlling to distinguish significant relationships from incidental ones is difficult. Results still require interpretation like that of the historian investigating "natural experiments." You can only extrapolate to broader conclusions with great care. Experiments provide evidence for "plausible logic" not definitive conclusions. They make some conclusions more likely. Their main fruit is often the guidance they provide in what further tests are most likely to be worthwhile.

What you learn from a social experiment is not likely to be from whether it succeeds or fails overall. Overall success and failure often depends on factors that you can't control and that may not even be relevant to what you want to test. You are likely to learn more from examining how and why component parts of the overall effort failed or succeeded.

My relationship to the projects described in Part 6 varies. Some I initiated; some I actively participated in; some I primarily observed and wrote about. As a result, my accounts reveal different balances of participant and observer. In many cases I drew on my experience as a writer and historian to make a role for myself in projects that were primarily the work of others. All involved collaboration.

These projects were not undertaken to test my ideas. Most of them resulted from targets of opportunity in concrete circumstances: A problem arose and people tried to do something about it. I happened to be involved or on the scene. At most, my involvement made some of my questions and preoccupations part of the mix.

The first four chapters portray a series of local initiatives in Connecticut's Naugatuck Valley. "Brass Valley" describes experiments in participatory community-based history designed to provide local residents with "feedback loops" connecting their collective history with their current situation. "Brass City Music" describes efforts to use the sharing of ethnic musical traditions as a vehicle for creating mutual appreciation and common preservation among disparate and at times hostile ethnic groups. "Co-Creators: The Naugatuck Valley Project" recounts the efforts of a labor-community coalition to address problems of deindustrialization. "Seymour Specialty Wire: An employee-owned company" describes how workers tried to save their jobs by buying and running a threatened brass mill.

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[372] The role of social movements in testing social possibilities is a central theme of Alberoni, *Movement and Institution*. (reference to come)

The next two chapters describe efforts to create structures for economic change. "We Are the Roots: Cooperative Home Care Associates" describes a successful employee-owned home health company in the South Bronx that I had the opportunity to study. "Social Criteria" describes a Connecticut community economic development agency that I helped initiate to provide resources for enterprises in poor communities.

The next three chapters address non-traditional organizational forms for social movements. "Let's not have a party" describes my attempts to propagate the idea of a vehicle that would serve some of the functions of a political opposition without becoming a political party seeking state power. "The NAFFE network" describes the North American Federation for Fair Employment, which brought together diverse groups to address the issue of contingent work by means of an organization form it calls a "structured network." "Wither labor?" tells the story of a long-running series of efforts to foment discussion of structural problems in the American labor movement.

The next two chapters concern globalization. "Global Visions" describes a series of efforts to encourage an "ecological shift" in perspective to recognize the transformation that is now generally known as globalization. "Bernie and the Global Sustainable Development Resolution" recounts an effort in the office of Congressman Bernie Sanders to promote discussion of alternatives for the global economy by means of a Congressional resolution laying out detailed proposals for change.

The next three chapters describe efforts to counter US military aggression. "Global constitutional insurgency" recounts efforts to justify anti-war civil disobedience on the basis of international law. "Uniting for Peace" describes an effort to take the 2003 US attack on Iraq to the UN General Assembly. "Terminating the juggernaut" describes an effort to develop a strategy based on international collective security and nonviolent sanctions to contain and transform the unilateral militarism of the George W. Bush administration.

"Social forums" describes the origins of the World Social Forum and its development as a vehicle for the on-going self-transformation of global social movements.

A look at the state of the world should be sufficient to establish that these experiments have not succeeded in solving its problems. However, there is no trial and error learning without error. The mouse in the learning experiment who gets a shock has succeeded in the task of learning something about its environment. I knew more about how to change the world at the end of each of these experiments than I did at the beginning.

My involvement with these experiments was guided by my emerging heuristic for common preservation; they show some of the many different contexts in which that heuristic can be applied. Many of these experiments, in turn, helped me formulate the proposal for a Human Survival Movement presented in Part 7.

## Brass Valley: Closing the loop

Knowledge is not much use if it is not accessible to those in a position to act on it. Conversely, people with a problem are at a disadvantage if the knowledge they need is not accessible to them.

History can be a means of constructing shared representations useful for social action. But workers and working class communities have been systematically deprived of knowledge of their own history. This has been one aspect of their denigration and disempowerment. As two labor leaders wrote in the introduction to a book on the Flint sit-down strikes published in 1947, "If there is any one paramount characteristic of books on American history, it is that they are not histories of the people."

> This is no accident. It is part of the great conspiracy which consists in drawing an iron curtain between the people and their past. The generals, the diplomats, and the politicos learned long ago that history is more than a record of the past; it is, as well, a source from which may be drawn a sense of strength and direction for the future. At all costs, that sense of strength and direction and purpose must be denied to the millions of men and women who labor for their living. Hence, the record of their past achievements is deliberately obscured in order to dull their aspirations for the future.[373]

The 1970s saw a great expansion of labor history, but there was a problem. Most of it was written by scholars for scholars. Ordinary working people remained almost as cut off from their own history as if the "new labor history" had never existed. They were "out of the loop."

In 1973, when I finished *Strike!*, I knew that there was something wrong about the process by which I had written it. Even though half the period it covered was within living memory, I wrote it without talking to a single worker. And while *Strike!* was written for a popular audience, I had no means to make it available to those who could best make use of it.

There had to be a better way. If I was going to do labor history, I wanted to find or invent some way to do it that included those who had lived the experiences recounted and that made the results available to them and to others who had roots in similar experiences and faced similar problems.

In the late 1970s I was invited through an old SDS friend, Robb Burlage, to a party in Waterbury, Connecticut at the home of Peter and Frances Marcuse. Peter was a professor of urban planning at Columbia University and the son of the famous radical philosopher Herbert Marcuse. Frances was a long-time high school teacher in Waterbury. They had

[373] George F. Addes and R.J. Thomas, "Introduction," in Henry Kraus, *The Many and the Few* (Los Angeles: Plantin Press, 1947).

lived in Waterbury for decades. Several old-time local labor activists at the party poured out their stories of organizing campaigns, strikes, union factional conflicts, triumphs, and heartbreaks to my receptive ears.

Waterbury was the major city in the Naugatuck Valley, which had been the center of the American brass industry for 150 years. It was less than an hour from my home, but I hardly knew it. Now I wondered, was the "Brass Valley" the place I should try to do labor history in a different way?

I began hearing about some efforts to do so. In England, activist historians had organized local "history workshops" to explore the history of particular neighborhoods. In Sweden, many workers had taken part in the "dig-where-you-stand" movement, tracing the histories of their own work places and communities. Influenced by the British history workshops, three historians had formed the Massachusetts History Workshop and were developing history projects in Lawrence, Lynn, and Boston.[374] The Beaver Valley Labor History Association, composed primarily of retired steelworkers in the Pittsburgh area, had published a labor history newspaper giving a month by month account of the events that had occurred a half century before when the steel plants were being organized.

Meanwhile, I met Jan Stackhouse and Jerry Lombardi, a community organizer and a video documentary maker, who were living in the Naugatuck Valley and making videos about the plant closings and job losses there. Hank Murray, the education director for UAW Region 9-A, which represented most unionized industrial workers in the Valley, was a friend of theirs; he suggested that we focus on a history of the brass workers in the Naugatuck Valley. We teamed up to form the Brass Workers History Project.[375]

By the grapevine we learned that the National Endowment for the Humanities was expanding its funding of labor history projects, especially ones that produced programs for the general public, rather than just for scholars. We designed a project that we thought would appeal to them. We proposed to produce a popular book and a videotape

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[374] For background on the movement for "history from below," see James Green, *Taking History to Heart: The Power of the Past in Building Social Movements* (Amherst, Mass: UMass Press, 2000). I attended the events at Lawrence and Lynn as we were in the run-up to the Brass Workers History Project.

[375] *Brass Valley: The Story of Working People's Lives and Struggles in an American Industrial Region*, The Brass Workers History Project, Compiled and Edited by Jeremy Brecher, Jerry Lombardi, and Jan Stackhouse. (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1982). See also Jeremy Brecher, "A Report on Doing History from Below: The Brass Workers History Project," in Susan Porter Benson, Stephen Brier, and Roy Rosenzweig, eds., *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Jeremy Brecher, "How I Learned to Quit Worrying and Love Community History: A 'Pet Outsider's' Report on the Brass Workers History Project," *Radical History Review*, 28-30 (1984), 187-201; Jeremy Brecher, *History from Below: How to Uncover and Tell the Story of Your Community, Association, Or Union* (New Haven, Advocate Press/Commonwork, 1986); Lynne Williamson, Jeremy Brecher, Ruth Glasser, and Jean J. Schensul, "Using Ethnography to Enhance Public Programming," in Jean J. Schensul and Margaret D. LeCompte, eds, *Ethnographer's Toolkit: Volume 7: Using Ethnographic Data: Interventions, Programming, and Public Policy*. Accounts of the project are also given in Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997) and James Green, *Taking History to Heart: The Power of the Past in Building Social movements* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000).

documentary on the brass workers intended to make available to a general audience the themes developed by the "new labor history" which at that time was developing a less institutional, more social and cultural exploration of working class life. We would involve workers and other community members who had lived that history, thus developing a model for workers' participation with historians and media professionals in recounting their own history. We wrote in *Brass Valley*, the book that came out of the project, "We see this kind of history, not as an academic exercise, but as a social act, a way people can communicate with each other about their experiences, needs, aspirations, and potentials."[376]

The Brass Workers History Project was more like a community organizing project than a conventional process of historical research. We initially envisioned establishing "history committees" in unions and community organizations and recruiting volunteers to work with us in our office. Such formal participation, however, turned out to be very limited. Instead, the strategy for participation we evolved was to build an informal support network around the project. Participation took the form of a myriad of fluid, informal contacts with people who supported the project. Ultimately, we had more than two hundred people involved with the project in one way or another. They contributed their stories, helped line up interviews, donated photos, set up photo sessions, and helped in many other ways. As we completed rough versions of the book and documentary, dozens of people reviewed them and gave us their comments. Twenty-five people served on the project's Community/Labor Advisory Panel.

Perhaps most important, we drew brass workers and other community members not just into providing facts, but into the process of historical interpretation. In the interviews we asked people not only what happened and how they felt about it, but also why they thought those things had happened and what they thought those things meant. Our own interpretations were often corrected or deepened. For example, we initially saw our work as a labor history project, and therefore paid inadequate attention to ethnicity. Early on in our work an informant chided us about this. "There is something you have to understand. In the old days Waterbury was all sectioned off and the different ethnic groups didn't mingle too good. If you don't pay attention to the ethnic dimension, you will never understand this community." We reluctantly accepted his point, and the integration of the ethnic dimension into our work would later be commented on as one of its greatest strengths.

We started distributing *Brass Valley*, a heavily illustrated book composed primarily of oral history materials, in 1983. The book received substantial coverage in the local newspapers, and project staff gave talks about it and sold copies in local clubs and libraries. It was for sale in union halls and downtown department stores as well as in local history museums. One young brass worker, who had written the book's Preface, sold it out of his locker in the plant. (In retrospect, I believe we could also have sold it in variety stores, restaurants, and other community outlets as well as at local cultural and even sporting events, but money ran out and the rest of the project staff left the area or

[376] *Brass Valley*, p. 278.

moved on to other work before such approaches were tested.) The UAW donated copies of the book to schools and libraries throughout the region.

*Brass Valley*,[377] a feature-length documentary video, was completed in 1984. We showed it first to a special audience of those who had been involved one way or another in the project, and then in union halls, history museums, senior organizations, and elsewhere in the Naugatuck Valley. Local reactions to the movie were strongly positive. People were very impressed that it treated their often-maligned communities with respect. Many who had worked in the factories identified strongly with the portrayal and said that we had told the truth about their experience in a way that they had never seen on television or in other media. Several people said that they had lived in the community all their lives but had never had the pieces of its history put together for them before. One elderly woman told us that her husband had worked in the brass mills all his life, but that she had never understood what he went through and the effect his work must have had on him until she saw the movie.

After a press build-up, the movie was shown statewide on Labor Day evening on all the stations of the Connecticut Public Television system. Several people told me that they heard the program being discussed at work the next morning. The video has remained available through local organizations and is rebroadcast periodically on public and cable TV.

A variety of other efforts grew out of the Brass Workers History Project. A permanent archive was established at the Mattatuck Museum in Waterbury, which has served as a resource for many subsequent activities. The Museum ran teacher training workshops using materials gathered by the project. I've helped the Museum with nearly a dozen subsequent community-based research projects, including oral histories of Waterbury's African American and Jewish communities and several projects on Waterbury neighborhoods. I prepared the text for the Museum's permanent exhibit on Waterbury history, which drew heavily on materials from the Brass Workers History Project. Twenty years later, in 2008, I worked with the Mattatuck to replace it with a new one, placing Waterbury's history in a global context, addressing the deindustrialization and metropolitan restructuring of the "post-industrial" era, and trying to make the region's history meaningful to a new population for whom "Brass City" is little more than a slogan on company logos. (Another offspring, the Waterbury Ethnic Music Project, is discussed in the next chapter.)

Drawing on the experience of the Brass Workers History Project, I published a guide called *History from Below: How to Uncover and Tell the Story of Your Community, Association, or Union*.[378] It has been used in dozens of projects around the country that I know about – and no doubt many more that I don't.

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[377] *Brass Valley*, distributed by Cinema Guild, New York, NY.
[378] Jeremy Brecher, *History from Below* (New Haven: Advocate Press/Commonwork Pamphlets, 1986).

A couple of years after the Project was completed, I wrote that the "long-term impact on consciousness would be difficult to judge."[379] After thirty years I can see that the project and its progeny have had a significant impact on the way people in the Valley understand their history.

When we started, the dominant explanation of why the brass industry had declined – even among brass workers – was that workers and unions had been too greedy in their demands and that therefore the companies had left. In our products we had provided a far more complex view, one that emphasized the process by which local brass companies had become subsidiaries of global energy corporations for whom the Valley's aging brass plants were but numbers on a balance sheet. Disinvestment in Valley factories – aka milking -- was in fact a long-standing corporate policy that led naturally to industrial abandonment. This view has become a widespread alternative in the Naugatuck Valley, which I have heard and continue to hear repeatedly when the region's deindustrialization is discussed. It became the cornerstone of the analysis provided by a community coalition called the Naugatuck Valley Project which brought together scores of religious, labor, and community organizations in the mid-1980s to combat plant closings.[380]

In 1986, the workers at Seymour Manufacturing Company, one of the brass plants where we had worked most intensively, discovered that their plant was threatened with sale and/or closing. They organized to purchase and run the plant, calling their new company Seymour Specialty Wire: An Employee-Owned Company.[381] Several of those involved in organizing the buyout had also been involved with the Brass Workers History Project. We were told by the son of a worker at the plant that, in his estimation, the appreciation for the value and significance of the plant and its heritage fostered by the Brass Workers History Project had contributed to the commitment of the workers and community to saving it.

In the 1990s I went to a community meeting on the cleaning up and redevelopment of a contaminated brass factory site in Thomaston, a mill town just north of Waterbury. A local resident gave an impressively detailed account of the plant and its relationship with the community over the previous century. I surmised from his talk that his family had worked there for generations. After the talk I went up to him and asked how he came to know so much about the community's history. He told me that indeed had learned much from his family and from other old-timers. "But if you really want to know about the history of this place in depth, there's a book you have to read. It's called *Brass Valley*."

Of course, everything has its downside. Now when I do oral history in the Valley, I always have to worry whether the accounts I get have been "contaminated" by the work of the Brass Workers History Project.

The Brass Workers History Project was a deliberately experimental process. At its core was a belief in the participatory construction of social knowledge and shared authority for

[379] "A Report on Doing History from Below," p. 276.
[380] See "Co-creators: The Naugatuck Valley Project" below.
[381] See "Seymour Specialty Wire: An Employee-Owned Company" below.

the interpretation of historical experience.[382] The Project constructed a dialogue both in the research process and in the products. The project staff had ultimate responsibility for the interpretations in the book and movie, but our interpretations had been heavily influenced by those we interviewed and consulted. And the book and movie themselves were largely composed of the memories and interpretations of those we interviewed.

We did not see history as understood by the people who experienced it as somehow "inherently authentic" or as embodying "the real truth." We saw history as among other things a way to put their experiences in a wider context and to juxtapose their views with those of others. But we saw this "de-centering" as a process that went both ways. While we tried where feasible to integrate our interviewees' accounts into a larger account of the experience of workers in the region, we also included views that at times contradicted each other and our own.

The Brass Workers History Project illustrates one way of "closing the loop" among action, experience, and knowledge. As we wrote in the Introduction to *Brass Valley*,

> There is a dialogue about the history of working people in our society, but it tends to go on in academic forms hardly accessible to those it is about. Thus, we have designed this book to be of interest and of use to the communities it describes and to others like them. Working people have been brought into the historical dialogue as collaborators on this book; we hope, in addition, they will enter the dialogue as readers. The attempt to understand the conditions of one's life and the forces that have shaped them is a fundamental aspect of human dignity. It is also one of the prerequisites for controlling those forces.[383]

A few older local residents complained that we had given too much emphasis to immigrants and workers. One amateur local historian said to me, "The people you emphasized didn't really matter. It was really the brass masters and the local leaders who were significant in the history of the Valley." I took this as an indication that the Project had done something to demand respect for previously ignored or denigrated members of the local community. That's one aspect of challenging domination.

[382] See Brass Valley, "Appendix: How this Book Was Made," p. 271 and Michael Frisch, *Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1990).
[383] *Brass Valley*, p. xvi.

## Brass city music

As I started research for the Brass Workers History Project, I got a letter from the Honorable John Monagan, former mayor and Congressman from Waterbury. He had read about our project in the newspaper and offered to be helpful. Above all, he wanted share with us a song called *Scovill's Rolling Mill*. Its began,

"The half past ten from Tralee town to Queenstown on its way
Brings thousands of our boys and girls off to America,
They leave the place of their birth and that's against their will
And they labor for their bread in Scovill's Rolling Mill."

We used Monagan's song and story at the start of *Brass Valley*.

Monagan later explained to me that the "half past ten from Tralee town" was the train that left Tralee in County Kerry, Ireland. "It went to Queenstown, which is now Cobh, where the greenhorns would get on the boat and come to the U.S. It is a real folk song out of the experience of the brass workers, written by a onetime Waterbury fireman, Faker Sullivan."

Its nine verses tell of working at the pickle tub and the muffles and going from mill to mill looking for a job. Finally the ailing immigrant's friends take up a raffle to send him home.

"And when you are six months in Ireland and feeble is your walk,
The friends you knew while in your youth, to them you'll scarcely talk.
Your dance is gone, your voice is still, six feet of earth you'll fill
And they'll lay you away in the burying ground due to Scovill's rolling mill."[384]

Lots of the old-timers we interviewed for the project had warm memories of music in their immigrant families and communities. Rachel Piccochi Doolady of the Waterbury Retired Workers Center, a stalwart of the local labor movement and of our project, told us:

"I remember when I was a kid. My mother used to have a beautiful voice. They used to get together Saturday nights with their friends. They used to sing. They used to have their own accompaniment, guitar players and that. It was like a great big party."

Folk music had been part of my life as long as I could remember. My brother Earl was dandled on John Lomax' knee to the tune of the cowboy ballad *Wake Up Jacob*. I grew up listening to recordings of Pete Seeger, the Weavers, and Leadbelly. A lot of my mispent youth was misspent trying to imitate Mississippi John Hurt's and Doc Watson's licks on the guitar and banjo. I had literally sat at the feet of Rev. Gary Davis and

[384] *Brass Valley*, p. 9.

Elizabeth Cotton. I had also read Alan Lomax' essay on "Folk Song Style" and recognized that traditional musical performance could be a crucial part of a social group's culture and identity.

I was drawn to the mystique of the folk music collector, but it never occurred to me to become one myself. Then one day I learned that a grant proposal to train local Waterbury residents to do oral histories in their own and each other's ethnic communities had been shot down by a professor who didn't approve of allowing people without academic training to do oral history. It was the middle of the Reagan era, and I needed to come up with a project that was uncontroversial and that therefore could get funded fast or else abandon my work in Waterbury. I thought, how about collecting the music of Waterbury's ethnic groups? And so the Waterbury Ethnic Music Project was conceived.

I had no track record or credibility as a folk music collector, so I recruited a team to work with me on the project. I'd known Sandy and Caroline Paton, highly respected collectors and founders of Folk Legacy Records, for years as neighbors in Northwestern Connecticut; they agreed to help, and to be responsible for technical recording standards. Lisa Null, founder of Green Linnet Records, was taking simultaneous degrees in history at Yale and in folklore at the University of Pennsylvania and had done collecting in Newfoundland. Martin Bresnick, a well-known composer and head of the composition program at the Yale school of music, added academic heft and an appreciation for music of all kinds.

As we were getting rolling, I got a phone call from a Yale graduate student in American studies named Ruth Glasser who wanted to work on the project. Over the years I'd been contacted by quite a number of Yale students about working on my Waterbury projects, but none had ever followed through. I was skeptical, especially since she didn't have a car to get from New Haven to Waterbury. I suggested she take a look at Waterbury and call me back if she thought she could deal with the logistic problems. I didn't expect ever to hear from her again. Instead, she called and said she had taken her bicycle on the bus and explored the entire city. She came on project staff as a volunteer. When she got her Ph. d she was one of the few young historians who was likely to get a regular academic job at a prestigious university. Instead, she moved to Waterbury and began working on the history of the Puerto Rican community there. More than twenty-five years later, I'm proud to say, she remains a community-based historian in Waterbury and a close collaborator on many projects.

I didn't have time to do spadework before the project started, so I had no idea what, if anything, we would find. I hoped that at the worst we would find a few stray songs from a few distant times and places. I made the rounds of my old contacts from the brass workers project, asking if they knew any of the musicians from their ethnic communities were still alive. From many of them I got a sense that it was too late; the comment I heard most often was, "Somebody should have done this long ago."

Gradually the leads began to come in. A friend introduced us to Christine Candaris, a young music student at Wesleyan whose family, she said, were the musical heart of

Waterbury's Greek community. They invited our whole team to a wonderful dinner. Then we recorded Christine's grandmother singing ancient Greek hymns and telling nursery rhymes – including a child's version of the Riddle of the Sphinx. Her family translated and egged her on.

One day I got a phone message that said, "This is Mary Eurist. Christmas is on Monday." I was mystified. When I called back, she explained that the Orthodox Church in American had adopted December 25th as Christmas, but that the ultra-orthodox congregations continued the traditional date. If I wanted to know about traditional Russian music, I should meet her in the supermarket parking lot in Naugatuck that morning. She and her husband took me to a Russian church in Bridgeport. With considerable trepidation I went up into the choir loft and asked if it was ok to record – I'd never recorded in a church before. The young choir director looked up and said, oh sure. We usually put our microphones over there. It was my first inkling that the "natives" had already taken on the role of being their own anthropologists.

After the service, I went with tape recorder in hand along with a group that went singing from house to house. We ended up at the home of Mary Eurist's family, another great dinner, and family singing all afternoon. They loved singing, and after they had sung every traditional Russian tune they could think of they passed another hour singing American old favorites like *Down in the Valley* and *You Are My Sunshine*. It occurred to me that I might be suffering from some stereotypes about musical boundaries.

I saw in the local newspaper a photograph of Maria Santiago, who had sung at a local Puerto Rican event. I passed it on to Ruth Glasser, who had been studying Spanish and had offered to be our researcher for the Puerto Rican community. She got the woman's address and paid a call on her. It turned out that she was a "hibaro" musician, a word whose connotations are very close to our "hillbilly." She had written literally hundreds of songs in ancient Spanish folk ballad forms like decimas and aguinaldos. She kept the texts of over a hundred of them in a box in her decrepit apartment. I'm proud that we eventually helped her win national recognition, arranging a few years later for her to open the main concert at the National Folk Festival.

We followed up leads that took us to ethnic clubs, picnics, and restaurants, as well as churches, mosques, and temples. By the time we were done with our initial collecting phase we had recorded more than a thousand songs and tunes in more than twenty ethnic groups. We produced thirteen radio programs and a TV documentary that were broadcast repeatedly on public broadcasting stations statewide and on Waterbury's local commercial channels.

I got a whole different sense of the community from collecting music than I ever did from what was defined as a labor project. People opened their lives and their hearts to me in a very different way. And over and over again what I found was very different from what I expected.

Folklorists are often preoccupied with the question of authenticity. We found that ethnic community members were also concerned with authenticity – and that they had their own definitions of the authentic music of their communities that might be very different from those of outside "experts." For example, two elderly African American women complained about our presenting black gospel music because the real religious music of the black community was spirituals. We gradually came to the conclusion that "authenticity" was not a subject for objective judgment, but rather a way of asserting, and contesting, definitions of identity.

I assumed that if we did find ethnic music it would be more or less a haphazard survival of an earlier time. Instead, I found that the music's survival was largely the work of what we came to call "ethnic cultural activists." Because they valued the music and other traditions, they sang it, played it, passed it on – and served on the committees that organized the music for community events.

I assumed that what we found would be fossilized relics. And we did find some precious ones, like the ancient Greek hymns and nursery rhymes of Christine Candaris' grandmother. But we also found strata upon strata of past musical transformations. And even more significant, we found new music evolving. In the Cape Verdian community we recorded beautiful songs played on fiddle and guitar by old men in styles that had been recorded in the Islands more than half-a-century earlier, but we also recorded brilliantly rocking versions of the same songs played by the son of one of them and his peers on electric instruments and synthesizers. We had similar experiences in African American, Puerto Rican, Polish, and many other communities.

I had assumed that the people who were interested in preserving ethnic music would be insular if not bigoted ethnic nationalists, those who had recently been characterized as "unmeltable ethnics." While all groups have a share of insularity and bigotry, the preponderant attitude among our "informants" was expressed by one elderly cultural activist who told me, "I love my ethnic group and its culture, but I don't think we're superior to any other group. I think the people in every group deserve to have their culture preserved."

I had assumed that what traditions we found would be relatively pure, and that the musicians would pretty much stick to them. Hearing the Eurist family first singing traditional Russian songs, then *Down in the Valley*, was only one such shock to that expectation. We found polkas popular not only in Waterbury's Polish community, for example, but also in the Lithuanian, Italian, Portuguese, and even Puerto Rican communities. We recorded Manos Hadjidakis' *Never on Sunday* played by Lebanese, Polish, and Portuguese bands and a Rabbi singing *My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean* in Yiddish. The overall pattern was neither one of rigid boundaries between different ethnic musical traditions nor of complete blending into a cosmopolitan blur. Rather it was one of traditions that persist, but that borrow from and experiment with elements of the musical worlds that surround them. Somehow strange words like "open systems," "assimilation," and "accommodation" kept floating into my mind.

Ultimately we learned the wisdom of what composer and folk music collector Bela Bartok had concluded about Hungarian music in his great 1942 essay "Race Purity in Music": Richness results from extended musical give-and-take among different groups. "The 'racial impurity' finally attained," as Bartok wrote, "is definitely beneficial."[385]

One day Marie Galbraith at the Mattatuck Museum said to me, what are you going to do with all this music you've found? Why don't we have a festival? It was something I couldn't have conceived pulling off by myself, but if the Museum was prepared to back it, why not?

We hired Ruth Glasser as coordinator. Before becoming a scholar she had been a community organizer, and she treated the festival as an organizing project. She drew in the ethnic community activists we had discovered to be our advisors and our liaisons to the city's ethnic communities. She recruited a roster entirely made up of local musicians and promoted the event as a chance for local ethnic groups to showcase their cultural riches to each other and to the local community at large.

The festival had a Waterbury fife and drum band dating from the colonial era, a multiethnic marching band, and Irish, Polish, Hispanic, and French Canadian dance bands. We set up a cabaret where Italian, Russian, and Hispanic music was played in an intimate setting. A program of religious music on Sunday afternoon included Black, Hispanic, Portuguese, and Greek choirs, a Native American religious storyteller, and "rock or soul gospel" sung by forty-five young people of the Mass Pentecostal Choir.

In a city notorious for racial and ethnic conflict we were quite fearful of bringing so many diverse groups together. We tried to set a good tone by having a group of young people recruited from the local ethnic communities serve as hosts and hostesses. It was before the era of cell phones, but our organizing team circulated busily trying to keep an eye on everything. I was very upset when I handed one of our singers the program and she said, "Jeremy, what are you doing to me? You've put me with the Puerto Ricans!" A few hours later, as a news photographer was about to snap a picture of a Puerto Rican hibaro band, I saw her push her way forward to be in the shot.

I came to think of our work as a community-wide process of de-centering. As my friend Joe Rodriguez, a musical and cultural leader in the Puerto Rican community, observed after the first Festival,

> You had people in the audience who were there only because they wanted to hear the Russian singing or see the Russian dancing, and another group that were only interested in what the Italians had brought to it. You had the Hispanics who didn't care what else was going on, they wanted to hear the salsa. So then all of a sudden they're sitting through a segment that is totally alien to what they would ever see in the normal course of their lives, and they're able to enjoy this and

[385] Bela Bartok, "Race Purity in Music," In Bela Bartok, *Essays* (New York: St. Martin's, 1976). Bartok's essay was among other things a scathing indictment of the "race purity" ideology that was arising as part of Hungarian fascism.

> learn from it. They say, this is where I come from, and I see where you're coming from. And they get a sense of pride. That's beautiful; isn't what I'm doing beautiful? All of a sudden that real sense of community and respect for each other is there.

The comment I heard most often at the festival was, "We've got to do this more often." We held five more festivals in the ensuing years. We expanded to cover the wider Naugatuck Valley region. It added a new dimension, and increased our rootedness in the local communities, when the Naugatuck Valley Project, a coalition of more than sixty congregations, unions, and community organizations, joined as a co-sponsor.

I came to regard the festivals as a vehicle for fomenting community dialogue on the questions that our work implicitly raised. For example, folklorist Jill Linzee who came in to help identify potential musicians for the festival noted that many ethnic groups had enclaves in the Valley, but that these were often closely linked with similar enclaves elsewhere. Building on this idea, we presented a panel discussion at one of the festivals on "Ethnic Communities and the Wider World." In explaining the panel for the festival brochure I wrote, "Some ethnic groups maintain a virtual worldwide network of such enclaves, with family ties, cultural links, and frequent visitations spanning the continents. . . . Strangely enough, connecting with the roots of our own local communities may also link us with people all over the world."

While we got quite a few grants for the festival, no institution except the Mattatuck Museum was willing to fund it on a permanent basis. At the end, Ruth and I were going from business to business trying to raise money by getting ads for the brochure. Eventually we just burned out. The Mattatuck Museum continued the work in other forms, including an ethnic music concert series and a program that sent local ethnic musicians to do presentations in Waterbury public schools. Studies on strategy for Waterbury's economic and civic revival regularly refer to the festival as exemplary of what the city needs to do to show its strengths, but no one so far has offered to provide the support to revive it.

For me, the Waterbury Ethnic Music Project fitted into a broader historical context. In an essay on nationalism that had no mention of music or our project I wrote,

> The animating idea of nationalism, belief in a national community, has always presumed a set of common traits, biological, cultural, or historical, among community members. But in reality, all modern nations have been formed to a greater or lesser extent by the willing or unwilling incorporation of diverse human groups. The period of nationalism has, in consequence, been continuously marked by the domination or destruction of 'national minorities' – Jews in Central and Eastern Europe, Afro-Americans in the United States, Moslems in Indian, Koreans in Japan, Amerasians in Vietnam, Kurds and non-Islamic religious groups in Iran, Armenians in Turkey, and, most recently, Turks in Bulgaria.[386]

[386] "The 'National Question' Revisited," p. 101.

Social movements of national minorities had traditionally pursued either equality, civil rights, and integration within the mainstream national community or formation of an independent nation, but a third alternative was emerging, "multiculturalism." This approach "challenges the underlying nationalist ideal of a state which represents a homogeneous national community." Carried to its logical conclusion, multiculturalism would amount to "a historic shift in the character of the nation state, comparable perhaps to the rise of religious toleration and the disestablishment of official religions that followed the Protestant Reformation."[387]

At the time of the Waterbury Ethnic Music Project, there was a battle raging in the US over the very legitimacy of multiculturalism. The Project was a kind of action experiment in asserting that legitimacy. As Theresa Francis, a former brass worker and NVP activist who became Coordinator for the festivals, said, "It's nice to be American and have all the things we have, but it's great to have this identity with other backgrounds."

> It's like the squares of a quilt. You get all of these beautiful squares, and they're off by themselves. And they don't get woven together. When you put them together, you give everybody a chance to see what the other group is doing, and you develop an affinity for all the different traditions that you might not come in contact with. It was the greatest thing to see what somebody else was doing, and to hear the richness of their music and their dance.

One of our festivals was held soon after terrible and highly publicized racial violence in Bensonhurst, New York. A Waterbury city employee who had been sent over to the park to help move a stage asked what we were doing. I explained we were holding a festival of music from the city's various ethnic groups. He paused for a moment and then replied, "This is what you might do if you wanted to prevent something like what happened in Bensonhurst."

I told that story in the brochure for the next year's festival.

[387] "The 'National Question' Revisited," p. 101. For issues of culture, nationalism, and multiculturalism, see also Jeremy Brecher and Jill Cutler, "Returning Oral History to the Community: A Review of *Cape Breton's Magazine*" *International Journal of Oral History*, February, 1985.

## Co-creators: The Naugatuck Valley Project

As we were collecting the oral histories and music of the people of the Brass Valley, the Valley's economic base was collapsing.[388] The brass industry, its economic lifeblood for a century and a half, went from more than fifty thousand to less than five thousand jobs in less than a decade. This was part of a national pattern that came to be known as "deindustrialization." Waterbury became an outpost of what was coming to be known as the "rust belt."

As we completed *Brass Valley*, we could not find a single person who could provide a positive vision of the future of the Valley. We found instead advice to accept the inevitable, embrace the deterioration of wages and conditions, and hope that cheap labor might lure some new businesses into the region's decaying plants. People and organizations were largely passive in response to the devastation of their communities. Indeed, the most dramatic response came not in any kind of political action, but in a strange ritual.

On a dreary day in April 1983, a hearse rolled through Thomaston, the small town just up the river from Waterbury. Behind the hearse, four white-gloved factory workers carried a bier. On it was laid out a clock -- a Royal Seth mantel clock manufactured by the Seth Thomas Clock Company. The procession halted at the green next to the recently closed 168-year-old Seth Thomas factory. Then laid-off workers from Seth Thomas stuffed the clock with paper towels, soaked it with gasoline, and set it ablaze. They announced they would send the ashes to executives of Talley Industries, a multinational conglomerate that had bought Seth Thomas and then, unexpectedly, shut it down forever. In a eulogy for the clock, Rev. Henry Cody of St. Thomas Parish in Thomaston said, "We mourn for the workers who served with dedication, loyalty, and skill. We ask for a resurrection here, that people may again have a chance to create."

Seth Thomas and the other plant closings throughout industrial America illustrated the basic problem of workers and communities dependent on resources they do not control. Indeed, former Seth Thomas employee Linda Turner called the funeral "a symbolic gesture of ordinary people against something they cannot change."

Around the time of the Seth Thomas closing, a number of churches, unions, and community organizations decided they had to find a more positive way to address the economic problems of their members in the Naugatuck Valley. At the same time an experienced organizer named Ken Galdston was scouting the Valley as a possible location for organizing around plant closings. Together they set up the Naugatuck Valley Project with the stated goal of helping workers and communities gain more control of the economic decisions that were affecting them. They planned to bring together disparate groups that had a stake in the Valley. Their strategy was to take the techniques of

[388] The NVP story is told more fully in Jeremy Brecher, *Banded Together: An Experiment in Economic Democratization from Below* (Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, in press).

community organizations and citizen action groups and project them into the economic sphere. As Ken Galdston put it,

> The idea of the Project is that if you bring together the diverse groups in the community that are hit by these decisions made far away, and if you teach them how to organize, how to focus on an issue, how to bring their full pressure to bear, you can get those other people to sit down with you and start making decisions that you want.

Ken began running workshops around the Valley in which he elicited from people their knowledge of how local companies had been swallowed up by national and then global conglomerates – which had then milked and closed them. The Project also began holding briefings to teach workers the "early warning signs" of plant closings. This turned them from passive victims to the community's eyes and ears watching for approaching danger.

Less than a year after Seth Thomas closed a local union leader at another Talley subsidiary attended an NVP briefing on the warning signs of plant closings and said, "That's what's happening where we are. We were suspicious but we didn't know what to do." The NVP immediately pulled together a local coalition of union and church people. Confronted by a story in the newspaper and a call from a local minister, the president of the subsidiary agreed to meet with the NVP. Ken Galdston recalls that "when we walked in the room with the guys from the Connecticut Citizens Action Group and the UAW and the Catholic church and the Episcopal priest, that guy from General Time Control was blown away by seeing this."

One of those who spoke was Bishop Peter Rosazza.

> We confronted the executive officer. I had never been involved with things like this before. You could just see people a little more proud of themselves because they were able to do something like that. Many of them had never been in situations where they could confront people at that level and feel supported by a group. If you took them one by one it would be intimidating, but I think this way we intimidated the opposition.

Eventually the company assented to an NVP proposal that Talley give preference in any sale to buyers who would keep the jobs in the area.

Where workers and residents had previously stood by, helpless to affect the forces that were eliminating their jobs and devastating their communities, now they had become players. They made the heads of corporations sit down and bargain with them. They influenced corporate policy -- no doubt in a limited way, but enough to mean that the story didn't always have to end with a funeral.

The NVP's goal was not just to save one or another set of jobs, but rather to build an organization which could help Valley communities enhance their economic conditions on a continuing basis. It aimed therefore to train leaders rooted in the churches, unions, and

community organizations of the Valley who could mobilize these institutions to jointly address problems in the face of which they separately were powerless. The NVP became a vital force in the Naugatuck Valley, with 65 member organizations, chapters in six towns, hundreds of active supporters, and meetings almost daily in one or another part of the Valley. It also linked with similar organizations that arose around the country in the Federation for Industrial Retention and Renewal.

Because it identified economic problems as problems of power and control, the NVP promoted local, democratic ownership through such vehicles as employee-owned companies and community land trusts. Perhaps its most dramatic success was to help 250 workers at a threatened brass mill buy their factory and create the largest employee-owned company in the country up to that time. It also sponsored the creation of new, democratically-controlled enterprises, such as an employee-owned home health aid cooperative which provides jobs and services in some of the Valley's poorest neighborhoods.

The NVP has gone on to apply similar approaches to education, environmental pollution, housing, and other matters that affect the region's economic life. When soaring real estate prices made housing unaffordable for many Valley residents, for example, the NVP organized tenants not only to bargain with their landlords, but also to create a community land trust and develop permanently affordable cooperative housing. Some of the Project's efforts have been stunning successes, others painful failures; both shed light on the problems that emerge when ordinary people try to influence matters from which they have normally been excluded. The Project has now been an on-going part of the life of the Valley for a quarter of a century. Ken Galdston has gone on to initiate similar projects throughout New England, linked by a support and training organization called the Inter-Valley Project.

Ken contacted me as he was starting the NVP, and as self-appointed chronicler of Naugatuck Valley social movements I began tracking and documenting its activities, attending meetings and conventions, and periodically interviewing staff and leaders. My relationship to the Project was essentially that of a historian who could be drawn on for background about the Valley and a sympathetic journalist reporting on some of its more noteworthy efforts. I wrote several articles, made a public television documentary, and ultimately wrote a book about the project. While the NVP is not necessarily the kind of organization I would have advocated as a solution to the problems of working people in the Naugatuck Valley, I have utmost respect for what the NVP has accomplished, and I regard it as an invaluable series of experiments in how apparently powerless people can develop new ways to solve their problems.

For the NVP's 25th anniversary in 2009 I helped organize a participatory history project and reunion. Led by an NVP history committee, the project produced an exhibit at the Mattatuck Museum, an old-timers reunion, and a NVP history website.[389] It felt like one more case of using history to "close the loop" so that those who act can reflect on the consequences of their action and draw the lessons for their future.

[389] www.brassvalley.org

The NVP experience was congruent in many ways with my emerging heuristic. At the same time, that heuristic was undoubtedly modified, as well as concretized, by what I was learning from the NVP.

Valley workers and communities had long-established patterns for making a living and making their lives. But when the plants started shutting down those patterns didn't work any more. The result was not only unemployment but increasing alcoholism, family violence, and suicide.

At first people felt helpless in the face of conditions they could not control. They expressed that helplessness in many ways, like the ceremonial immolation of a clock. But recognizing that they shared similar problems and similar feelings created the basis for reaching out to each other to try something new. Through the NVP they developed a shared analysis of their situation, re-conceiving plant closings as the result of corporate strategy rather than of worker greed. They also redefined the problem of plant closings as a common problem shared not just be the workers directly affected but by all the churches, small businesses, and residents of the community. They created means – meetings, committees, conventions -- to coordinate their action and pool their power. They took advantage of whatever dependencies they could identify in their adversaries – concern about bad publicity, need for local political support, fear of "labor trouble." They sought support from people and institutions elsewhere who might also be able to put pressure on them. And they created an organizational vehicle that could develop new responses – new equilibrations -- as new problems and possibilities emerged.

One of those who became active in the Project was Theresa Francis, a worker at Century Brass who told me that before becoming involved in the NVP she had never done anything except work in the factory, raise her family, and sing in the church choir. She put the meaning of the NVP this way:

"You have to become involved and help with creating your community because if you don't you are a victim, and God didn't make us victims; He made us co-creators. And that's what we're about and that's what we're supposed to be about. That's my way of saying what the Naugatuck Valley Project is about."

## Seymour Specialty Wire: An Employee-Owned Company

The Naugatuck Valley Project proposed employee ownership as a possible alternative to the economic powerlessness of the Valley's communities and workers. I was skeptical of the viability of such an approach. But I was all for trying anything that might work.

Early in 1984, workers at the Seymour Manufacturing Company, a century-old brass mill with 250 employees in the Naugatuck Valley town of Seymour, learned that the company's owner, National Distillers and Chemical Corporation, was planning to divest its metals division.[390] Ken Galdston met with the Seymour UAW local and urged them to at least explore the possibility of buying the plant, arguing that even if they didn't end up doing so, the effort would make them players and provide them much information that would be useful in dealing with any other buyer. Defining workers as potential purchasers could, in effect, allow an end run around American labor law's exclusion of workers from a right to affect the "entrepreneurial core" of the enterprise.

Workers were highly skeptical but decided they should explore any avenue for preserving their jobs. With encouragement from the NVP, the union began to reach out across the divisions among those affected by the threat, reaching out to white-collar employees, retired union members, local clergy, and politicians. The employees' exclusion from knowledge of the firm's true condition was countered by hiring as consultants the Industrial Cooperative Association (ICA), a Boston-based consulting group specializing in employee-owned companies. Prestigious Connecticut legal and accounting firms offered to provide additional technical support. The State Department of Economic Development and the town of Seymour kicked in money for a feasibility study, providing the beginnings of a financial base for the employees' efforts.

With its community support and its expert team in place, the buyout coalition met with National Distillers' brokers and were told that they would be accepted as potential buyers -- but that they must submit a final bid within five weeks. Realizing this was an impossibility, the Project drew on its organizing perspective to initiate a campaign of community members, plus archbishops, union presidents, Senators, and other national figures, to pressure National Distillers for more time. This strategy redefined the plant's fate as a broad social and class concern and mobilized resources in and beyond the community to affect what had previously been defined purely as a business decision. Two weeks after the start of the campaign, National Distillers agreed to extend the deadline, reduce the asking price, and help pay for a feasibility study.

The plan the coalition developed was for a leveraged buyout -- the same technique used by the high-flying conglomerateurs who were taking over the Valley's companies with "other people's money" and virtually no capital of their own. The purchasing company would be owned by an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP), using a 10% pay cut as a down payment. In contrast to most other ESOPs, this one would be highly democratic:

[390] For a fuller account of Seymour Specialty Wire, see Jeremy Brecher, *Banded Together*.

The ESOP would own one hundred percent of the company's stock and all company employees would vote for the board of directors on a one-person, one-vote basis. By this means the employees would gain control of the company's decisions. As the loans were paid off, individual employees would be credited with shares of the company's stock in proportion to their earnings.[391] The union contract would remain in force.

Ultimately a purchase price was negotiated, a bank supplied financing, the state provided a loan guarantee, and, after a job search, the current plant manager was hired to be company president. More than a year after the buyout effort had begun, "Seymour Specialty Wire: An Employee-Owned Company" (SSW) took over the assets.

This pioneering effort soon came up against all the things that *hadn't* changed. As one worker put it,

> What he actually could see and hear, the guy in the shop, it was no different, except he knew the company belonged to him and he had x number of shares being built up on paper. There wasn't the vehicle there yet to help him realize this really was his company.

The division between managerial cadre and rank-and-file workers was little changed. Work roles remained largely the same and workers continued to refer to management as "upstairs" and the mill as "downstairs." Employees initially elected a majority-white collar board of directors who rarely challenged the company president; even when subsequently a blue-collar majority was elected, the board often felt inadequate to overrule what it regarded as the superior business knowledge of top managers, who were often reluctant to share full knowledge of the company's situation and workings with the employee-owners.[392] When union members on the board did challenge management decisions, management sometimes charged them with conflict of interest and violation of their fiduciary responsibility to maximize the stockholders' profits.

Many employees were reluctant to become actively involved in running the company, preferring to remain with the traditional roles to which their motivation and way of life had long been adapted. Conflict between management and workers festered over issues ranging from pay raises for managers to the accountability of front line supervisors.

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[391] The model of individual capital accounts had been elaborately worked out by ICA, drawing on the experience of the noted Mondragon cooperatives in the Basque region of Spain, to circumvent some of the common problems experienced by previous producer cooperatives.

[392] Diane Elson, in "Market Socialism or Socialization of the Market?," *New Left Review*, November/December 1988 pp. 32-2, points out the difficulties with openness if there is "an unstable environment, requiring lots of discretionary powers in the hands of a few decision-makers." This surely describes the situation at SSW. She notes that, "The possibilities for egalitarian forms of worker-management thus have implications for and depend on relationships between enterprises. It is not possible to have a fully open information system within an enterprise and to keep secrets from other enterprises." She argues that what she describes as "socialized markets" organized by public agencies would be "much more compatible with industrial democracy" than are "markets organized by enterprises."

After evidence of sabotage indicated the seriousness of continuing labor-management conflict, a "goal-setting process" was initiated; it established a system called Workers Solving Problems, something of a cross between quality circles and a union grievance procedure, which was designed to create a vehicle for active rank-and-file participation in day-to-day operations and to provide a mechanism more direct than the board of directors for holding managers accountable. Top management endorsed the plan and many workers were initially enthusiastic, but front-line supervision and middle level managers were widely reported to feel threatened by it. As workers found that the problems they identified did not move toward timely solution, many lost interest and the system gradually petered out. Despite their ownership of the company, their efforts to assert day-to-day control were in effect repelled.

For the first year, SSW was a financial success, and the 10% pay cut was restored. The next few years saw ups and downs, due to a combination of recession, intensified competition, and internal production problems. By 1989 the company was in crisis, and in a dramatic confrontation the board decided to "fire the boss." A new president began a major turnaround effort, with new financing, reduced workforce, and a partially new management team. But after a few hopeful months the company was losing money and went into bankruptcy. Early in 1993 its assets were auctioned off for the benefit of its creditors.

Employee-ownership at SSW succeeded for seven years in preventing the company from being sold, moved, or shut down. The experience also showed some of the limits of employee-ownership as an unsupplemented strategy.

First, the legacy of a century of role division in the firm was never overcome. Employees were never able to control the managerial cadre; nor did the majority of them even try to establish an active role for themselves in running the company. Close observers of the company attribute many of its problems to poor day-to-day management of production[393]; many efforts were made to get top management to address these problems and to hold lower-level management accountable for correcting them, but these efforts were generally unsuccessful.

Second, the company remained at the mercy of product, labor, and capital markets in which it was merely a chip on the waves. Like the rest of industry in the Valley and like the rest of the wire industry nationally, it was buffeted by international competition and declining markets for its products due to recession in its customers' markets; its demise, like that of so many other companies, was the result of forces over which the owners, whether outside investors or employees, had no control.

As with product markets, so with labor markets. Much internal conflict arose at SSW from efforts to raise the salaries of managers and high-skilled workers; these attempts were seen by workers who had taken a pay cut as exploitation, but by managers as

[393] Many advocates of employee-ownership argue that the employees' stake in the company guarantees cooperation and increased effort to improve the functioning of the company; the SSW experience does not support this claim.

necessary in order to attract and retain qualified employees by paying salaries competitive with other companies. The overall polarization of income that marked U.S. society in the 1980s was in effect imported into the employee-owned firm.

The peculiar nature of capital markets had made it possible for the workers to buy the company in the first place with "other people's money." But the necessity of paying off the loans on schedule gave the company little choice but to treat profit maximization as its prime criterion for decision making.[394] Once the company got into financial difficulty, ultimate control turned out to lie with the lenders, who first forced the company into bankruptcy and then required the auctioning off of its remaining assets.

All this took place within a broader economic context that was not fully recognized by those who had initiated SSW. The company had been launched into an industry in turmoil. An article in the industry journal *Purchasing*[395] noted that in the late 1970s, many brass firms were "unwanted stepchildren" that were bought up by big oil companies. Then many became "abandoned stepchildren" when "Big Oil unloaded Big Copper." Brass mills were subjected to "a pattern of mergers, acquisitions, leveraged buyouts, plant shutdowns, and product mix changes." In 1980, *Purchasing* noted, major players in the brass industry had included Anaconda, Bridgeport Brass, Century Brass, Chase Brass and Copper, the Hussey Metals unit of Copper Range, and Olin Brass. By 1990,

> part of Anaconda was Outokumpo American Brass, part had become Ansonia Copper & Brass; part of Bridgeport Brass was absorbed by Olin and part was employee-owned Seymour Specialty Wire; Revere Brass is an LBO [leveraged buyout] called Revere Copper Products; Century is out of business; Hussey Copper Ltd is an independent LBO; and Chase Brass' sheet operation opened, and then crashed, as an LBO called North Coast Brass & Copper.[396]

"Will the turmoil ever end?" asked *Purchasing*'s Markets & Metals Editor.

*Purchasing* also noted that "global factors" played a "key role" in all coppermetal market activities.[397] Expansion and contraction in the "global copper economy" was as likely to be shaped by consumption in Germany or Japan or the expansion of capacity in Asian, European, and South American brass mills as it was by events in the U.S.

Faced with growing imports, U.S. copper and brass companies in 1986 won anti-dumping duties against foreign producers. To gain access to the U.S. market, foreign companies then built "transplants." Poonsang Corp., South Korea's largest copper and copper-alloys manufacturer, spent $80 million to build a copper products plant in Cedar Rapids,

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[394] This criterion was contested. Some union officials maintained that "saving jobs" had been the original purpose of the buyout and that avoiding layoffs was a proper criterion for company decisions as long as it did not undermine the company's viability; some managers countered that only conventional business criteria should be applied.

[395] "Watch for supply volatility in 1991" by Tom Stundza, *Purchasing*, March 7, 1991.

[396] *Purchasing*, March 7, 1991.

[397] *Purchasing* March 4, 1993.

Iowa.[398] By the early 1990s the Finnish-owned Outokompo Copper Group owned the former American Brass of Buffalo, N.Y., Nippert, Co. of Delaware, Ohio, Outokompu Copper USA of Chicago, and SSW's direct competitor Valleycast of Appleton, Wisconsin.[399] In short, a small brass factory in the tiny mill town of Seymour, Connecticut, had discovered – or rather was discovered by – globalization.

How much employee ownership would affect the boundaries of SSW as an isolated entity was soon tested. The NVP had hoped that SSW would become a member of the Project, provide financial support, and become the flagship for a fleet of locally- and employee-owned enterprises that would be linked through the NVP somewhat like the enterprises of the Mondragon cooperatives in the Basque country of Spain. But SSW's first president declined to have SSW join the NVP and avoided other forms of involvement. When SSW board members who were active in the NVP started working with employees of another brass mill the NVP was trying to save from closing, he successfully demanded that they stop on the grounds that they were violating their fiduciary responsibility by helping a competitor.

Perhaps SSW's greatest success lay in redefining the issue of plant closings in the Valley. It demonstrated that workers and communities did not have to sit idly by while their livelihoods were destroyed. It indicated that the problem of economic decline had to be addressed as a question of power. It made an issue of who owned the Valley's economic assets. For much of its existence it served as an inspiration for efforts by the NVP and others who sought an alternative to economic powerlessness.

The NVP learned some important lessons from the SSW experience. When it started ValleyCare Cooperative, an employee-owned company designed to provide home health care and thereby also provide stable jobs for low-income women in the Valley, managers were selected in part on the basis of their commitment to worker ownership and participative management. The NVP held initial control of the board and a phased transition to worker ownership was carefully planned. The NVP as sponsoring organization retained Class B stock which carried a blocking vote over changes in the public purpose goals of the organization. This arrangement was designed to assure that community service remained a prime goal of the company and to tie it in with the developing network of NVP-related institutions and enterprises. Like SSW, ValleyCare thrived for several years, then went under in the midst of industry turmoil, shifts in government policy, and devastating cutbacks in the market for its services.[400]

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I'd been concerned with workers' powerlessness in the workplace since my youth. Seymour Specialty Wire provided a revealing experiment in worker self-management. It demonstrated some of the problems – but also some of the possibilities – of employee ownership as a means for worker empowerment. In a different context, and with the

[398] *Purchasing*, May 17, 1990.
[399] *Purchasing*, "Metal chips," undated clipping.
[400] ValleyCare Cooperative is described at length in Jeremy Brecher, *Banded Together*.

lessons learned from this and other experiments, work – and the position of workers – could perhaps be transformed.[401]

David Duke, a vice-president of the local union, summed up his feelings about the SSW experience in a way that reflects the basic values that motivated the buyout from the beginning:

> I'm glad we did it. I wish that we could have made it work. I don't have any regrets about it, because we kept the place going for seven years. So we did serve a purpose for a while. We got a lot of people to retirement with their pensions before we went under. That was one of the things to make you feel good when you sit back and reflect on it. And then you think about the ones that had already lost a job in the other plants that had closed and now were in their mid-forties, early fifties and its just going to be real, real hard for them to find something now. That -- that's the kind of stuff that hurts.[402]

[401] See next chapter, "We are the roots," for a more successful example.
[402] David Duke interview, November 14, 1994, deposited at NVP archive, Mattatuck Museum.

## We are the roots

Most workplaces are subject to domination by bosses and the constraints and disorder of the market. What would happen if someone deliberately set out to create a workplace based on values of cooperation, mutual respect, and job stability – while still having to sell a product or service in the market? When Ruth Glasser and I were hired to do a study of Cooperative Home Care Associates, an employee-owned home health care agency in the South Bronx, we got to witness an experiment that illuminated that question.

Ruth and I met Rick Surpin and Peggy Powell, founders and senior managers of CHCA, at a series of forums on employee ownership.[403] After one of the sessions Rick and Peggy took me aside and asked me if I would undertake a project to document the internal life of CHCA. A good business history of the company had been written, but they wanted something that would capture its life as a community – what they called its culture.

After the heartbreak of Seymour Specialty Wire I was eager to get a close-up look at a worker cooperative that really worked. But I told them that I saw several problems. I wasn't an expert on employee ownership or how to study a company. Rick and Peggy answered that over the years they had adopted the practice of selecting people to work with primarily on the basis of shared values, rather than technical expertise, and they felt my values were right for them. Rick added that in his youth he had been deeply influenced by the shop floor emphasis in *Strike!*

I pointed out that the great majority of their workers were women; as a man I would have something of a rapport problem. Many of the workers were Latino, and I didn't speak Spanish. They said they hoped I would consider it nonetheless. Then I realized both these problems would be solved if Ruth Glasser would do the project with me. She agreed, we all met, and the project was on its way.

Ruth and I took what we had learned from our participatory community research in Waterbury and tried to apply it to work in a company – albeit a very unusual one. A "design committee" composed of home health aides and one office staffer helped shape the project. Ruth set up shop very visibly in the office; conducted oral history interviews with people from diverse backgrounds in all positions in the company; observed a wide range of company activities; organized a "story day" for workers to share personal recollections of the company's history; conducted a survey of the entire workforce; and for a year and a half participated in the informal social life of the workplace. I consulted on the work and participated from time to time when I could, and helped write up the results.

[403] Cooperative Charitable Trust Forum, sponsored by the Cooperative Charitable Trust.

Part of our mission was to "enable the CHCA community to take a retrospective look at itself and initiate a discussion about what people would like to see happen in the next ten years."[404] Ruth reported back to people all the time informally and wrote short pieces for the company newsletter. We drafted a report together that was circulated and debated in-house at CHCA.[405] We were, in effect, serving as a feedback loop for the organization and its members, recycling experiences and reflections to everyone from top managers to front-line workers.

In 1983, Rick Surpin had been hired by the Community Service Society to try to create decent jobs for low-income New York communities. The home health care industry was growing explosively but it was organized through a casual labor market that made home health aide a lousy job -- thereby also undermining the quality of care that was provided. CSS decided to establish a home health agency whose purpose would be to create higher quality jobs for home health aides (often referred to at CHCA as "paraprofessionals," no doubt as a sign of respect). This would lead to higher quality care, which in turn would make it possible to charge more for the service and thereby increase wages and benefits. The employees would be African American, Latino, and other minority women who in most cases were currently on welfare.

Rick, from a Jewish family in Staten Island, brought a family background in a marginal small business, the social values of 1960s radicalism, and a sensitivity to the psychological dimensions of social issues. When we asked about the emphasis on respect in CHCA's value system, he answered,

> I grew up heavy and was made fun of. I felt that people as a rule are incredibly mean, and I also came to believe that the more money they had, the more material things they had, they were that much meaner; they just didn't pay any attention to what the effect was on the other person.
>
> I've often felt invisible and I feel that most people who are born working class feel invisible. In your own home, or in your own community, you don't feel invisible. Creating a good place is about creating a place where invisible people can feel visible and valued and want to be visible. I didn't know any place like that.[406]

He brought in Peggy Powell, a community organizer with African American, Caribbean, and Italian roots, who shared similar values. CHCA, Peggy said, was not just about training and filling home care slots, it was also about creating community: "It's about feeling like an outsider, and this place helps you feel like an insider. That's what I'd like to believe we provide in terms of the company, and why people feel this sense of connection."[407]

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[404] Ruth Glasser and Jeremy Brecher, *We Are the Roots* (Davis, CA: University of California Center for Cooperatives, 2002) p. xii.
[405] Published in revised form as the book *We Are the Roots*.
[406] *We Are the Roots*, p. 99.
[407] *We Are the Roots*, p. 9.

CHCA's founders started off with strong democratic impulses and desire to be a company that truly belonged to its workers not only on paper but as a living, breathing reality. From the start they envisioned CHCA as an employee-owned company in whose governance workers would play a critical role. At the same time, they did not envision it as a collective with no formal hierarchy. Managers would run the company day to day; indeed, part of their responsibility would be to foster a participatory culture, which would make employee ownership real.[408]

I've heard a lot of talk about cooperation, respect, and democracy in my time, and I've heard it a lot from employers whose goal is to manipulate their workers into willing subservience. But CHCA managers seemed determined to walk the walk as well as talk the talk. They recognized that those entering the company had "been around enough to know that you don't say what you really think in a workplace, no matter how different this workplace is claiming to be, or how nice the people appear to be."[409] They realized that a positive work environment "had to be both consistent and genuine to counteract the deep-rooted suspicion toward managers that employees typically bring to a work place."[410]

Prospective home health aides first experienced CHCA's approach in the hiring process. Aides were hired less on the basis of formal qualifications than whether they had experience in caring for others in their families and communities. At the level of professional staff technical expertise was necessary, but commitment to CHCA's values was emphasized even more – as in the decision to hire me and Ruth.

This approach was reinforced in the training process. As much as possible the training of new aides was conducted by assistant trainers who had themselves been aides with the company. As the director of training put it,

> The underlying message is that everyone can learn, that everyone can teach, and we're all doing this together. . . . If you have one person up there who seems to know everything, that's part of the message. So if you have a whole team of people and there is no lead instructor, I think the message to the trainees was, 'And you have to participate, too.' And they did.

Training was designed to counter bad past experiences and self doubts, provide social support, and give opportunities to learn from mistakes without feeling failure. One aide told Ruth, "The classes give you a lift. Everybody makes you feel good. It's like, you make mistakes and it's okay to make mistakes; if you did something wrong, you just do it over."[411]

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[408] *We Are the Roots*, p. 72.
[409] Cathleen Perez interview, p. 26.
[410] Rick Surpin interview, p. 101.
[411] Vivian Carrion interview, p. 41.

The training also encouraged cooperation and discouraged trainees from undermining each other. "For instance, laughing at your classmates when they're struggling with getting a demo. What we expect you to do is to go over there and help them with it, not stand back and laugh at them."[412]

The style of management was intended to model respect for workers. Rick told us that, as the word got around that anyone could walk into the president's office and he would try to do something about their problem, it led to "a process of believing that I worked for them." It's "the thousand little acts and the consistency between them that make all the difference in the world."[413]

But it wasn't just style that made CHCA management radically different from a conventional company. Of course it was essential that clients receive the care they need. But within that constraint, work assignments were organized for the benefit of the HHAs. Coordinators turned themselves inside out to make job assignments with the goal of providing full-time work for those who wanted it, thus turning an insecure, casualized job into a regular one.

Workers were assured they would not be penalized for bringing problems to their coordinators. Many, though not all, seemed to believe it. One told us, "If I don't like something, I don't disrespect anyone. But I call Adria, who right now is my coordinator, and I go to see her and talk to her. If she doesn't resolve the issue, well I got to Jeanie [head of patient services] until she resolves it. If I want work, I go and plant myself in the middle of the coordinators, 'Give me work, give me work, give me work.' If they have it, they give it to me, and if they don't, they tell me, 'I don't have any.'"[414]

Employees can buy shares in the coop out of their wages and become owners, eligible to vote for the board of directors and receive dividends out of company earnings. But this was only one many ways CHCA tried to create a relation of "ownership" between workers and the company. In Rick's view, the board of directors, a majority of whom are elected by the employee owners, has absolute legal control. "But I believe that the politics and legality are based in a social community, that it's totally different when people know one another and have expectations of one another and talk in the hallways as well as vote in a booth."[415]

In the early days, Rick remembered, there were lots of "hallway discussions," and the life of the company took place in the hall, not in individual offices. "There was a sense of involvement, even though it was clear that Peggy and I made final decisions."[416] As the company grew, it created "work teams" out of the groups who had gone through training together. As it grew still larger, workers in each of five geographical regions started

[412] DeVore interview, p. 99.
[413] P. 73.
[414] Juana Gomez interview, p. 53
[415] P. 85.
[416] P. 76.

meeting together and electing representatives to a "Worker Council." In addition CHCA established a Workforce Development Unit to promote participation.[417]

Managers went to extraordinary lengths to let workers learn how the company runs. At the worker-owner assembly, the director of finance regularly supplemented oral presentations and written handouts with a game "based on whatever the theme seems to be for the company at the moment." Once, "We did 'The Price is Right' and guessed the company's revenue." At other times she organized games where "you give people play money and you have to go around the room and spend the money at different stations to show how the company spends its money."[418]

Like any business, CHCA sells a commodity in a market. But it has its own characteristic ways of dealing with that reality. CHCA's original purpose was to create good jobs for a particular segment of the community, and it has resolutely closed its ears to "market signals" telling it to do otherwise. For example, a company seeking to maximize its profit would probably have sought a niche emphasizing higher skilled employment; CHCA has steadfastly focused instead on creating employment for home health aides.[419]

CHCA has also pursued strategies designed to change the market for its product. When it became clear that home health aide wages could not be further increased through company policies, it helped form the NYC Home Care Work Group to promote a restructuring of the industry that would provide higher reimbursement for workers.[420] More recently it has joined the Service Employees union; many of its workers participated in a citywide strike to raise wages for all home health aides. CHCA created an allied policy organization, the Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute, to challenge the instability and low pay of home care nationwide.

As we did our study, CHCA was creating its own long-term managed care organization called Independence Care System (ICS). ICS establishes in effect a "consumer/worker co-op" designed "to retain the worker co-op for providing the service, but to have consumers drive what they want, and to have an organizational format for reconciling where those things don't meet exactly."[421]

The creation of ICS was driven primarily by the goal of making good jobs for paraprofessionals. As Rick put it, "We've created our own market, so we now have control over market opportunities that we didn't have before. We'll have lots of people to provide jobs for and longer hour jobs and there'll be possibilities for upgrading that just weren't there before."[422]

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[417] P. 93.
[418] 78.
[419] P. 93.
[420] P. 11.
[421] Rick Surpin, p. 95.
[422] P. 94-5.

Indeed, ICS was created in defiance of market signals. Rick told us, "No one else wants to serve the same population we're doing [people with physical disabilities]. Everybody looks at this as a population that's incredibly difficult, and why bother? It's not worth the money, and you won't make a lot of money on them. And that's true and we don't care. We will do a lot of home care with it."[423]

CHCA had plenty of remaining tensions and problems. Many revolved around the pressing need for rapid growth in an industry undergoing chaotic consolidation. CHCA veterans at all levels worried incessantly about how to keep the culture and community they prized as it grew from an organization of one or two hundred to a projected workforce of more than a thousand. (As of 2010, CHCA had 1,600 employees.) Salary levels have been raised at the top to attract highly qualified managers; I know from Seymour Specialty Wire that this can undermine the sense of common interest within a workplace.

I was struck by the extent to which CHCA accepted that, under the conditions that prevailed, the various goals of the organization and the interests of various groups were likely to be in partial conflict. Peggy Powell commented on the organization's perennial conflict between the personal development needs of potential employees and the business needs of the company:

> Where do you put your emphasis? And the limited amount of time resources you have? Are you a company that's providing a business and a service, or are you an organization that's designed to grow people, build people, empower people to do whatever? I say the tension won't go away.[424]

At the same time, CHCA regularly worked to reduce such conflicts. For example, as financial pressures increased, the company raised its hiring standards. Peggy commented, "I'm not in disagreement with that, except I feel and felt like, if our goal is to empower, and is to really provide jobs for this population, then we have to figure out another strategy to continue to serve that group, to not just completely slam the door." So CHCA began working with other community-based groups "to have them do the job readiness, the recruitment" for those with multiple barriers to immediate employment.[425]

I saw CHCA as trying to address many of the problems that had brought tragedy to Seymour Specialty Wire. It explicitly defined its objectives as different from those of profit-maximizing companies. It recognized that employee ownership was of limited significance unless the role of employees in work itself was transformed. It recognized that conflict among interests and cultures was ongoing and needed to be addressed rather than just condemned. It recognized that markets posed major problems that couldn't always be addressed by changing the company, and therefore had to be addressed by changing the market.

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[423] P. 94. For ICS, see also pp 12-13 and 110-111.
[424] P. 88.
[425] P. 89.

These features helped CHCA to survive and grow. They were not enough, however, to secure decent wages and benefits. (I saw tears well up in managers' eyes as they talked about their inability to get adequate wages for their employees.) Nor did they provide protection from the unremitting pressures of a gyrating market. Decent wages and institutional security will require further changes in the market. But CHCA does provide a sketch of one way that work can be organized to reduce domination and disorder.

## Social criteria

One day in the early 1990s I got a call out of the blue from Juan Figuaroa, a progressive Connecticut state senator whom I had met briefly at a conference of New England labor leaders and those they considered their community allies held annually at the UAW conference center in Black Lake, Michigan. For no reason I could discern, Juan asked me to serve on his informal "think tank." I agreed.

Our initial focus was on trying to limit the damage of Clinton-era welfare reform. But Connecticut was in the midst of a devastating economic crisis, and Juan was easily persuaded that we also needed to develop a positive program for jobs.

I scoured the landscape for possible models and found a few. I of course drew on the experience of the NVP; I looked at the inspiring network of coops and economic institutions that had developed in Mondragon; and I discovered an economic development agency in Maine that was supporting local, community-based development. But the model that appealed to me most was the Greater London Enterprise Board that had been set up by the radical wing of the British Labor Party – one of the "provocations" that led Margaret Thatcher to virtually eliminate local government in Britain. With very limited resources, the GLEB decided to target support to enterprises that met stringent social criteria, including socially useful products and a voice for workers in management. Where possible it favored coops and other democratically-owned companies.[426]

All these efforts, whether governmental, quasi-governmental, or independent, seemed to combine provision of capital with provision of expert technical assistance. I developed a preliminary plan for an organization to provide these resources to community-based enterprises in impoverished parts of the state. I tried to smuggle in the GLEB approach to social criteria for investment. Indeed, I suggested 17 (!) criteria for evaluating proposals:[427]

1. Provision of meaningful employment for un- and under-employed individuals in communities with high rates of unemployment and poverty.

2. Development of production and management capacities in the workforce.

3. Demonstration of broad community support.

4. Mobilization of community resources.

5. Mobilization of additional sources of capital.

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[426] The Greater London Council published an impressive series of strategy documents, notably *London Industrial Strategy* (London: Greater London Council, 1985). For an account of the GLC's economic initiatives, see Maureen Mackintosh and Hilary Wainwright, eds., *A Taste of Power: The Politics of Local Economics* (London: Verso, 1987)

[427] Memo, March 22, 1993.

6. Production of a good or service which meets a need in the state of Connecticut which is not adequately met at present.

7. Ability to become self-sustaining.

8. Capability of applicant to fulfill the plan.

9. Potential for future growth or replication.

10. Contribution to enhancement of the Connecticut environment.

11. Accountability to citizens of the local community.

12. Accountability to grantor for fulfillment of plan.

13. Vigorous affirmative action in employment policies.

14. Acceptance of basic rights of workers to self-expression and self-organization.

15. Conformity to the *Connecticut State Policies Plan for Conservation and Development*.

16. Contribution to local, regional, and state strategic economic plans.

17. Provision of markets to other Connecticut enterprises.

While these may read like a laundry list, in my mind they were intended to plant the seeds of a new approach to economic development based on decentralized community initiative, cooperation, democratic participation, economic and social planning, and the coordination of social labor with social need.

Juan made an alliance with Jeff Davis, a state legislator from an impoverished rural area in Northeastern Connecticut who was chair of the planning committee, based on including poor rural as well as poor urban areas. We organized briefings for the network of progressive organizations and legislators that operated in the state capital, primarily under the aegis of a coalition organization with the mellifluous title Legislative Electoral Action Project (LEAP).[428]

Meanwhile, Connecticut's economy was crashing and its small businesses experiencing a credit crunch that was driving many of them out of business. (Only later did I put two and two together and realized that the credit crunch was the other side of the globalization of capital markets and the flow of funds to "emerging markets" that was so highly touted at the time.) We heard from reliable sources that our maverick independent

[428] For the history of LEAP, see Bruce Shapiro, "Connecticut LEAP: A New Electoral Strategy" in Brecher and Costello, *Building Bridges*.

Governor Lowell Weicker had met with the state's bankers and demanded that they end the credit crunch. When they refused, we were told he had sputtered, "If you won't lend, I will!" Shortly thereafter he announced that he would establish something called "Urbank" to make loans to urban small businesses.

We began meeting with the governor's staff. They had had a plan drawn up by a consultant, but in a lot of ways they actually liked our plan better. We melded the two together with little loss. I was amazed by how much of our original proposal got through. Then the day I had long dreaded arrived: A revision came back from the Governor's staff without the social criteria. I tried, though with little hope, to fire up my allies for a fight. Then with considerable trepidation I raised the question with the Governor's negotiator. Oh, it's just a drafting error, she replied; we want social criteria!

I didn't get all 17, but the final bill did include seven goals: job creation and skill development for the unemployed; leveraging of private and community investment; community participation in decision-making; establishing of self-sustaining enterprises; improving the environment; promoting affirmative action, equal employment opportunities, and minority owned businesses; and coordination with Connecticut's environmentally and socially progressive *State Plan for Conservation and Development*.

We agreed that the program would be non-governmental and that its board would represent the state, private investors, and the poor communities where it would work. My biggest concern was my inability to figure out an appropriate way for those communities to be represented. I hoped to find some equivalent to the role of labor unions as bargaining agents for workers. I went around the country to a number of conferences and workshops asking if anyone knew or could come up with a good model, but to no avail. I didn't like the final decision that legislative leaders would appoint "persons of low or moderate income" residing in targeted communities or "representatives of non-profit organizations the primary purpose of which is to serve low and moderate income, unemployed or underemployed residents" of targeted neighborhoods to comprise at least one-third of the Board. But I had nothing better to propose.

The Community Economic Development Program was passed by the Connecticut legislature in June, 1993. It was designed to create jobs and stem community deterioration in the state's poorer urban and rural areas by providing technical and financial assistance for individuals, businesses, worker coops, community-based organizations, and community development corporations.

In a commentary piece explaining the program, I wrote that it is based on "supporting the initiative of individuals and groups in our communities."[429] It should make it possible

> for a group of parents on welfare to organize a cooperative daycare center to make it easier to seek employment. For a mechanic fixing cars on the street to open a small garage and hire and train helpers. For a community group to provide home healthcare to elderly residents so they can stay in their own homes. For a city

[429] Jeremy Brecher, "How to grow the economy," *Hartford Courant*, July 18, 1993.

> agency to hire and train unemployed young people to remove lead from residential neighborhoods. For an entrepreneur to start a company to reprocess recycled material or to service the state's growing number of electric cars.

I argued that

> Connecticut and its impoverished communities are filled with unmet needs for housing, education, healthcare, transportation, environmental improvement, and infrastructure development. We have un- and underemployed people eager to work. This program offers a way to put those people to work meeting those needs." And I asked, "Isn't that a better use for public money than trying to lure casinos, malls, defense contracts, and sports arenas or throwing it at companies with no guarantee of benefit to the state?[430]

The CEDF has now been up and running for nearly two decades. Unfortunately I haven't been able to follow up on its work. (I once wrote a grant proposal to evaluate its effectiveness, but I was turned down for funding.) Every once in a while I run across its track. For example, it helped fund an NVP project to clean up polluted "brownfield" industrial sites in the Naugatuck Valley. (The NVP staff complained of excessive red tape.) And a friend of mine who was a neighborhood economic development organizer for poor neighborhoods in New Haven once called me up and asked if I knew anything about the origin of this neat organization he had discovered whose mission was to promote economic development in poor communities – not knowing that I had had anything to do with starting it.

A few years later when I was working part-time for Congressman Bernie Sanders I persuaded him to explore a similar approach at a national level. I left his office before the idea matured, but he subsequently held hearings and submitted legislation to create an agency to provide loans and technical assistance to coops and other employee-owned companies.[431] As Senator Sanders he revived the idea in 2009 in response to the Great Recession.

The CEDF was one of many experiments in transferring capital, knowledge, and other resources to those who would use them to strengthen local community economics. In itself it was just a modest response to a concrete set of economic problems in a local setting. But it also suggests one possible approach to reducing the differentiation of economic resources and economic power without re-concentrating them in the government.

[430] "How to grow the economy." Check against final published text.
[431] HR 2969, US Employee Ownership Bank Act, 2003.

## Let's not have a party

Political parties almost by definition aim to take state power. When they are not in power, they present a critique of those who are, formulate a program for what the government should do, and appeal to the public to put them in power instead. This pattern holds for both parliamentary and revolutionary parties.

Is it possible for a convergence of social movements to perform some of the classical functions of an opposition party without the goal of taking state power? Can that promote common preservation without leading to some of the problems of domination and cooptation that have haunted political parties that took state power? Over the years I've tried to explore the possibility that it can.

I first got the idea from the German New Left, some of whom defined themselves as an "Extra-Parliamentary Opposition."[432] I tried without much success to propose it as a vehicle for the US New Left to implement the goal of participatory democracy.[433]

It seemed to me that something like an extra-parliamentary opposition had appeared from time to time in the US, without it being called or even clearly conceived as that. I wrote,

> Movements based on non-violent direct action, like the labor movement in the 1930s and the civil rights and anti-Vietnam war movements of the 1960s, have often been the real 'opposition party' in America. For such movements to take the next step and constitute themselves as a bloc around a program of basic social changes does not necessarily require that they function in the electoral arena. Indeed, the formation of such an oppositional bloc around a radical program to be implemented by mass direct action was very much the conception on which Martin Luther King was operating at the time of his death.[434]

My old SDS and *Root & Branch* comrade Stanley Aronowitz drew on Antonio Gramsci's idea of a "historic bloc" to develop a parallel approach.[435] For Gramsci, a bloc is something more than a coalition in which different groups agree to support each other's demands. Rather, it is a collaboration of different groups built up around a program that aims to meet the needs of each by reshaping certain basic structures of society. While

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[432] Frequently referred to as the "APO." See Nick Thomas, *Protest Movements in 1960s West Germany* (New York: Berg, 2003).

[433] Jeremy Brecher, "Book Review: Michael Albert & Robin Hahnel's *Marxism and Socialist Theory* and *Socialism Today and Tomorrow*," *Workers' Democracy* Summer, 1984.

[434] Jeremy Brecher, "Book Review: *The Crisis of Historical Materialism* and *Working Class Hero*" by Stanley Aronowitz," *Our Generation*, Fall-Winter, 1985-6.

[435] Brecher "Book Review" of Aronowitz. Stanley's concept differed from Gramsci's in that he explicitly rejected the notion that such a bloc be based on the hegemony of one group, such as the working class, which provides the leadership and integrating ideology for members of the bloc. Rather, each of the groups that participate in the bloc should draw on its own culture, conduct its own dialogue, and participate in the bloc on its own terms. Stanley took different positions in different writings on how such a bloc should relate to the political arena.

coalitions shift, blocs tend to be more long-lasting. An example was the bloc of labor, African Americans, ethnic groups, and a fraction of capital that was based on Keynesian eeconomic policies, expansion of US global power, and the welfare state. It developed around the New Deal and persisted for half a century.[436] Stanley proposed a "new historic bloc" based around a much more radical if somewhat nebulous program.[437]

In the late 1970s, I met by chance a young Polish art history student in New Haven. She told me that Poles had started holding illegal meetings in their homes, creating what came to be called the "flying university." Police regularly broke the meetings up and beat up their participants. They went on holding the meetings anyway. This was the first premonitory tremor I heard of the earthquake that would lead ultimately to the end of Communism in Europe and the Soviet Union.

When the first general strike broke out in Gdansk, it was hard to find out from outside what was really going on. Fortunately, I knew Andrej Tymoski, an American radical of Polish background, who was avidly following events in Poland. I was working with a little pamphleteering group in New Haven called Commonwork; we asked Andrej to write up whatever he could about the movement in Poland. I'm proud that the pamphlet we published called "Who Are the Workers of Polish Solidarity and What Do They Want?" was one of the first statements from the American left welcoming the Solidarity movement.

Shortly thereafter a collection of writings by Adam Michnik, a prominent activist in the democratic opposition, came out in English under the title *Letters from Prison.*[438] It gave me a new understanding not only of the events in Poland, but also of what such an independent opposition might be. I tried to use what I learned from the Polish experience, first for social movements in the US, then for the new movements that developed to challenge economic globalization.[439]

In the mid-1970s, the milieu that had spawned the flying university also gave birth to a variety of other groups that came to be recognized as the "independent opposition" or "democratic opposition." Michnik was active in KOR, initially formed as the "Worker Defense Committee" and then renamed "Social Self-Defense." KOR, initiated primarily by radical intellectuals, began providing financial, legal, and medical assistance to workers and families who had suffered repression at the hands of the regime. Its members, who insisted on operating openly in public, were soon blacklisted, beaten, and imprisoned. They nonetheless persisted, and nurtured many of the networks, strategies, and ideas that came to fruition in Solidarity.

Michnik defined the goal of the independent opposition as "self-limiting revolution." It aimed for neither a mere change of policy by the present rulers nor the replacement of

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[436] Brecher "Book Review" of Aronowitz, p. 205B.
[437] Brecher "Book Review" of Aronowitz, p. 205B.
[438] Adam Michnik, *Letters from Prison and other Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).
[439] In 1987 I wrote an extended essay titled "Self-Limiting Revolution: Polish Lessons for American Radicals." I was never able to get it published, but I cannibalized its ideas in many subsequent writings.

those rulers by a new ruling group. Rather, it aimed for a devolution of power through which ordinary people in all spheres of society would govern their own lives and labor. The "revolution" they advocated was "self-limiting" because it sought not to seize power but to disseminate it.

"Self-limiting revolution" developed in Poland in response to the inadequacy of both revolutionary and reformist paradigms. In contrast to most reformism, it looked to a continuous struggle against the power of the existing authorities, based on mass action by the population. But in contrast to classic revolutionary doctrine, it would not orient to a single climactic struggle between the forces of progress and reaction. Nor would it aim to establish a new state to replace the old one. Rather – and here the new strategy was linked to the new goals – its activities "do not aim to win power but to help society organize itself through the gradual emancipation of groups and individuals."[440]

Michnik strongly emphasized the need for an opposition that remains independent of the regime in its identity, ideas, and organization. He described how previous reform movements which operated within the framework of the Polish state and the Communist Party were led by their position to back the party and state against popular movements when conflict intensified. He argued that a democratic opposition must be free in such situations to support those who are being beaten against those who are doing the beating.

But such an independent opposition needs to resist the temptation to become a revolutionary sect or conspiracy. Rather its goal must be to encourage the people to organize themselves, develop their own norms and values, and begin to assert their own influence over all aspects of social life.

The independent opposition

> must be constantly and incessantly visible in public life, must create political facts by organizing mass actions, must formulate alternative programs . . . Every act of defiance help us build the framework of democratic socialism, which should not be merely or primarily a legal institutional structure but a real, day-to-day community of free people.[441]

Both goal and strategy implied that the transformation of society was not something to achieve in one revolutionary cataclysm, but rather something to be built day by day in the expansion of the spheres of self-management and the progressive limitation of the autonomy of the rulers.

The development of an independent workers movement and the evolution of the Catholic Church from an anti-Communism that sought to restore pre-war Poland to a defense of civil liberties and workers rights opened the potential for a new alliance with the independent opposition. These were indeed the forces that came together in Solidarity.

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[440] Michnik, p. 158.
[441] Michnik, p. 147-8.

Michnik laid out a sophisticated strategy for how the democratic opposition should relate to potential allies, the regime, and those in between. "Reform" forces in the regime should not be regarded as allies of the democratic opposition, since their goal was to perpetuate the power of the regime. But they should be encouraged; a pragmatic, opportunistic ruling group following its own rational self-interest would represent an improvement in Polish life, and could serve as a bargaining partner for the opposition. However, "The only sensible way of supporting the 'liberal-reformist' faction in the party is to exert pressure on the authorities as a whole."[442]

Michnik promoted synergy among those who create independent institutions, those who attempt to confront directly the power of the authorities, and those who attempt to win over official institutions from within. Each can serve as part of a process by which the power of the authorities is limited while social control from below is expanded: "Should people act by creating independent institutions unrecognized by the authorities or by struggling inside official institutions with the aim of winning them over? This question resembles the classic problem, 'Should I wash my hands or my feet?' Both!"[443]

The free press created by the Polish movement should assert its right to publish, illegally if necessary, rather than negotiating for authorization with the authorities. Unions, on the other hand, should negotiate with their employers where necessary to do their job. He even raised the possibility of negotiations between the opposition and the regime for cooperation on a national economic program. But he emphasized that all such cooperation needs to be based on an awareness that the regime bargained not on the basis of common norms or the interests of society but rather of its own power interests.

Michnik put great emphasis on the importance of those who are neither part of the regime nor active supporters of the opposition. "The opposition's successes and its very existence remain possible only because those who decided to take the gravest risks do not separate themselves with insurmountable barriers from those who may help them actively from time to time."[444]

The Polish independent opposition experienced an enormous but ironic success. Against their own initial theory and intentions, they actually did take state power. They did not

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[442] Michnik p. 151. My first project when I came to the Institute for Policy Studies was to study the historical interaction between progressive groups within government, particularly within the US Congress, and independent insurgencies outside the electoral arena. See Jeremy Brecher, "A Note on the Relation of Radicalism to Liberalism," in Tom Christoffel, David Finkelhor, and Dan Gilbarg, Up Against the American Myth (New York, Hold, Rinehart, and Winston, 1970). In my review of Aronowitz I wrote, "The periods of greatest social progress in the U.S., and of the most progressive national administrations, have been ones in which mass social movements have operated outside the electoral arena out of the control of liberal political mediators. Out of the dialectic of Republicans and abolitionists, New Deal and labor, unemployed and elderly movements, New Frontier/Great Society and the civil rights movements developed major social changes. Two dynamics account for this. First, the establishment feared the threat of social disruption and instability implicit in the popular movements, and were prepared to tolerate politicians who would aim to control them by making concessions to them. Second, liberal politicians, fearing competition for their own mass base, had to move to the left." P. 216B.

[443] Michnik 152-3.

[444] Michnik, p. 153.

establish the kind of decentralized self-government that Michnik had envisioned, however, but rather a conventional capitalist democracy. They triggered a ricocheting process that in little more than a decade resulted in the fall of Communist regimes from Berlin to Vladivostok. While many leaders of the independent opposition became officials in the new government, Michnik supported the new regime but himself remained on the outside, running a respected but irreverent newspaper.

The Polish experience and Michnik's interpretation of it was very much in Tim's and my minds in the late 1980s as we worked on *Building Bridges: The Emerging Grassroots Coalition of Labor and Community*. The new coalitions resulted from the growing powerlessness of labor and other non-elite groups within the US political system. That had required different groups to reach out to each other for support. We saw the resulting labor-community coalitions as potentially the kernel of an independent opposition. We argued that such alliances could develop a common program based on a mutually-beneficial restructuring of social power and a joint strategy to force dominant elites to accept it.[445]

I portrayed the Naugatuck Valley Project as an example in miniature. It jealously guarded its independence from the local political establishments, yet negotiated when necessary with any powerholders it could bring to the bargaining table. It developed its own alternative program for the economic future of the region. And it attempted to implement parts of that plan by mobilizing support both among allies and the general public.

I also drew on many of these ideas in trying to think about the convergence of social movements from around the world that we called globalization from below. "Globalization from below has now established itself as a global opposition, representing the interests of people and the environment worldwide. It has demonstrated that, even when governments around the world are dominated by corporate interests, the world's people can act to pursue their common interests.[446]

Our proposals in *Globalization from Below* were in a sense a globalization of Michnik's and others' ideas about an independent, democratic opposition. The opposition's goal should be a process of democratization at every level from local to global. It should mobilize people to pursue this goal in all available arenas. It should bring an alliance of social forces into an "historic bloc" around a mutually beneficial program for social transformation. It should remain independent of all governments, but should enter into negotiations with governments and international institutions where it could do so from a position of strength and without giving up its own independence.[447] The form proposed for a "Human Survival Movement" in Part 7 below grows out of this approach.

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[445] We didn't explicitly refer to the labor-community coalitions as an independent opposition or new historic bloc. However, in my Aronowitz "Book Review" I wrote that convening a "new historical bloc" was on the agenda and that "Its elements can been seen in the various community/labor alliances, support committees, and 'rainbow coalitions' that have emerged around the country." P. 213B.

[446] *Globalization from Below*, p. 16.

[447] Related ideas have appeared in a great variety of venues. The Zapatista movement in Mexico, as articulated by sub-commandante Marcus, presented a program for Mexican democratization and aimed to

These experiences suggest at least the possibility of independent, non-party oppositions composed of coordinated networks of social forces that pursue radical democratization by encouraging action "from below." Such independent oppositions can foster public discussion of alternatives to the status quo; develop programs for social transformation that integrate the interests of varied groups; help knit together a social bloc composed of significant social forces; and undermine the domination of established governments and elites. The problems with such an approach are no doubt myriad, but it does demonstrate that there is at least one alternative to strategies of reform and revolution based on parties that take state power through election or insurrection. Perhaps with further experiment it can be improved.

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mobilize forces for its implementation while eschewing any attempt to take state power. There have also been a number of efforts, such as the German Green party and the Brazilian PT, to enter the electoral arena while continuing to function, or to allow associated movements to function, as an external, non-parliamentary opposition. Unfortunately, these efforts so far seem to be subject to the traditional problems of political party cooptation that led many radicals to shift from parliamentary to non-parliamentary forms of opposition in the first place.

## The NAFFE network

In 1972, soon after I finished *Strike!*, I got a call from a budding labor historian named Kathy Stone who had been commissioned by two radical economics professors to prepare a history of job structures in the steel industry.[448] We became friends and from her research I learned that the then-prevalent idea of a job was actually a fairly recent historical creation.

Until the rise of the modern corporation in the late 19th century, most work was what we would today call contingent work: Both unskilled laborers and skilled artisans moved frequently from employer to employer. But the emerging large corporations, led by the steel industry, gradually began to construct job definitions, job ladders, training programs, personnel departments, and employer seniority policies that established a pattern of stable, steady work and the possibility of advancement within a corporation. In the 1940s, this pattern was reinforced by the legalization of collective bargaining and the wartime labor policies of the Federal government. The result was what economists call "internal labor markets" in which individuals typically remained within a firm for much of their working life.[449] The modern "steady job" provided a previously unknown stability to working class life and undergirded the oft-touted "middle class" lifestyle of American workers.

The 1980s saw a historic reversal of this trend. As I wrote in 1984, "The U.S. economy is going through a transformation that is fundamentally altering the situation of American working people. It is removing the majority of workers from relatively secure job structures and thrusting them into a semi-casualized labor market."[450]

Tim Costello saw the erosion of "steady work" as a transforming force in working class life. In the early 1990s he began trying to figure out how to make it the focus of an organizing campaign. I helped hook him up with an organization that wanted to support some kind of campaign around jobs and in 1996 they formed the Massachusetts Campaign on Contingent Work (CCW).

Organizing contingent workers posed big problems. Contingent workers ranged from office temp workers to immigrant day laborers to high-tech consultants. They did not have an identity as contingent workers; rather, they were workers of the most diverse kinds who happened to be in contingent jobs. High turnover and dispersed workplaces made organizing contingent workers notoriously difficult. Unionized workers were often hostile to contingent workers, often viewing them as scabs. Demands for improvement in

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[448] Katherine Stone, "The Origins of Job Structures in the Steel Industry," in *Root & Branch*. Kathy is now a well-known professor of labor law at UCLA.

[449] Research on job structures burgeoned at that time. Under the auspices of a group of researchers called the Work Relations Group I prepared a review of the resulting literature in a variety of disciplines. "Uncovering the Hidden History of the American Workplace" *Review of Radical Political Economics*, Vol. 10, No. 4.

[450] Jeremy Brecher, "Crisis Economy: Born-Again Labor Movement?" *Monthly Review*, March, 1984.

conditions for contingent workers seemed to conflict with demands for the abolition of contingent work. Ambiguity about who was the real employer – the labor agency who supplied the workers or the company in which they worked – made it hard to hold employers accountable to workers, public pressure, or law.

I remember sitting on Tim's porch in Boston trying to figure out a strategy. There wasn't much to go on. It dawned on us that most of the workers who made up the "unemployed councils" of the Great Depression, which I had written about in *Strike!*, probably were working intermittently whenever they could, so that they were really contingent workers; we lifted whatever strategies we could from them. Some unions represented workers who moved frequently among employers, and we tried to learn from their experience. There were also non-union organizations, such as the working women's organization Nine to Five, that organized workers on a non-workplace basis. But none of these provided an off-the-shelf model. The workshop had to come up with something new.

CCW started by developing an interpretive frame for the issue. It defined contingent work not just as a concern of contingent workers but as a social issue that affected other workers and society as a whole. It provided a historical frame that recounted the rise and fall of the "steady job." It identified "contingent staffing policies" as a specific employer strategy for playing workers off against each other: "Employers discriminate against workers in non-standard jobs." It asserted a common interest among different kinds of contingent workers, other workers, and society at large in blocking a "race to the bottom" that destroyed security and job protections for all.

This interpretation provided the basis for a strategy based on a cross-class movement of people with diverse interests who nonetheless shared a common interest in eliminating discrimination against workers in contingent jobs. The strategy was not to abolish part-time or temporary jobs but to fight for equal pay, benefits, and rights for all workers. "Equality will help remove cost as an incentive for companies to create contingent jobs."[451]

Where unions had clout, they needed to oppose multi-tier agreements that made contingent workers second-class citizens and bargain for equal rights and access to regular jobs for contingent workers. (In 1997 UPS workers provided a sterling example by making such demands for part-time workers the focus of a strike by nearly 200,000 drivers and package handlers, most of them full-timers.[452]) Where possible, they needed to organize contingent workers.

Where unionization was not a realistic possibility, other tactics were necessary. We knew about the Maquiladora Coalition and other campaigns that were then promoting codes of conduct to restrain international sweatshops, and we proposed to adapt the idea

[451] *A Workplace Divided: Understanding Contingent Work for Activists* (Boston: Campaign on Contingent Work, nd).
[452] See *Strike!* Revised and Updated edition, pp. 358-362.

to contingent work.[453] Nine to Five had pioneered campaigns targeting abusive employers backed by public pressure and direct action.

Contingent work was promoted by gaps in the laws protecting workers and by legislation that enabled employers to evade their normal responsibilities when it came to contingent workers. Defining contingent work as a broad social issue made a legislative strategy feasible. CCW drafted a Massachusetts Workplace Equity Bill that would ban discrimination against contingent workers in wages and benefits. CCW strategy did not naively assume that government would act because it represented the interests of the people, but it did view government and politicians as viable targets for organized pressure.[454]

Meanwhile, groups concerned with contingent work were springing up all over the country and unions and other existing organizations were being forced to grapple with the issue. In 1997, delegates from 24 unions, community-based organizations, legal service agencies, advocacy organizations, and public policy groups met to share information and talk strategy. These groups were interested in forming a national organization and had potential foundation support for doing so, but they were fragmented in ways that made that difficult.

These groups addressed different issues, ranging from job security provisions in union contracts to street corner hiring conditions for day laborers. Their constituencies ranged from unionized construction workers to high tech professionals and from immigrant organizers to socially concerned religious activists. Some were local organizations, some national. Their organizational forms were diverse. Most had internal planning processes that could not possibly be subordinated to a higher decision-making body. All had their own structures and agendas.

Several possibilities for structuring an organization were considered. It might be a unified national organization with a strong executive board, a centralized decision making structure located in a national office, and a clearly defined national program. Most such organizations have individual memberships. Local groups function as branches of the national organization with some autonomy to carry out local campaigns but with the expectation that they will devote considerable energy to the agreed upon national program. This model was quickly rejected; they were creating an organization of organizations, none of which was likely to cede any significant decision-making power about campaigns or strategies to a national governing board.

An alternative might be a lobbying or "trade association" type organization. These organizations generally produce information for members; hold annual conventions; deal

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[453] Our ideas about codes of conduct also drew on labor history. Early trade unions had enforced work rules not through collective bargaining but through "industrial legislation" in which the union made its own rules and unilaterally imposed them on employers. The New Deal's National Recovery Administration developed industrial codes for wages, hours, and working conditions that had to be met for products to receive the NRA's "Blue Eagle" seal.

[454] I helped develop a later articulation of this strategy in *Guide to Strategic Planning for Legislation on Contingent Work* (Boston: North American Alliance for Fair Employment, September, 2002).

with the press; and conduct lobbying on behalf of the groups' shared interests. This model was rejected because it is too centralized and would do little to promote grassroots activity or movement building.

The new organization might be a coalition, bringing representatives of organizations together to develop a joint program around a limited set of mutually agreed upon objectives. This structure was rejected because NAFFE members felt it was impossible to boil down a complex issue like contingent work to a few specific campaigns.

Tim and I had been pondering and experimenting with organizational questions since our SDS days and we had written extensively about them.[455] NAFFE provided an opportunity to try out some of these ideas in practice. Indeed, NAFFE, as we wrote, "explicitly set out to serve as a social laboratory in which to test experimentally the best ways to organize and manage itself as a structured network."[456]

The era of globalization had generated a wave of social movement experimentation with new forms of organization and the beginnings of theoretical reflection on them. The trendy term for describing these new forms was "network." The founders of the new organization tried to bring the emerging theoretical perspectives on networks to bear on their own concrete challenges.[457]

Tim and I were influenced in particular by the concept of "advocacy networks" developed by political scientists Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink in their book *Activists Beyond Borders*. They defined networks as "forms of organization characterized by voluntary, reciprocal and horizontal patterns of communication and exchange."[458] These networks could include NGOs, local social movements, foundations, the media, churches, trade unions, consumer organizations, intellectuals, parts of regional and

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[455] See Jeremy Brecher, Tim Costello, and Brendan Smith, *Globalization from Below: The Power of Solidarity*, Chapter 6. "Self-Organization from Below," especially 83-4 and 86-90. Brecher and Costello *Common Sense for Hard Times* (Second Edition), (Boston/New York: South End Press/Two Continents Publishing Group, 1977). Brecher and Costello, *Building Bridges: The Emerging Grassroots Alliance of Labor and Community* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990), especially pp. 332-334, "What Makes These Coalitions Different?"

[456] NAFFE, *Making Networks Work*. I helped draft several major NAFFE documents, which gave me a bird's eye view of the process. National Alliance for Fair Employment, *Contingent Workers Fight for Fairness* (Boston, NAFFE, 2000). North American Alliance for Fair Employment, *Guide to Strategic Planning for Legislation on Contingent Work* (Boston: NAFFE, 2002). North American Alliance on Contingent Work, *Making Networks Work: Preliminary observations from NAFFE's structured advocacy network* (Boston: NAFFE, 2003). *Outsource This?: American Workers, the Jobs Deficit and the Fair Globalization Solution* (Boston, NAFFE, 2004).

[457] We discussed, for example, Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999). Hilary Wainwright, *Arguments for a New Left: Answering the Free Market Right* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994). Diane Elson, "Market Socialism or Socializing the Market," *New Left Review*, 172, pp. 3-44. Alberto Melucci, *Challenging Codes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Walter W. Powell, "Neither Market nor Hierarchy: Network Forms of Organization," *Research in Organizational Behavior* 12 (1990).

[458] Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 8.

international inter-governmental organizations, and parts of the executive and/or parliamentary branches of governments.

Such networks, they argued, exchange information and support a dense nexus of communication among participants. They also develop a common language and frame issues for participants and the public.

Keck and Sikkink described "framing" as particularly central for advocacy networks. They defined framing as "conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action."[459] Indeed, they portrayed networks as defined primarily by their frames. Individuals and groups generally participate in a network to the extent that they accept its central frame.

Advocacy networks perform two functions. They provide a structure through which members can communicate, exchanging information, learning from each others' experiences, and informing each other of plans and intentions. But they also themselves serve as vehicles for action, as agents that initiate and conduct campaigns and other actions.

Advocacy networks functioned differently in campaigns than either conventional organizations or coalitions. There might be a lead organization and perhaps a formal coalition of supporters, but in practice most transnational campaigns emerged from planning within networks and were conducted by them, often across formal organizational lines.

Such campaigns were marked by what might be called cross-organizational team leadership. They reflected the comment of leadership theorist John Gardner that "In a tumultuous, swiftly changing environment, in a world of multiple, colliding systems, the hierarchical position of leaders within their own system is of limited value, because some of the most critically important tasks require lateral leadership – boundary-crossing leadership – involving groups over whom they have no control."[460]

Network participants can be highly diverse and may disagree on many matters, as long as they accept the network's defining frame of the issues that it addresses. Individuals can participate in them directly, whether or not they are formally affiliated through organizations. Segments of organizations can participate in them, and in the actions they launch, while other segments remain apart. They therefore allow the formation of new "concerted actors" that cut across the boundaries of existing organizations and communities.

The network form allows a coordinated social movement composed of relatively autonomous groupings. It eschews a sharp distinction between organizers and the rank and file. It is difficult to monopolize the flow of communication within networks or to

[459]Keck and Sikkink, p. 3.
[460] John Gardner, *On Leadership* (New York: Free Press, 1990), p. 98.

block its flow across organizational boundaries. Networks are resistant to leadership domination; they provide little opportunity for "extended authority"; their leaders are largely dependent on persuasion, rather than on control of scarce organizational resources or some form of muscle. When authority is delegated, it quickly expires, and is only renewed in the presence of active trust. Such a decentralized form also allows experimentation, which means that failures are less likely to be catastrophic for the movement as a whole.

With help from foundation-funded organizational consultant Paul Vandeventer,[461] CCW developed a proposal for what they called a "structured network." The group became the National (later North American) Alliance for Fair Employment. As the NAFFE Charter puts it, "The network structure promotes broad member participation in decision making, coordinates the strategies and actions of member organizations in common projects, locates the resources necessary to sustain those projects, and attempts to shape public discourse through media advocacy, scholarly research, public events, and other suitable activities."

Action Groups formed the foundation of the NAFFE network. Action Groups could be convened by two or more member organizations on the basis of a community of interest around a particular sector or issue. Action Groups were responsible for planning and implementing strategies in their sectors, consistent with the Charter. They created an annual action plan, reported to the NAFFE membership as a whole, and confered with the Coordinating Committee and National Office about their activities. Any two NAFFE members could also convene an Ad Hoc Committee to pursue specific tasks.

NAFFE had a Central Office, but instead of an Executive Director directing the work of the organization it was essentially a secretariat with Network Coordinators and support staff. The main functions of the Central Office were to support the Action Groups, provide information, and help the Coordinating Committee with administration and fundraising.

Decision making in NAFFE was based on the principle of subsidiarity: Decisions were made at a level as close as possible to those they affected. For instance, the Annual Meeting made decisions that affected all of NAFFE; the Action Groups made decisions that affected their various sectors, consistent with NAFFE basic strategy and frame as agreed on by the Annual Meeting. The Coordinating Committee made NAFFE-wide decisions between Membership Meetings. This helped decision making be both fast and democratic.

When Tim left NAFFE after eight years (1997-2005) to pursue global labor networking, it had more than 60 member groups, ranging from an AFL-CIO department to local organizations of immigrant day laborers and including members in Mexico and Canada. It had spawned several overlapping networks, including the major organization of academic contingent workers. It had provided information and support

[461] Paul Vandeventer and Myrna Mandell, *Networks that Work* (Los Angeles: Community Partners, 2007), includes a study of NAFFE as a "cooperative network."

for its members and also organized campaigns of its own. It had conducted negotiations with one of the largest global temp staffing agencies. It was recognized by the media as the primary representative of contingent workers. It had helped to reframe the way contingent work was seen locally and nationally.

NAFFE represented a response to the growing disorder created by de-regulation, unrestricted markets, the dis-integrated corporation, and neoliberal globalization. It illustrated the development of a shared representation through the construction of a historic frame and a definition of common interests. It exemplified the formation of a concerted actor across existing lines of division. At the same time it indicated how those who make up such a concerted actor can also remain independent actors on their own, retaining their ability to take initiative individually and collectively either through or separately from the organization as a whole. It provides one possible organizational model for encouraging the emergence of the kind of Human Survival Movement proposed in Part 7.

## Wither labor?

Tim Costello and I have spent nearly forty years trying to stimulate critical discussion of structural problems of the American labor movement. Much of my thinking regarding the abuse of power in organizations and ways of countering it comes from this experience.

Old-time printers' union locals were called chapels. If a grievance arose in a print shop the printers would stop work, convene the chapel, and decided what to do. Proprietors might fret and fume, but they knew that if they interfered the printers might go home instead of printing the next morning's newspaper. The power of the printers where they worked also gave them democratic control of their union; indeed, they were the union.[462]

Unions may have started as the self-coordination of workers. But they became progressively differentiated into leaders and rank and file. The national Bricklayers constitution of 1897 granted national officers "the entire control of all executive business of this Union, when not in session, viz. all grievances relating to and all strikes and lockouts, the settlement of all disputes between bosses or exchanges and members of this or Subordinate Unions, and the concurrence in the appointment of all special deputies or committees. They shall have full and complete control over all strikes."[463]

Such powers were defended as necessary to ensure workers acted together. But they made it possible for union officials to develop political machines. The typical national labor leader in the years between 1870 and 1895 held office for a year or two, then returned to life as a worker. Thereafter, "labor leader" became a full-time career. Between 1895 and 1920, half of national labor leaders held national office for 15 years or more. Authority that was granted to allow workers to better coordinate themselves became a means for their domination. Conventions and executive boards became creatures of top officials and dissent a basis for expulsion.

The American Federation of Labor was formed by such top labor oligarchs less as a way to represent the interests of all workers than as a means to reinforce their own fiefdoms. It divided unions by craft and gave each union "craft autonomy." Efforts to cooperate across craft lines or to advocate class solidarity were repressed via expulsion for "dual unionism." Monopoly unionism was furthered by the AFL principle of "exclusive jurisdiction" that became enshrined in American labor law in the 1930s as "exclusive bargaining rights." Despite splits and reunifications, the labor federations that succeeded the AFL – the CIO, the AFL-CIO, and Change to Win – followed substantially the same approach.

In *Common Sense for Hard Times*, Tim and I quoted *Business Week* that "today, a union is very much like a business set up to serve as legal agent for workers."[464] We described

[462] Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello, "The Sovereignty of the Workers," *Z*, February, 1989.
[463] "The Sovereignty of the Workers."
[464] *Common Sense for Hard Times*, p. 83.

the way in which the union in many auto plants had taken over the job of enforcing work discipline.[465] We argued that conventional union reform movements still left the union "a power separate from and often even opposed to the groups of people who actually work side by side on the job."[466] We also described a worker organized wildcat strike and a highly democratic local union that used quickie work stoppages to assert their power on the job.

When *Z* magazine was founded in 1987, Mike Albert and Lydia Sargent asked me to be its labor correspondent. In a series of articles, Tim and I laid out ideas for alternatives. In "The Sovereignty of the Workers" we described new forms of direct action on the job, such as 500 workers in a Wentzville, Missouri General Motors plant who assembled for a work team meeting, then surrounded the in-plant union office and demanded union action to combat speed-up and violation of safety rules. Told that the union shop chairman was out of town, they elected their own representatives on the spot and persuaded management to negotiate with them.[467] It reminded me of the shop floor initiative and worker autonomy of the earliest sitdown strikes.

We described a reform movement that used "Auto Bargaining Accountability Sessions" to force union delegates to discuss union policy with the rank and file. We described various steps toward union democratization, such as union executive boards composed of rank and file workers rather than those on the union payroll.

We wrote, "The maldistribution of power within unions has two sides. One is the disempowerment of the rank and file. The other is the centralization of power within a bureaucratic leadership group." The question for proposed steps toward democratizations are "do they strengthen the ability of the rank and file to organize themselves in the workplace and do they make the union structure a vehicle for empowering the rank and file?"[468]

We argued that "at the core of the undemocracy of the labor movement" is "the disorganization and repression of rights of workers in the workplace itself." Direct action to assert basic human and constitutional rights in the workplace was the key to empowering workers in relation to their unions as well as their employers.

We advocated a reduction in the power gap between leaders and rank and file. The role of the union and its officials should be redefined to "supporting the empowerment of the rank and file, rather than acting on behalf of the rank and file."

Rank and file workers should assert "the right of direct communication and coordination with whomever they choose, and should demand support from national unions in

[465] *Common Sense for Hard Times*, p. 91.
[466] *Common Sense for Hard Times*, p. 99.
[467] Sovereignty, p. 95.
[468] Sovereignty, p. 96.

pursuing that right."[469] That should include relations with workers in other unions, community groups, and workers in other countries. This would lead the labor movement to evolve from "a cluster of strongly-bounded organizations, each internally dominated by centralized political machines and loosely bound together by the AFL-CIO leadership" to "a network of networks coordinating the action of working people in relation to workplaces, corporations, communities, and governments."

Democratization did not require that the labor movement abolish full-time staff or return to purely local organization. "There will always be a need for as well as a tension between specialization and participation, between large-scale coordination and direct control. Each must be given its due." Large-scale coordination requires "some centralization of power in the hands of representatives whose interests will never completely coincide with those they represent." But modern bureaucracies, including labor movements, have "tremendously over-concentrated power at the national level." Rank-and-file workers therefore "always need to organize themselves independently if they want to control the structures that are supposed to represent them."[470]

Labor historian David Montgomery once compared the AFL-CIO in the era of George Meany to a great snapping turtle, "hiding within its shell to shield the working class from contamination" and "snapping out" at those outside forces who ventured too close."[471] Tim and I began to see the emerging phenomena of community/labor coalitions as a means to break organized labor out of its rigid structural shell. "Cooperation with other movements is proving to be an important means for renewing the labor movement and overcoming some of its widely recognized ills, such as isolation from the growing female and minority segments of the workforce, lack of rank-and-file participation, and public perception of organized labor as a special interest group rather than an advocate for the needs of all working people."[472] We wrote two articles in *Z* on community labor coalitions that served as the starting point for the book *Building Bridges: The Emerging Grassroots Coalition of Labor and Community*.

Meanwhile, the labor movement was crashing. By 1995, the proportion of workers belonging to unions fell to 15.5 percent – the lowest level since 1936. Large strikes hit a fifty-year low – one-eighth the number two decades before.[473]

In 1995, SEIU president John Sweeney made an unprecedented challenge to the incumbent leadership of the AFL-CIO and successfully ran for president on an insurgent campaign for a "New Voice for American Workers" that would generate a "new labor movement." The centerpiece of his plan was to cajole member unions to put a far larger proportion of their resources into organizing.

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[469] We expanded on the theme of labor rights as basic human rights applied to the workplace in "Reforming Labor Law; Reforming Labor" *Z*, November, 1989, and other writings.
[470] Sovereignty, p. 96.
[471] Brecher and Costello, "A New Labor Movement in the Shell of the Old," *Z,* April, 1996, p. 45.
[472] *Building Bridges*, p. 10.
[473] *Strike!* Revised edition, p. 305.

In a series of articles, Tim and I welcomed signs of life in the AFL-CIO, but warned that "What needs changing goes far beyond the AFL-CIO as a national union center." The US labor movement's "focus on collective bargaining," its "definitions of bargaining units," its "divisions among unions," its "notions of seniority," its "limited repertoire of tactics," its "narrow conception of workers' needs and interests," its "faith in the beneficence of economic growth," and its "embeddedness within a national framework" all required "drastic change." We warned that without such change, attempts to simply organize more workers by putting more money and effort into organizing were doomed to fail.

Surprisingly – and reflecting a new spirit of openness – John Sweeney publicly replied to this critique. He welcomed constructive discussion, but maintained that we were too pessimistic about the possibilities for organizing. Unfortunately, our grim prophesies proved all too true. Despite nearly a decade of effort, by 2003 union membership rates had fallen below 13 percent and have continued to fall since.[474]

Meanwhile, capitalism was undergoing a revolutionary restructuring worldwide through globalization and the shift from vertical and horizontal integration to a core/ring structure.[475] The structural problems of American unions became not just an impediment but an absolute barrier to working class organization. We pointed out as an example more typical than extreme, 24,865 union members at the Georgia-Pacific Corporation were divided among OCAW, UPIU, UBC, GCIU, OPEIU, IAM, UA, IBEW, SEIU, IBT, and USWA – and that included only the US workers of this global corporation.[476]

For a long time our critique of union structure separated us from the mainstream of labor reform efforts. These generally identified the problem of American unions as poor and conservative leadership and argued that more attention to organizing was the key to overcoming the decline of the American labor movement. By the end of the 1990s, however, discussion of structural alternatives began to emerge. Some called for a "global unionism" based on extension of US unions across borders or alliances among unions in different countries that would gradually grow toward merger. Others called for a "solidarity unionism" that emphasized local autonomy and community-level organization. Still others argued for a return to industrial unionism based on one big union for each major industry.[477]

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[474] Bureau of Labor Statistics. Current figures to come.

[475] See Part 5 above.

[476] Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello, "Labor and the Challenge of the 'Dis-Integrated Corporation,'" *New Labor Forum*, Spring, 1998.

[477] In 2004, several major unions organized a new initiative they called the "New Unity Partnership." Unlike John Sweeney's "New Voice," it made a structural critique of the AFL-CIO. Among its major proposals was to merge all US unions together into a few organizations covering major industrial categories. It also promoted discussion of "global unionism." Several unions eventually seceded from the AFL-CIO to form the new labor federation Change to Win. It did not, however, grapple with either the problem of how to deal with employers that cut across industry lines or the problem of over-centralized, highly bureaucratized union organizations.

In an article called "Labor and the Challenge of the 'Dis-Integrated Corporation,'" Tim and I argued that none of these approaches really grappled with the new organization of capitalism. While global capitalism in a sense put all workers in competition with each other, some workers are much more closely connected than others. The problem is that these connections often cut across one another. For example, those who work in the same company may work in different industries. "So any organizational structure that links along one dimension is likely to divide along another."

We argued that the only way to cut this Gordian knot was

> to recognize the need for multiple, overlapping structures." A group of workers in any workplace "need to be able to connect and coordinate with those they would otherwise compete with. This is likely to include workers in the same company, workers producing similar products, workers in the same occupation or using the same set of skills, and workers in the same local or national labor market.

Such workgroups should be free to choose their own representatives. Then "those representatives should be able to form coordinating councils or similar structures with whatever workers they need to connect with." These would include, as appropriate, local, company-wide, and industry-wide networks. Conventional collective bargaining would be supplemented or replaced by joint bargaining councils and campaigns to impose common standards. We described the experience of joint bargaining councils both within the US and internationally.[478] We concluded that without some new structural approach, workers will be nearly as unprotected as if they had no unions at all. And for the labor movement, "such change may be wrenching, but it may also be the only alternative to extinction."[479]

Our goal in this work was as much to foment discussion as to propound the correct solution. Whenever possible we followed a strategy of trying to promote a debate while at the same time taking a position within it. For "Crisis Economy: Born-Again Labor Movement" I encouraged *Monthly Review* to solicit a reply from David Montgomery. Tim and I started the process of gathering pieces for *Building Bridges* by sending our original *Z* articles on community labor alliances to a range of labor activists and scholars to stimulate their reflections, additions, and critiques. In something of a coup, we got the newly elected AFL-CIO president John Sweeney and Teamster's reform president Ron Carey, as well as *Labor Notes* stalwart Jane Slaughter, to submit pieces for a forum in response to our article "'A New Labor Movement' in the Shell of the Old?,'" which provided a respectful but critical discussion of Sweeney's "New Voice" initiative. And

[478] In 2004, several major unions organized a new initiative they called the "New Unity Partnership." Unlike John Sweeney's "New Voice," it made a structural critique of the AFL-CIO. Among its major proposals was to merge all US unions together into a few organizations covering major industrial categories. It also promoted discussion of "global unionism." Several unions eventually seceded from the AFL-CIO to form the new labor federation Change to Win. It did not, however, grapple with either the problem of how to deal with employers that cut across industry lines or the problem of over-centralized, highly bureaucratized union organizations.

[479] "Labor and the Challenge of the Dis-Integrated Corporation."

we persuaded the *Nation* to round up seven commentators, from UAW insurgent Jerry Tucker to AFL-CIO International Affairs director Barbara Shailor, to respond to our piece on "The Challenge Ahead" for the American labor movement.[480]

The structural problems of the labor movement reflected both the excessive differentiation of leaders and led and the failure of coordination among those who needed each other's support. Addressing it requires reduced differentiation and increased democratization within organizations and increased coordination in pursuit of shared needs and interests worldwide. The ongoing decline of the American labor movement tracks the failure to deal with these underlying problems.

[480] Jeremy Brecher, "Labor's Day: The Challenge Ahead," *The Nation*, September 21, 1998.

## Global visions

In *Strike!*, I had focused almost entirely on the US. During the 1980s I gradually went through an "ecological shift" of my own, realizing that I had to rethink politics in a global perspective.

My first attempt was an article in *New Politics* called "The 'National Question' Reconsidered." I wrote, "The insubstantiality of national boundaries was well demonstrated on last year's May Day, not by workers of all lands joining in *The Internationale*, but by a cloud of radioactive dust circling the globe, carrying the message "Chernobyl is everywhere."[481]

Meanwhile, Communism was collapsing in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. President George H. Bush declared a "New World Order." He organized a global alliance to impose his vision of what that meant.

I sought a way to relate my own globalizing perspective to the emerging historical situation. I started by using a technique I have applied many times since: organize a discussion with multiple viewpoints while simultaneously taking a provocative position within it. In this case I initiated a symposium in *Z Magazine* on "Bush's New World Order – and Ours."[482] In my lead piece I observed,

> We live in a world where oil spills, satellite news broadcasts, and fleeing refugees stream across national borders, a world in which an entire factory may be nothing but one work station on a global assembly line. The purpose of this article is to stimulate transnational discussion of what kind of world order would meet human and environmental needs, and how such an order might be realized, in a world whose features are no longer cut to the measure of the nation state.[483]

I proposed a "world order corresponding to the needs of people and planet" based on the worldview that "the social world is composed not of sovereign entities of any kind but rather of a multiplicity of interpenetrating entities with relative and overlapping boundaries." This implied that the people of the world must be seen as inheritors-in-common of the earth and the products of past human activity as a whole. It implied the right of all individuals and groups to a share of the governing of life on earth and its benefits. It also implied a responsibility of all individuals and groups to protect the rights of all co-inheritors and to preserve the earthly environment for present and future.

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[481] Jeremy Brecher, "The 'National Question' Reconsidered," *New Politics*, Summer, 1987, p. 95. Shortly thereafter I also wrote a review essay on Richard Falk's *The Promise of World Order*, Dimitrios Roussopoulos' The Coming of World War Three, and Peter Waterman's *The Old Internationalism and the New*. Jeremy Brecher, "World Government," *Z Magazine*, June 1988.

[482] "Bush's New World Order -- and Ours", *Z Magazine*, July/August, 1991.

[483] "Bush's New World Order" p. 92.

To realize these principles, all people must be free to express themselves, communicate, and organize. And all people must have a right to effectively participate in governing all institutions insofar as they affect common rights and responsibilities. Such participation does not require a "world parliament" making every decision in the world. "There are many instruments through which rights and responsibilities may be distributed for a limited time and under limited conditions, such as leases, licenses, charters, taxation, profit-sharing, easements, and regulation." These define in effect "bundles of rights" which may be assigned to different individuals and institutions at various levels. "Protection of the ozone layer may be assigned to a global environmental protection authority; building a local road primarily affects – and therefore requires input from – builders, users, and neighbors." Only ultimate authority need remain with the people as a whole.

Three friends of mine replied. Stephen Shalom criticized my approach to the locus of decision making as too centralized. John Brown Childs criticized the idea of a "new world order," proposed instead the language of a "planetary community," and drew on African American social movements to suggest pathways to that destination. Peter Waterman proposed "global civil society" as a better way to think about an alternative to "international relations."

I was thrilled at how well the project had realized its objective of getting people to start discussing what a global alternative might be. But I felt there was one glaring problem: the participants consisted of three Americans and a Briton. If there was going to be discussion of an alternative new world order, there had better be input from all quarters that such an order would affect.

That summer John Childs and his wife Delgra Childs visited Jill and me in Yelping Hill. When we pooled our knowledge it was clear that people all over the world were struggling with these same questions. Yet, as Jill succinctly put it, nobody knows how to live as one world. Together we came up with the idea of trying to expand the original "new world order" symposium to a book with contributors from all around the world. We didn't know if we could actually pull it off, but we decided to try. The process proved difficult – that was just before the emergence of email, and soliciting and editing globally by fax and mail made a task that would be simple today into a logistical nightmare. But we managed to round up 32 contributors from more than 20 countries on five continents and a few islands. The result was called *Global Visions: Beyond the New World Order*.

We opened the Introduction to *Global Visions* with the statement of Xabier Gorostiaga, Rector of the Central American University, that in the 1990s, "Humanity itself is being discovered as one world, an inseparable unity, a communal home linked to a common destiny."[484] Contributions ranged from Indian environmentalist Vandana Shiva on "The Greening of the Global Reach" to African trade unionist Hassan A. Sunmonu on "One

[484] *Global Visions*, p. ix.

Man No Chop"[485] and from exiled Chinese scientist and human rights activist Fang Lizhi on "Patriotism and Global Citizenship" to Brazilian political scientist Evelina Dagnino on "An Alternative World Order and the Meaning of Democracy."

We had two frustrations. Despite considerable effort were unable to find anyone from Eastern Europe or the former Soviet Union willing and able to contribute. And except for Martin Khor Kok Peng's piece on "Reforming North Economy, South Development, and World Economic Order," we could not find any articulation of alternatives for the global economy.

In the wake of the Gulf war, Bush's global coalition fragmented and his "New World Order" rhetoric faded. Meanwhile, economic globalization exploded into public consciousness. Tim Costello and I had already started writing in *Z Magazine* and in a pamphlet published by the International Labor Rights Fund about the emergence of new forms of labor internationalism and the problems of global labor strategy.[486] One day we got a letter out of the blue from Richard Falk, whom we had never met, instructing us more or less peremptorily that it was time to turn our ideas into a book. With some reluctance we admitted he was right. The result was *Global Village or Global Pillage: Economic Reconstruction from the Bottom Up*.

After giving an overview of economic globalization from above, and the emerging globalization from below, the Introduction concluded, "The authors of this book start with a strong orientation toward local, grassroots action." But "gradually we have been forced to realize that the grassroots efforts we cherish so highly are likely to come to naught unless they 'think locally and act globally.'" Like it or not, "our lives and our children's lives will be lived in the global economy. We'd better fix it."[487]

A few years earlier I had received a call from a young TV documentary producer named Andrea Haas (later Andrea Hass Hubbell) who wanted to make a movie about reproductive rights. I worked with her as writer for the documentary *The Roots of Roe*, which was broadcast on PBS. She was a wonderful producer and *The Roots of Roe* won two Emmies and a slew of other awards. With some trepidation I asked her if she would consider producing a documentary based on *Global Village or Global Pillage*. To my surprise she jumped at the chance. I put together a team that included Tim and Brendan and painfully raised the money from foundations and friends. The product was a half-hour documentary called *Global Village or Global Pillage?* narrated by Edward Asner, and featuring Ralph Nader, Thea Lee, Charles Kernaghan, "and a cast of billions."

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[485] According to Sunmonu, the phrase "One man no chop" comes from African truckers graffiti and means "It is bad to be selfish." P. 191.

[486] "Labor Internationalism," *Z Magazine*, November, 1988. "A Worldwide Social Charter?" *Z Magazine*, January, 1990. "International Labor" (book review), *Z Magazine*, September, 1990. "Labor Goes Global: I," *Z Magazine,* January, 1991. "Labor Goes Global: II," *Z Magazine*, March 1991. *Global Village vs. Global Pillage: A One-World Strategy for Labor* (Washington: International Labor Rights Education and Research Fund, 1991.)

[487] *Global Village or Global Pillage*, p. 11. Many of the book's themes are discussed in Part 5 above.

The movie opened with Janet Pratt, a factory worker who had lost her job at a Westinghouse plant in Union City, Indiana. She went with her home movie camera to Juarez, Mexico, where her employer had opened a new plant. "I wanted to find out where my job was, where had it went." Over her home movie footage she recounted that "What I found there was a completely different world. You get into Juarez and nothing but rundown shacks. And they were hard working people. They were working doing the same thing I did up here" but "they were working for 85-cents an hour."

Starting from Janet's experience, we explained the "race to the bottom" that put workers and communities all around the world in competition with each other. We laid out the "Lilliput Strategy" of linking people at the grassroots across borders to resist the race to the bottom. Then we presented such examples of Lilliputian resistance as the labor and student campaigns against international sweatshops; the international labor solidarity that won locked out Bridgestone/Firestone workers back their jobs; the international campaign to force the World Bank to stop funding India's Narmada Dam; the blocking of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment by activists in 70 countries; and the campaign for labor rights in international trade agreements. Labor cartoonist Mike Konopacki used cartoon conventions like industrious mice oppressed by fat cats to create video animation, making seemingly abstract concepts like the race to the bottom and the Lilliput strategy instantly graspable.

I like to say that *Global Village or Global Pillage?* was premiered before 25,000 people in the stadium that held the giant People's Rally at the WTO protests in Seattle. Indeed, after endless lobbying of the organizations involved, we succeeded in having it shown in the stadium – early in the morning, *before* 25,000 people *arrived*.

Distributing an independent video is a tough proposition. I tried unsuccessfully to get funding for a "Global Village or Global Pillage Grassroots Education Project" that would use the book, movie, and related materials to reach a wide public with an alternative view of globalization. So we were limited to guerilla marketing with the limited resources we had.

*Global Village or Global Pillage?* was broadcast on Connecticut Public Television, but was turned down by national PBS on the grounds that it was one-sided. It got a Gold Special Jury Award at the Houston International Film Festival, a Best Documentary award at the FirstGlance Philadelphia Film and Video Festival, and an Emmy Award Nomination. We've distributed several thousand copies. The Steelworkers union made its own edition and distributed a copy to every local. I suspect its greatest use has been in the "church basement circuit," and it still is used in schools, unions, and community organizations. At the 2004 Boston Social Forum, a woman who teaches a college class on globalization told me it's the only movie she shows to her students: Every other movie on globalization is depressing, she told me, while this one is inspirational.

We've continued this work as best we can. As a contribution to the emerging global justice movement Tim, Brendan, and I published the book *Globalization from Below*. In the wake of the Battle of Seattle, as local organizations all over the country were trying to

figure out what the global economy meant to them, we published a pamphlet called *Fight Where You Stand: Why Globalization Matters in Your Community and Workplace and How to Address it at the Grassroots*.[488] And when white collar outsourcing suddenly leapt into the media and the presidential primaries in 2004, I helped NAFFE staff draft a report called *Outsource This? American Workers, the Jobs Deficit, and the Fair Globalization Solution*.

I wish these efforts had had a wider reach. It would be hard to claim that they have had an impact that could be measured the way advertisers like to measure the impact of their media buys. I console myself with the thought that they have entered into the thinking of a few thousand people and thereby have contributed to the resources available to people trying to figure out how to think and act in concert in our globalizing world. They underlie the proposals for a Human Survival Movement in Part 7 below.

[488] (Boston: Campaign on Contingent Work, nd [2000])

## Bernie and the Global Sustainable Development Resolution

One afternoon early in 1998 I was taking a little nap when the phone rang. The voice at the other end of the line said, "This is Congressman Bernie Sanders." I immediately wondered if it was a hoax, but listened on. "I'm engaged in a tough fight regarding the International Monetary Fund, and I wondered if you would be willing to help work up some material that would be helpful for me."[489]

I knew little about Vermont Rep. Bernie Sanders at the time except that he was the only Independent in the US House of Representatives and the only self-proclaimed socialist. Writing up some material for him sounded like a modestly useful thing to do. I said sure, spent a day or two whipping some of my previous writing into appropriate form, got a nice thank you call, and assumed that was the end of it.

A few weeks later I got another call from Congressman Sanders. He said he had moved up on a committee and had a little extra staff money; would I work for him on a part time basis? That was a harder proposition. I had worked for Congressman Robert Kastenmeier when I was at IPS in the 1960s and had no desire to leave my peaceful happy life to return to the adrenalin-soaked world of Capitol Hill. Indeed, I had walked away from Washington in part as a gesture of rejection toward top-down politics. On the other hand, it seemed like a potentially interesting and useful thing to do. I consulted some of my more hard-line friends, most of whom said why don't you try it – you can always quit.

My final concern was that, simply by being part of the US government, I might be morally implicated, at least implicitly, in supporting aggressive imperialist ventures that I not only despised but considered to be crimes against humanity. I checked Bernie's record and found that he had outspokenly opposed every US war from Vietnam to the Gulf War. In my final discussion with Jill we concluded that, in the unlikely situation that I felt morally compromised, I could simply quit. I told Bernie I'd come down a few days every couple of weeks.

I was assigned to work with Brendan Smith, a 26-year old staffer who had spent his childhood in Newfoundland as the child of American expatriates, become an activist in college in Vermont, and rapidly advanced from a campaign worker to Bernie's senior legislative aide for labor and foreign policy issues. We shared many values and even many personality quirks: a love for Cape Breton fiddling and macho attitudes about cold weather, to name just two. We bonded immediately and have remained close friends and collaborators ever since, our difference in age notwithstanding.

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[489] I was told later that someone had given him a copy of *Global Village or Global Pillage* and that he had read it on a trip to Africa. The combined impact of the two had intensified his concern with problems of the global economy.

We also made a great team. Brendan combined unlimited dedication to his political values, highly-focused energy, political cunning, and self-confident initiative paradoxically combined with abundant caution. I couldn't really keep up with his pace, but he knew how to get the best out of whatever experience and insight I had to offer.

Bernie had formed a sort of working alliance with a somewhat populist conservative Republican from Alabama named Spencer Backus. They worked together to oppose the pro-corporate globalization policies promoted by the leadership of both Democratic and Republican Parties. I wrote op eds and testimony for Bernie. I helped plan his grillings of government officials like Alan Greenspan and the US representative to the IMF. I helped Brendan dream up amendments we could tack on to pending legislation in order to protect international labor rights or block debt gouging of poor countries. We organized hearings that brought in the likes of Walden Bello and Boris Kargarlitsky to describe first hand the devastation that the IMF had wreaked on Asia and Russia.

Advocates of globalization often said that their opponents had no alternative. And indeed, the then-nascent "anti-globalization" movement had plenty of critique but only fragmentary alternatives. Brendan and I wondered whether we could address this problem by putting together a bill that would lay out a broad alternative path for the global economy. Of course such a bill stood no chance of being passed, but it could show that an alternative was indeed thinkable. Pieces of it could then be fought for as opportunities emerged.

This was not the usual way of doing things in Washington, but Bernie had previously developed comprehensive legislation on issues like healthcare and labor law reform and he was willing to give it a shot. He also grasped, at least in principle, that the globalization issue had to be reframed away from economic nationalism and toward new forms of international solidarity and cooperation. He told me that the alliance with rightwing anti-globalization had been only tactical and that it would inevitably weaken as we moved toward a progressive internationalism.

Brendan and I started by collecting every proposal for alternatives to actually existing globalization we could find articulated by organizations and individuals. We held a small meeting of public interest lobbyists who had been involved in anti-IMF and other anti-globalization fights. We tried to imagine a scenario through which their proposals might come about – in effect, a "thought experiment." Then we drafted the Global Sustainable Development Resolution to spell out the goals and a possible pathway to reach them. We circulated drafts for comment and gradually involved a wider circle in the effort.

The resolution laid out a set of findings: Unregulated economic globalization tended to generate economic volatility; a race to the bottom; impoverishment; a downward economic spiral with stagnation and recession; growing inequality; and the degradation of democracy.

The resolution laid out goals for a new global economic policy, including: reducing the threat of financial volatility and meltdown; democracy at every level from the local to the

global; human and labor rights for all people; environmental sustainability worldwide; and economic advancement of the most oppressed and exploited groups.

The resolution called for a national and global dialogue to be promoted by US and UN commissions on the global economy. It also proposed a Global Economy Truth Commission to investigate abuses in the use of international funds and abuses of power by international financial institutions. This process of dialogue and investigation would lead up to a series of Bretton Woods-type conferences, with representation for civil society, to initiate negotiation of a Global Sustainable Development Agreement.

The resolution then laid out in dozens of pages of detail many of the demands and proposals of those who had challenged economic globalization. A new global financial strategy would restructure the international financial system to avoid global recessions, protect the environment, ensure full employment, reverse the polarization of wealth and poverty, and support the efforts of polities at all levels to mobilize and coordinate their economic resources. Reform of international financial institutions would force the IMF and World Bank to reorient their programs from imposing austerity and destructive forms of development to support for labor rights, environmental protection, rising living standards, and encouragement for small and medium-sized local enterprises. A binding code of conduct for transnational corporations would provide corporate accountability for labor, environmental, investment, and social policies. The WTO, NAFTA, and other trade agreements would be renegotiated to reorient trade and investment to be means to just and sustainable development.

Sadly, my work on the Resolution was cut short. I arrived at Bernie's office one day and discovered that the House leadership had called a surprise vote authorizing President Clinton to attack Yugoslavia, ostensibly to protect the Albanians in Kosovo from "ethnic cleansing." It authorized unlimited bombing, which I believed was potentially an authorization for war crimes.[490] Bernie said he was going to vote for it. I drafted an alternative position for him. He seemed uninterested. Later I told him I was personally uncomfortable with the situation. He said, "You're saying I'm a war criminal." I hadn't said anything of the kind, and I thought of the words of Jesus: "You have said it."

We spent a couple of intense hours going round and round about it, in which it was clear to me that he understood the force of all the arguments I was making – indeed, that he had made them himself in previous wars. Perhaps the feeling that something had to be done to keep Kosovo Albanians from being slaughtered overrode his usual skepticism about US imperial ventures ostensibly conducted in pursuit of human rights. Finally he

[490] Shortly after the resolution was passed the US bombed a residential neighborhood on the grounds that Slobodan Milosevic had a house there. The bombing of Serbia continued for 78 days. NATO aircraft flew over 38,000 combat missions, bombing bridges, factories, power stations, refugee convoys, a political party headquarters, and the Chinese embassy. The international tribunal investigating war crimes in Yugoslavia actually decided that there was sufficient evidence to investigate the US for war crimes, but then dropped the investigation. I later met a senior staff member of the tribunal at a dinner party; he told me that they had decided to drop the investigation, not because there was no evidence of war crimes, but because, as he put it, the political environment was not supportive to it and because it was considered less important than other investigations they might undertake.

said, you're uncomfortable with this situation. Do you want to resign? I said yes and went on my way.[491] (Within a week he was promoting a plan for peace in Yugoslavia that was almost the same as the one I had proposed to him before the bombing began.)

Fortunately, Brendan was able to continue with the work on the Resolution. He recruited a group of progressive legislators, including Sherrod Brown, Cynthia McKinney, and Dennis Kusinich, as original cosponsors. I helped from behind the scenes with getting out the word and gathering endorsements and media coverage. I summarized the resolution before a forum on alternatives with about a thousand participants at the 1999 Seattle WTO protests.

The Battle of Seattle suddenly made progressives inside the Beltway more eager to present an alternative to globalization. Almost a year after I resigned, Bernie organized a new unveiling and press briefing for the resolution. [492]

I suspect that most Washington insiders on the left regarded the Resolution as a Quixotic exercise. Many activists outside the beltway might have agreed. A few did not. Tom Barry of the Interhemispheric Resource Center called it "A fantastic effort to pull together a cohesive approach to global economy reform." Trim Bissell of the Campaign for Labor Rights called it "A Magna Carta for the new millennium."

The resolution was a "target of opportunity" for me, not something I would have pursued had I not accidentally found myself in a position to do so. Maybe if I'd been able to stick around we could have used it to build a bit more of a common platform for an alternative globalization, maybe not. The document itself will surely astonish any future historian who stumbles onto it. And it served as the basis for a "Draft of a Global Program" when Brendan joined Tim and me in writing *Globalization from Below*.[493]

[491] A few days later, on May 4, 1999, I wrote a letter explaining in detail the reasons for my resignation that was widely circulated on the web.
[492] Links to the Global Sustainable Development Resolution and accompanying materials can be found at http://bernie.house.gov/imf/global.asp.
[493] "Draft of a Global Program," in *Globalization from Below*.

## Social forums

My father used to tell the story of how he visited Montgomery, Alabama as a journalist in the mid-1950s, but declined to write about the Montgomery bus boycott because he didn't think it would be of lasting significance. Perhaps now I can finally measure up to the standard he set.

At the beginning of the 1990s, I noted that "A transnational coalition of development, human rights, and environmental organizations holds counter-meetings called the NGO Forum at the annual meetings of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The have proposed alternative policies and helped organize transnational campaigns." I noted similar coalitions organized at the negotiations that established the World Trade Organization and numerous international campaigns that brought together similar forces around labor, human rights, and environmental issues and the struggle against apartheid in South Africa.[494] I suggested that global democratization might develop by making global institutions accountable to such proto-parliaments of social movements, much as democratization movements had recently forced governments in Eastern Europe and South Africa to do.

Sometime in the months following the Battle of Seattle at the end of 1999, I got an email from trade union educator and activist Andy Banks mentioning that a Brazilian friend of his was going to set up an international gathering in Porto Alegre, Brazil to serve as a counter to the super-elite World Economic Forum held annually in Davos, Switzerland. He said she was a serious person and I should be interested. It sounded to me like a non-starter. Perhaps a way for some jet-set radicals to get a trip to Brazil.

Little did I realize that the most significant embodiment of the kind of global assembly I had been writing about was being hatched. Perhaps that was because, instead of assembling to confront the globalizers directly, it did so at the opposite side of the earth. I didn't recognize the significance of initiating such an event in the third world and under third world leadership. Nor did I realize that moving away from the centers of power would put the focus less on the evils of the enemy and more on what people and movements were doing themselves.

Few Americans went to the first World Social Forum in January, 2001. I was hardly aware of it. It was barely mentioned here, even in the radical press. When mentioned, it was described as an "anti-globalization" meeting.

In the tense atmosphere that followed the attack on the World Trade Center, the annual Washington, DC demonstrations against the World Bank and IMF had been cancelled. In January, 2002 the World Economic Forum temporarily moved from Davos to New York as a symbolic show of "solidarity" in the wake of 9/11. With considerable trepidation, the "anti-globalization" movement decided to call demonstrations in New

[494] "Bush's New World Order – and Ours," *Z*, July/August, 1991. Reprinted in *Global Visions*.

York against the WEF. Despite threats of violence from both the New York police and "black bloc" militants, tens of thousands showed up. The demonstrations were largely peaceful, albeit extremely tense. By then word of the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre had filted out, at least to movement activists, and the demonstrations were held under the WSF slogan, "Another world is possible!"[495]

At the high point of the rally, suddenly a phone connection was opened with the second World Social Forum in Porto Alegre. An excited American described how fifty thousand people from all over the world had gathered to protest the WEF. Suddenly we were part of a global movement in a new way. And suddenly it dawned on me that the emerging global movement that I had been advocating, describing, and nurturing for the past decade had created a new organizational form that I had not anticipated or even recognized. I knew that next time I had to go.[496]

Jill and I arrived in Porto Alegre in January 2003. We left our country at a dark time. President Bush was on a roll, preparing to outdo the devastation of Afghanistan with the conquest of Iraq. Media, politicians, pundits, and academics were rolling over before the most obvious lies and manipulations. It was at once comforting and exhilarating to find ourselves plunged amidst a hundred thousand people who felt pretty much the same way we did.

The WSF provided a great way to take the pulse of the global convergence of movements that I called globalization from below. We met and talked with brilliant activists from the Argentine neighborhood assemblies and unemployed "piqueteros" groups who were developing new forms of direct democracy and direct action in the midst of their country's devastating crisis. It was a WSF tradition for groups to hold marches through the streets and buildings; the Brazilian leagues of the landless used this form with fantastic creativity, including a march led by a fire-eating woman acrobat. We visited the youth encampment, where 20,000 people camped out in peace, order, exuberance, cultural extravagance, and even good sanitation. A hundreds-of-feet-long "tunnel of history," created out of butcher paper and junk scavenged by the agricultural workers union of the province, portrayed the history of the region from the original native communities through colonization, independence, the dictatorship, democratization, and a hoped for future of shared well-being based on careful tending of the environment.

The formal sessions were, not surprisingly, a mixed bag. They numbered in the thousands, so they could only be sampled. One comparing the recent experiences of socialist parties in Germany, Italy, Brazil, and Argentina was informative though somewhat academic. One on culture after capitalism was pretty dreadful. One on the neighborhood councils and "participatory budgeting" of radical local governments in Porto Alegre and some other Brazilian cities was fascinating and provided ideas that

[495] I was aware enough of the WSF by then to try to write, in collaboration with Tim Costello and Dennis Brutus, a proposal for the 2002 Forum to promote the idea of a "debtor's cartel." "Default: The People's New Weapon."

[496] I wrote about the WSF and the New York rally in the "Afterword" to the second edition of *Globalization from Below*, published in 2002. Pp. 129-30, 134.

could be brought right back home. Professional interpretation was provided electronically for a high proportion of the events; where there was no interpretation, or where participants spoke languages without official translation, polyglot individuals pitched in and provided informal translation.

All in all, it was impossible to comprehend the WSF as a whole. There was just too much of it. But perhaps that was part of its meaning. As Hilary Wainwright put it, "At its best, it is like a political jam session with people bouncing off each other in harmony and in counterpoint."[497]

There were plenty of problems. The giant tabloid program listing the thousands of activities and events was two days late in appearing. It was impossible till then to find out what was going on where, leading to frustration and a sense of chaos. Events were spread out around the big city; it took me two hours to find one place I was supposed to speak and almost nobody else found it at all. A lot of rooms were booked simultaneously for different events.

There were deeper problems, too. There was a certain hierarchical character to the event, with four different levels of participants from invited speakers down through observers who weren't even supposed to participate in discussions. Higher levels received various privileges; one woman almost wept as she asked Jill if she could have a WSF tote bag that had been provided at registration -- to higher-category registrants only. Women were seriously underrepresented in many of the panels and plenaries.

It was almost impossible to discover who was really making decisions, let alone who they were accountable to. Somebody had decided who would be invited to speak and what issues would be addressed in the main events. Somebody had also decided that certain groups would be excluded – some political groups on the grounds that they were advocates of violence, some, like the World Bank, on the grounds that they were actually opposed to the principles of the Forum and just wanted to use it for their own purposes. While I was generally sympathetic to the decisions made, I worried about how they were made.

While the World Social Forum had begun in opposition to economic globalization, it seemed to make an effortless transition to opposing the impeding US attack on Iraq. It closed with a big peace march and with Noam Chomsky and Arundhati Roy giving fiery anti-war speeches to 25,000 people in a sports arena. I was overjoyed at this extension of the WSF's writ, but I also wondered who had made the decision and whether they might make decisions in the future that were less acceptable to me and/or to others.

These problems reflected the development of the WSF. It had started as platform for a sort of counter-elite, designed to allow internationally-recognized speakers to respond to

[497] Jai Sen, Anita Anand, Arturo Escobar, and Peter Waterman, eds.,*World Social Forum: Challenging Empires* (New Delhi: Viveka Foundation, 2004). Many important documents regarding the WSF are gathered in this volume, which was published on the eve of the 2004 Forum in Mumbai. I met with Jai Sen and Peter Waterman toward the end of the 2003 Forum and helped them with initial planning for the book.

the WEF. But it made a space for, attracted, and therefore was infiltrated by more plebian social actors who saw it as a magnet that would draw others like themselves, and therefore provide them an opportunity to join with others like themselves. Now they wanted to make the Forum their own.

These issues were openly confronted in a variety of workshops and plenaries at the 2003 WSF. One of the people most visibly raising them was Jai Sen. Jai was an architect and campaigner around issues of homelessness in Calcutta who began researching the international anti-World Bank campaigns over India's Narmada dam and Brazil's rain forest. He visited me in Connecticut and we became fast friends. Jai has a unique ability to confront with stern concern bordering on scolding while at the same time inviting dialogue and modeling an undefensive openness to criticism himself. I myself had experienced his stern concern in his critique of a draft of *Globalization from Below*. He felt the book swept under the rug problems of undemocratic structure and class and cultural bias in the emerging global social movements. His sternness was enough to make me stop everything as the book was going to press and grapple with the issues he raised.

Jai used the same paradoxical combination of traits to challenge the WSF. He wrote essays warning that the Forum was becoming "a commodity and a brand name" and that it suffered a "rising dogmatism" and "organizational fundamentalism.[498] He demanded that the Forum's "central historical role" must remain "to *encourage* and *enable* free and open exchange and debate, not to overtly or covertly build a world movement of organizations of The Left."[499]

Although he was well enough connected in the Forum universe to have taken his concerns to the top, Jai instead hammered away on them in plenaries and workshops. He took what had been something of a private organization putting on events for an audience and acted as if it were instead a public organization accountable to its participants.[500]

Indeed, by 2002 the leaders of the WSF were well-positioned to make the Forum the base for a "world movement of organizations of the Left." They could have used the immense prestige it had developed and the critical global position it had established for itself to create a sort of global political party. They could have presented themselves as negotiating partners to international institutions like the World Bank. They could have treated the Forum as a sort of private property that they controlled because they started it.

Instead they went in a very different direction. They made the extraordinary decision that, instead of being held every year in Brazil, the WSF would move from country to country – and that it would be controlled by the organizing committee of the country that hosted it. They decided to emphasize the "self-organized programs" more than those

[498] "How Open?" in *World Social Forum: Challenging Empires*, p. 211-212.
[499] "How Open?" p. 225.
[500] I got this observation on Jai's role from Peter Waterman.

initiated by the WSF organizers. They also decided that the "WSF process" would be decentralized so that regional forums would be held under local initiative and control.[501]

Tim and I went to the January, 2004 WSF in Mumbai with a much more specific agenda than I had had in Porto Alegre in 2003. NAFFE was developing a campaign around international outsourcing. It networked with Jobs with Justice and trade union partners from India and Britain to organize a workshop called "Outsource this!." The workshop presented trade union and feminist views on outsourcing from first and third worlds. A joint statement on outsourcing prepared for the workshop found surprisingly large areas of agreement between those from first and third world movements. Connections made during the WSF expanded the international network on outsourcing that NAFFE was building. This work showed one of the more concrete functions the WSF can play, accelerating the networking and frame-sharing process that underlies so much of today's global social movement building.

I was able to steal a lot of time from such focused work for a "random walk" through the world of 100,000 activists that was the Mumbai WSF. By far the most impressive presence were thousands of Dalits – people formerly known as untouchables – and the groups of indigenous peoples allied with them. In his critique of *Globalization from Below*, Jai had warned that movements of the poor, notably the Dalits, were highly dubious about the anti-globalization movement; but the Indian committee organizing the Mumbai WSF had strongly emphasized the struggle against caste and different groups of Dalits from all over South Asia were constantly holding mini-marches and demonstrations around the Forum grounds. So were many oppressed groups from Nepal, Burma, Tibet, and elsewhere in Asia.

WSF organizers had also stressed opposition to the communal violence sweeping India and made the Forum a showcase for inter-communal cooperation. A powerful exhibit told the story of the recent Gujarat massacres and a recurring street theater performance with giant human puppets retold it in a traditional folklore mode.

I saw a sign for a meeting on "closed industries." I didn't know what closed industries were, but I wandered in. Workers from Bengal were giving an account of a huge struggle against the closing of the jute industry. Then workers from Mumbai described the struggle against the closing of the textile industry. Then women from Egypt described their struggle against the closing of the textile plants in Cairo. Someone came up to me and asked where I was from and whether I wanted to speak. So I gave greetings and a brief account of the struggles against plant closings in the Naugatuck Valley.

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[501] Many essays in Sen et al evaluate the importance and limitations of these changes. Many problems remain unresolved so far. The problem of who should be empowered to guide the WSF process, how they should be chosen, and who they should represent and be accountable to is difficult, and reminds me of the difficulty I had figuring out how poor communities should be represented in the Connecticut Community Economic Development Fund. The question of who should be included and excluded – raised so far in terms of movements that may be involved in violence, political parties, international financial institutions, and groups that don't support the rather vague principles of the WSF – remains difficult. So does the question of undue influence of foundations, wealthier NGOs, political parties, and governments on whom the Forum depends for its budget and logistical support.

I wandered into a meeting of indigenous peoples from all over India, who were sharing their experiences of resistance to the destruction of their traditional ways of life by globalization and neo-liberalism. I followed a parade of nearly 1,000 people, mostly women, into a meeting of construction and forestry workers from all over South Asia – where most construction workers, I learned, are women. I joined a session on land takeovers. A Palestinian scholar was showing slides recounting almost day by day and acre by acre the Israeli encroachment on Palestinian lands starting in the 1940s. I got up and wandered around the audience – and discovered that the great majority of them were Tibetans. They apparently had no problem understanding the parallel between the Palestinian experience and what they were undergoing from the Chinese encroachments in Tibet.

Indeed, the most stunning thing about the Mumbai WSF was the extent to which a shared paradigm about globalization had spread among the peoples of the world. A flyer I was handed on the impact of globalization on workers in northern Pakistan had virtually the same concepts and even the same words as one that would have been handed out in Hartford, Connecticut. I truly felt part of a global movement.

As we were preparing to leave Mumbai, Suren Moodliar, who worked with Tim at NAFFE, said to me, "We are planning a regional social forum in Boston. Would you serve on the advisory board?" I said of course. In July, 2004 I was one of five thousand people who attended the Boston Social Forum. The BSF presented more than 550 events sponsored by nearly 300 organizations. It connected New England activists with representatives from the Italian trade unions, the Brazilian landless workers movement, the Korean democracy movement, and the Japanese and Indian peace movements. It presented alternatives on everything from urban economic development to town budgeting to water supply, putting flesh on the slogan "Another New England is possible."

What I had envisioned in *Global Visions* was rather like what Jai Sen described as "a world movement of organizations of the Left." The WSF became something much better and more important than that: an on-going process for global self-organization.[502]

Before the WSF, ordinary people and social movements were starved of transnational channels and vehicles to communicate and coordinate. As a result, as Michael Mann would say, they were "organizationally outflanked." The originality of the WSF has been to address this problem, not by creating a new organization to provide coordination, but by creating a "space" in which emerging confluences can do so on an on-going basis. This is in accord with the thinking of movements like the Mexican Zapatistas that

[502] The WSF process is sometimes criticized on the left for its refusal to take positions and pass resolutions as an organization, leaving that to the initiative of participating groups. But in my experience this has been a strength. A crucial aspect of globalization from below is networking and dialogue among movements that started from different views and experiences that nonetheless might share common interests. The WSF provided a hot-house in which such growth could be accelerated exponentially. This happens all the better if not conducted by a "guiding hand." Even a certain randomness is conducive to making new connections – as my Mumbai experience revealed.

explicitly seek to disseminate rather than to concentrate power and to democratize rather than capture the state.[503]

The social forum process revealed an extraordinary capacity for self-correction. In four short years it transformed itself from a platform for elite opponents of economic globalization to a decentralized global process seeking to nurture the construction of alternatives to war and oppression. In the process it managed to avoid the temptation to substitute itself for the movement of which it is part, while making itself an invaluable vehicle for the movement's own development – and self-correction.

[503] Hilary Wainwright points out that the "new movements" of which the WSF is an expression "build into their organizing and into their ethics, the importance of the practical knowledge and transformative power of the people organized 'from below.' There has been a revolution in thinking over the past thirty years against mechanical models of action and knowledge. In these models, society is like a huge machine operated from the center – the State – and the knowledge which underpins politics, is knowledge of linear laws of cause and effect.
"The new thinking about knowledge and society understands the creative, unpredictable role of human agency and the non-linear, non-instrumental, even non-rational dimensions of knowledge and understanding." (*World Social Forum: Challenging Empires*, p. xviii.)

## Global constitutional insurgency

As the Vietnam war escalated, Marcus Raskin and other war opponents around the Institute for Policy Studies began a two-pronged initiative. They issued a Call to Resist Illegitimate Authority that encouraged young men to resist the draft – an advocacy that in itself constituted a crime. They also began documenting the ways in which the war constituted a war crime under the legal principles that had been used to prosecute the Nazis at Nuremberg after World War II.[504] Their intent was to establish that the advocacy and practice of draft resistance was legal because the war was illegal.

I thought I knew about the Nuremberg war crimes tribunal. My father's boss for a time at the FCC had been Telford Taylor, who went on to become chief prosecutor at Nuremberg. There was a book about the trials on our bookshelf and I remember asking my father what it was about. My father was skeptical about the whole business, however, and I came to share his skepticism. Nuremberg seemed to be "justice" meted out only to the vanquished; no one was prosecuting those who exterminated a hundred thousand civilians at a pop in Hiroshima. International law appeared to be little more than a vehicle for the strong to impose their will upon the weak – while claiming to be the champions of justice to boot. I thought Marc's strategy was swathed in liberal illusion.

After some delay, the Justice Department brought charges against Marcus and several others (including one actual draft resister, Michael Ferber, who later became a close friend) for conspiracy in "counseling, aiding, and abetting" young men to avoid and resist the Selective Service System.[505] What came to be known as the "Spock-Coffin trial" became front-page news and the subject of several books. Marcus was found innocent, but the others were convicted of conspiracy. At his post-sentencing press conference, Dr. Spock said the war "violates the United Nations Charter, the Geneva accords, and the Unites States' promise to obey the laws of international conduct. It is totally, abominably illegal."[506] When a Federal appeals court overturned the conviction, the Justice Department dropped the charges. The prosecution was widely regarded as a blunder by the Johnson administration; such repression helped erode support for the war and respect for the powers-that-be.

In retrospect, I can see that I failed to understand what I would today call an "indirect strategy." The "conspirators'" action was a kind of "political ju-jitsu" that provoked the government to act against them in a way that would only undermine its own position. The conspirators' power did not result from their ability to impede the draft but from their ability to persuade other people – how many it would be impossible to know -- that the war was illegal under international law and that everyone had a personal responsibility to resist it. In itself the action changed little, but in the context of a growing anti-war movement and a population deeply troubled by the war it helped create

[504] Ralph Stavins, Richard J. Barnet, and Marcus G. Raskin, *Washington Plans an Aggressive War*. (Clinton, MA: Vintage Books, 1971)
[505] Kirkpatrick Sale, *SDS*, p. 406.
[506] Bart Jones, "Pediatrician Benjamin Spock Dies, *Washington Post*, March 17, 1998.

to a situation in which the government and important elites decided that the cost of the war to their own legitimacy and therefore to their own authority was too great.

My blindness resulted in part from the common radical habit of viewing power as simply the domination of one force by another. This perspective applied in particular to the law, which is often seen as merely a vehicle to impose the power of the state or those who control the state on the underlying population. But over the course of the 1970s and 1980s, radical historians like E.P. Thompson and Staughton Lynd began to articulate a more nuanced view that portrayed law as neither a neutral expression of the popular will nor as simply a means for the strong to oppress the weak.[507] I adopted that view in an article on the "national question":

> Law is usually connected to two often contradictory realities: the norms of the community on the one hand and the ability of particular social groups to use the legal apparatus to shape society to their wishes on the other. Modern legal historians have taught us to think of law as an arena of conflicting interests, rather than either an imposition by the state or a pure expression of the will of the community. What laws exist and how they are interpreted and administered at a given time is a result of the historical power relations among different groups.[508]

Law, in short, reflects a hegemony in which often unequal but contending forces struggle to shift or maintain an unstable equilibrium.

Based on this idea, I proposed that "we should think in terms of a people's concept of world law, as something to be imposed on nation states by the cumulative pressure of individual and social groups."[509] While actually existing international law was not always just, "a large proportion of the evil things nation states do are today illegal. A large part of the things one would wish to stop are already defined as war crimes and crimes against humanity."[510]

I found a strategy to implement this idea in the work of international lawyer Richard Falk. He observed that under the Nuremberg Principles, established at the trial of Nazi war criminals and later codified as part of international law, "Complicity in the commission of a crime against peace, a war crime, or a crime against humanity . . . is a crime under international law." This, Falk argued, lays the basis for a "Nuremberg Obligation": "Each person in whatever societal position is called upon to avoid complicity in the crimes punished at Nuremberg even if it means violating normal domestic laws."[511] Where opponents of Trident missiles or of U.S. intervention in

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[507] See, for example, the appendix to E.P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters* (New York: Pantheon, 1975) and Staughton Lynd, "Communal Rights" *Texas Law Review*, May, 1984.
[508] "The 'National Question' Revisited," p. 104.
[509] "National Question," p. 104.
[510] "National Question" p. 104.
[511] Richard Falk, *The Promise of World Order* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988) p. 301. (check source). See also my review: Jeremy Brecher, "World Government," *Z*, June, 1988.

Nicaragua impede government action, "Citizens have become law enforcement agents in relation to the government."[512]

At that time, the Reagan administration was striving to overthrow the elected Sandinista government in Nicaragua. The Sandinistas, in turn, had reached out to activists, especially religious activists, in the US. Thousands of Americans had visited Nicaragua, among them my brother Earl and my Cornwall neighbor Marie Prentice. On their return these "tourists" became dedicated lobbyists against Reagan's "Contra" war. Their pressure led Congress to put significant limits on US attacks on Nicaragua.

One day in 1986 I got a phone call from someone trying to reach my brother Earl about an action at the office of our Congressional representative Nancy Johnson. When I told them Earl was away, they invited me to come. A mixed assortment of respectable local residents and alienated youth wended our way into Rep. Johnson's New Britain office where five of us were arrested for refusing to leave.[513]

I used an op ed in the local newspaper to try to frame our action in accord with Falk's idea of a "Nuremberg obligation."

> What would lead five inhabitants of Northwestern Connecticut to protest U.S. policies in distant Central America by sitting down in Rep. Nancy Johnson's office and staying until arrested?"[514]
>
> The Nazi holocaust, the threat of nuclear holocaust, and the war in Vietnam led me, like many others, to reflect on the consequences of unfettered national sovereignty and unrestricted government power. International law prohibits aggressive wars, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, but there are few effective institutional means of implementing that prohibition. I conclude, therefore, that the first responsibility for opposing such crimes lies with the people of the countries that commit them.
>
> The United States government is currently conducting an aggressive war against Nicaragua by means of its proxies, the Contras, whom it has organized and is now supplying for that purpose.

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[512] Falk, p. 311. (check source)

[513] I felt some trepidation at the thought of the New Britain jail; I vaguely remembered hearing that civil rights demonstrators had been abused there two decades before. We were not abused. I heard one police officer complaining about a young woman who had gone limp when arrested and had had to be dragged away. "They have a right to civil disobedience, but why do they have to go limp?" the policeman complained. The idea of a police officer acknowledging a "right to civil disobedience" astonished me, and indicated how much civil disobedience had become an accepted part of American political life.

[514] An indication of the extent to which the Cold War framework still dominated American politics is indicated by the fact that I started my answer with a defense of my anti-Communist credentials. "Many people see such actions as 'against' the United States and therefore 'for' the Soviet Union – but I have been an active supporter of the Polish Solidarity movement and have written against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. I have even been attacked in the *Daily World*, organ of the Communist Party, U.S.A., as 'rabidly anti-Soviet.'"

> One phase of this criminal policy was the CIA's mining of Nicaraguan harbors. When the U.S. role in that mining was exposed, the International Court of Justice (an institution empowered to serve as the highest interpreter of international law under treaties signed by the U.S.) ordered the U.S. to cease, and further ordered that:
>
> "The right to sovereignty and to political independence possessed by the Republic of Nicaragua . . . should be fully respected and should not in any way be jeopardized by any military and paramilitary activities which are prohibited by the principles of international law." When the U.S. State Department challenged the Court's jurisdiction in this case, the Court overwhelmingly rejected its claim.
>
> U.S. aid to the Contras constitutes "military and paramilitary activities" which jeopardize Nicaragua's "right to sovereignty and to political independence." But the Court has virtually no power to make the U.S. cease.
>
> As citizens of the United States, I believe it is we who now have the duty to make our country stop aiding the Contra war against Nicaragua.
>
> When I asked myself what responsibility I had to prevent my government from committing crimes in Central American and what "affirmative measures to prevent the commission of the crimes" I could take, my answer landed me in the New Britain jail. I now ask you, whoever you are, to ask yourself these same questions.[515]

I don't know what impact this action, and the many others like it around the country, had on our friends and neighbors, let alone on US policy. I do know that the "Central America solidarity movement" sank deep roots into American communities and exacted a political price for each escalation of US intervention, to the immense frustration of the Reagan administration.

In 1991 I was part of a larger and more organized sit-in against the US Gulf War at the US government building in New Haven, Connecticut. While I considered the war completely illegitimate, it was difficult to use an international law critique because George H. Bush had skillfully lined up the UN Security Council to authorize use of "all means necessary" to eject Iraq from Kuwait.

Surprising, New Haven's mayor endorsed the anti-war movement. I knew things had changed when, as we were about to be dismissed from the hall where police had taken us for booking, New Haven's police chief (once notorious for illegally wiretapping dissenters during the 1968 New Haven Black Panther trial) came in to address us. "These

[515] I added: "Some may say, what about the illegal acts of other countries? I answer, by opposing U.S. war against Nicaragua we can express our solidarity with all those who are the victims of superpower domination and aggression, whether in Poland or in South Korea, whether in Afghanistan, or in Central America."

protests must go on," he proclaimed. "If there is anything I can do to be of assistance to you, please come see me. My door is always open."

During the US war against Iraq, a group of Catholic Worker activists that Brendan Smith was working with in Ithaca, New York applied an international law defense of direct action with surprising success. The "St. Patrick's 4" were arrested and charged with a felony for pouring their own blood at a military recruiting station. They defended their action in court on the grounds that it was necessary to stop war crimes that violated international law. To the astonishment of the prosecution and the media, the jury after 20 hours of deliberation voted 9 to 3 for acquittal.

Such actions are in part a way to raise the stakes in issue campaigns, provoking the state to act in ways that undermine its own legitimacy and coaxing and/or inspiring supporters to intensify their commitments. But they also may be laying the groundwork for a longer term process that I refer to as a "global constitutional insurgency."

At the height of the 1937 sitdown strike in Flint, Michigan, a judge issued an injunction ordering workers to evacuate the plants and end picketing within 24 hours. As thousands of union supporters poured into Flint and the city manager began to organize an "army of our own" to break the strike, union military veterans developed a plan that they kept secret even from union leaders. If the leaders were arrested under the injunction, the veterans "would muster an armed force among their own number and in defense of the U.S. Constitution, of 'real Patriotism,' and the union, would take over the city hall, the courthouse and police headquarters, capture and imprison all officials and release the union men."[516] A "Union Veterans Song" declared:

> "We are veteran Union boys
> We uphold the Constitution . . .
>
> We fought in 1861
> To free this world from slavery. . .
>
> And now we have to fight again
> But this time for our Freedom
> From being General Motors Slaves..."[517]

I told this story in *Strike!*, but I was always puzzled about what to make of it. The union war vets certainly seemed to be organizing an armed insurrection against the legally constituted authorities. And yet they were doing so in the name of the Constitution. I discovered a way to interpret this, and many similar paradoxical cases, in the work of labor law professor James Gray Pope.

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[516] *Strike!* P. 220-221.

[517] Quoted James Gray Pope, "The Thirteenth Amendment Versus the Commerce Clause," *Columbia Law Review*, vol. 102, 2002, p. 80.

Pope characterized such a movement as a "constitutional insurgency." It rejects current constitutional doctrine, but "rather than repudiating the Constitution altogether, draws on it for inspiration and justification."[518] On the basis of its own interpretation of the Constitution, such an insurgency "goes outside the formally recognized channels of representative politics to exercise direct popular power, for example through extralegal assemblies, mass protests, strikes, and boycotts."[519]

Pope points out that "From the American revolution through the Virginia and Kentucky resolutions, the nullification movement, constitutional abolitionism, populism, the civil rights movement, and down to the recent rise of right-wing citizen 'militias,' constitutional insurgencies have exerted a pervasive influence on American constitutionalism."[520]

Is the concept of such a "constitutional insurgency" relevant to international law? Our sit-ins and other acts of civil disobedience may have been illegal under national law. But we claimed that they were justified under the principles that underlie international law – principles that form, in effect, a global constitution. These principles include those enshrined in the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the decisions of the War Crimes Tribunals that followed World War II. They are increasingly appealed to by activists all over the world. Perhaps they represent the early stages of what may come to be a "global constitutional insurgency" for common preservation.

[518] James Gray Pope, "Labor's Constitution of Freedom," *Yale Law Journal*, 106, p. 943.
[519] "Labor's" 944-5.
[520] "Labor's" 944.

## Uniting for peace

On the morning of September 11, 2001 I was just going to my desk when the phone rang. It was my daughter Moira, who worked as a teleconferencing tech at the Goldman, Sachs brokerage office on Wall Street. She sounded like she was in shock as she described the unimaginable destruction of the World Trade Center, which she had just seen from her skyscraper window. When I tried to calm her down and put things in some perspective, she kept saying "You don't understand. You don't understand." She was surely right.

Two weeks later, in a monumental predictive failure, I wrote "The Bush Administration now seems to be backing off from the threat of a Gulf War-style juggernaut. It's hard to weigh how much this results from the unlikelihood of success, the probable risks, other countries' objections, fear of war's impact on the deflating global economy, and the sheer irrationality of such an enterprise."[521] Alas, none of these deterred the Bush Administration from launching a juggernaut that far exceeded its Gulf War predecessor.

As the extent of the looming Iraq catastrophe started to dawn on me, I began seeking ways to contribute my widow's mite to the effort to contain Bush and his neoconservative cronies. I had become friends with John Humphries, a community organizer and Quaker who had come on as staff director at the Naugatuck Valley Project, visited Iraq, and decided to drop everything and work full time to oppose the war; I helped out with his attempt to mobilize the religious community and others in Connecticut against the war. I went to demonstrations. I helped lobby our local Congressman – who at the last minute in fact decided to vote against the war. But I decided the biggest contribution I could make – as well as the most congenial – was to write strategic pieces for the movement and op eds for the wider public. The Internet made possible a kind of initiative that would have required funding and a whole political apparatus a decade before.

As Bush began mobilizing support for a criminal and self-defeating attack on Iraq, I began to realize that the American people were too freaked out by 9/11 to be able effectively to resist. At the same time, I believed that the Bush administration's goal of global domination could be used to isolate and contain US aggression, and that isolation would in turn give the American people and American elites second thoughts about what Bush was up to. So I wrote an "Open Letter from an American to the World: HELP!" It began:

> The Bush administration is blundering into a global conflagration. There is no force within the US likely to stop it. It is up to the rest of the world, especially America's friends and allies – both governments and their citizens – to constrain its rush to disaster.[522]

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[521] Jeremy Brecher, "Now More Than Ever: A Global Movement for Global Justice," *ZNet*, September 28, 2001.

[522] Jeremy Brecher, "Open Letter from an American to the World: HELP!" December, 2001. Reprinted in *Antipode*, March, 2002.

It concluded:

"We have a slogan here: "Friends don't let friends drive drunk. PLEASE: America's friends need to take the car keys away until this power-drunk superpower sobers up."

I sent the piece to all the contacts abroad I could think of. I also worked with John Humphries to bring a delegation of British anti-war leaders to the US to share with American religious communities their concerns about US threats against Iraq.

On February 8, 2003 a commentary from *Z* magazine's ZNet came across my computer screen. It was titled "A U.N. Alternative to War: 'Uniting for Peace'" by Michael Ratner, head of the Center for Constitutional Rights and Jules Lobel of the University of Pittsburgh law school. It proposed using an obscure UN procedure called "Uniting for Peace" to take the Iraq issue from the Security Council to the General Assembly, which undoubtedly was opposed to US action against Iraq, and which unlike the Security Council was not subject to a US veto.

At first the idea made little impression on me. But as the Bush administration pressed on for war even without Security Council endorsement, and as global opposition surged without finding an effective way to constrain US policy, it suddenly hit me that a campaign for action by the General Assembly might be a significant pressure point. I did a quick research scan and discovered that, while the Center for Constitutional Rights had taken the lead in proposing the idea, there was no public campaign around it. It was virtually unknown and undiscussed even within the peace movement. After sounding out a few people whose judgment I trusted, I decided this was a good wheel to put my shoulder to. In an article that bounced widely around the web I wrote:

"If the US attacks Iraq without support of the UN Security Council, will the world be powerless to stop it? The answer is no. Under a procedure called "Uniting for Peace," the UN General Assembly can demand an immediate ceasefire and withdrawal."[523]

I proposed that the global peace movement make General Assembly action a central demand in the next round of global anti-war demonstrations. "Then we can mobilize pressure on governments that claim to oppose the war – the great majority of UN members – to demand that they initiate and support such a resolution."[524]

I contacted the Center for Constitutional Rights and asked about their strategy. Steven Watt replied, "We are just trying to get as many people and organizations as possible to run with the Uniting for Peace Resolution procedure, to get a worldwide groundswell of public opinion in support.[525] With help and guidance from John Humphries, I tried to get MoveOn, United for Peace and Justice, Win Without War, and anti-war religious groups involved, but without much success. Their agendas seemed full. As far as I know, Greenpeace was the only major organization that joined the CCR in its campaign.

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[523] Jeremy Brecher, "Uniting for Peace," *CounterPunch*, March 5, 2003. Reprinted elsewhere.
[524] "Uniting for Peace,"
[525] March 7, 2003

Meanwhile, in response to my article I was getting a steady stream of emails from all over the world asking how to help. A typical example read:

> I am a community activist in northern Vermont and your proposal seems like the only possible light at the end of a very dark tunnel, I would like to help and offer you my limited aid if you can think of what I can do to promote this. Please respond, I am more than happy to write letters to each of the general assembly and can start to petition the community I am a part of.

A French group began setting up a multilingual website to promote the Uniting for Peace strategy in the EU countries. A Malaysian activist told me his group had gone in to lobby the government. Jai Sen approached a friend at the *Times of India* who wrote an editorial supporting the idea.

Google News had only recently appeared, and a daily search produced a stream of little news items from all over the world about efforts to promote the idea. I started compiling these and sending out a series of Uniting for Peace "Information/Action Updates." In the vacuum of peace movement involvement, I inadvertently became the primary source of public information on the subject. A few selections from the first "Update":[526]

UNITED STATES
A group of former diplomats led by William venden Heuvel, former US Permanent Representative to the United Nations, held a briefing at the UN on Uniting for Peace. "For those in the United Nations who refuse to support force, vanden Heuvel said, "We still have the option of going immediately to the General Assembly and putting it to a vote of the world." -- AP, March 11, 2003

BRAZIL
Kofi Annan "noted that he had received a suggestion from Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula Da Silva that the United Nations convene a summit of world leaders who are not Security Council members to help search for a compromise acceptable to all sides." -- Reuters 3/13/03

NORWAY:
If the UN Security Council is not able to agree on a solution to the Iraq crisis, the issue should be turned over the General Assembly, says Oslo Bishop Gunnar Staalsett in a letter to the Norwegian Government. -- *Norway Post*

The US was not long in launching a preemptive attack against a General Assembly meeting on Iraq. As US forces launched "Operation Iraqi Freedom," my "Update" of March 20, 2003 revealed what was happening behind the scenes:[527]

The Chilean newspaper *La Tercera* reports that their embassy in Washington received

[526] March 13, 2003.
[527] misc2003\ufpupd2, March 20, 2003

a letter from the U.S., technically called a "non paper," that "demands" that they "focus on the real challenges that are to come and avoid provocative steps within the Security Council such as condemning resolutions or calls for an emergency session of the General Assembly. Such steps will not change the path that we are on, but will increase tensions, make divisions deeper and could provoke more damage to the UN and the Security Council." The US Ambassador to Chile confirmed that the letter was sent to all the countries of the world.[528] In Barbados, diplomatic sources said the US State Department had sent an urgent note to regional governments stressing that the US would see the region's participation in such a meeting as "inimical to its national interest."[529]

The US diplomatic attack was a response to governmental support for UFP that was building around the world.

UNITED NATIONS
Diplomats told CNN that "members of the U.N.'s non-aligned nations – underdeveloped countries that make up more than two-thirds of the U.N. – had discussed calling an emergency session of the General Assembly under the 'Uniting for Peace' resolution."[530]

RUSSIA
The State Duma, the lower house of the Russian parliament, approved 226 to 101 a resolution calling on the Russian president to seek a UN General Assembly emergency session "due to the military action launched by the United States and Britain against Iraq."[531] The same position is reportedly shared by the upper chamber.[532]

MAYLASIA
Malaysia, current chairman of the 116-nation Non Aligned Movement, condemned a US-led attack on Iraq as "an illegal act of aggression." Acting Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said that Malaysia, in its capacity of the Non-Aligned Movement chairman, "Will be consulting member countries of NAM on the appropriate course of action."[533]

INDONESIA
Indonesian President Megawati Soekarnoputri called on the UN Security Council to hold an emergency meeting to urge the US and its allies to stop the war. "If that was not

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[528] *La Tercera*, "Brownfield confirma que EE.UU. envió carta a Chile para evitar más problemas diplomáticos," March 19, 2001. (title in English: Brownfield Confirms that U.S. Sent Letter to Chile to Avoid More Diplomatic Problems," on-line at: http://www.latercera.cl/lt/Articulo/0,4293,3255_5702_22593738,00.html ) I was tipped off to this report by an email from a staff person I had been working with at the Institute for Policy Studies, who was told about it by sources in Chile.
[529] "US warns Caribbean," *The Jamaica Observer*, March 20, 2003.
[530] "U.S.., UK not expected to attend U.N. meeting on Iraq," CNN, March 18, 2003.
[531] "Putin Demands Swift End to War With Iraq," AP, March 20, 2003, in *The Guardian*. "Russian parliament calls on Putin to seek UN General Assembly meeting," AFP, March 20, 2003.
[532] "Duma wants UN General Assembly to debate Iraq crisis," IRNA, March 20, 2003.
[533] "Malaysia says war on Iraq 'illegal,'" AFP, *Borneo Bulletin*, March 19, 2003.

possible, the UN General Assembly should meet to discuss the issue, Mrs. Megawati said after a special cabinet meeting."[534]

BRAZIL
Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has been "speaking to regional and international leaders – including U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan – about the possibility of summoning those world leaders opposed to war to a meeting of the General Assembly to discuss alternatives to armed conflict."[535]

AUSTRALIA
Leader of the Democrats in the Australian parliament, Senator Andrew Bartlett, called on governments to use Resolution 377 (Uniting for Peace) to put war in Iraq before the UN General Assembly. "The assembly could mandate, for example, that the inspection regime be permitted to complete its inspections. An overwhelming vote against war by the nations of the world would increase the pressure on the United States, United Kingdom and Australia to reconsider."[536]

PAKISTAN
At a seminar in Islamabad, speakers including a former Air Force Chief and a former Secretary General of Foreign Affairs, advocated that "The matter should be taken to the UN General Assembly and war should be averted by gaining two-thirds majority in the Assembly."[537]

VATICAN
Archbishop Renato Martino, head of the Vatican's justice and peace council and for 16 years Vatican representative to the UN, said that the UN General Assembly could hold an emergency session of all its members. "In that case, all the countries could talk and vote, and the entire international community would face its responsibilities."[538]

More grassroots efforts also emerged. Thousands of women from women's organizations in over 35 countries including Syria, Russia, China, Germany, Sweden, France, Canada, and Turkey demonstrated in New Delhi, demanding that "UN member states use their power to carry out the emergency application of resolution 377 to convene the UN General Assembly to stop the bombing and avoid catastrophe." [539] The Greenpeace flagship *Rainbow Warrior* blocked the U.S Navy vessel Cape Horn from delivering arms for the war against Iraq. Greenpeace said all 191 members of the UN General Assembly should use UN resolution 377, known as 'Uniting for Peace,' to call an emergency session." [540]

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[534] "Security boosted before backlash," *The Age*, March 21, 2003.
[535] "Brazil: Iraq and U.S. guilty of disrespect," UPI, March 19, 2003.
[536] "Democrats push for NZ UN move," AAP, news.com.au March 12, 2003.
[537] "NA starts debate on Iraq, Pak can be next target: Fazal," *Pak Tribune*, March 19, 2003.
[538] John Norton, "Vatican official decries French, U.S. pressure tactics over U.N. vote," Catholic News Service, March 13, 2003.
[539] "Massive demonstrations against US war on Iraq in New Delhi," IRNA, March 20, 2003.
[540] Greenpeace Press Release: "New Zealander arrested as Spanish police board the Greenpeace flagship" March 15, 2003.

By my March 21 update, the fate of Uniting for Peace seemed to hang in the balance.[541] The group of 166 nonaligned nations at the UN met before the US attack "to consider convening a special session of the 191-nation assembly to denounce the United States." They failed to agree on whether to go ahead after "some argued action was premature as the war had not yet begun." No new meeting has been set, but "there are a lot of countries talking about that," according to Syrian UN Ambassador Mikhail Wehbe.[542] "Nations opposed to war will probably muster a majority in the assembly," according to Reuters.[543]

With US forces launching "Operation Iraqi Freedom," UN General Assembly President Jan Kavan of the Czech Republic said he thought it "very likely" that a special session would be called as early as the next week. If no session were called or a resolution defeated, "it would be a very clear victory for the United States," he said.[544]

But according to Reuters, "The United States has launched a worldwide diplomatic drive to head off the calling of an emergency session of the U.N. General Assembly to condemn the U.S.-led war on Iraq."

Diplomats attributed the "disarray among the nonaligned" to "U.S. diplomatic muscle" and said "many countries feared offending Washington." General Assembly President Jan Kavan stated, "The United States is putting pressure on many countries to resist." A U.S. State Department official confirmed the United States was making its case that an emergency session "would not serve the interests of the United Nations." He acknowledged, however, that "the situation is still fluid."[545]

By my April 1, Update, the press was reporting that a coalition of Arab, other Islamic, and developing countries had decided to ask for a special session on Iraq at the UN General Assembly.[546]

The Organization of the Islamic Conference Group (OIC) declared on Monday, March 31, that it is ready to take the Iraq war to the General Assembly. The OIC, which includes 57 UN member countries, plans to initiate such a meeting this week.

The General Assembly special session will be formally requested by Malaysian Ambassador Rastam Mohd Isa, who heads the 115-member Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) of developing countries at the United Nations. The Malaysian Ambassador "plans to request the special session, in a letter to . . . the assembly's acting president" before April 9.[547]

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[541] Following material from \misc2003\ufpupd3; 3/21/03'
[542] Arieff.
[543] "US gives UN reasons for attacking Iraq, March 21, 2003 in the *New Zealand Herald*.
[544] Irwin Arieff, "US Battles Calls for Emergency UN Session on Iraq," *Reuters*, March 21, 2003 on www.washingtonpost.com.
[545] Arieff.
[546] Following information is from [\mydoc\ufpupd4; 4/1/03].
[547] Irwin Arieff, "Arab Nations Press UN Assembly to Weigh in on Iraq," *Reuters*, March 31, 2003.

On Tuesday the 8th of April, the Arab League formally requested a U.N. General Assembly meeting on the war in Iraq and a meeting of the Assembly's General Committee was scheduled to consider the request.

But US opposition remained implacable. The press reported that the US had been "aggressively lobbying governments around the world for the past two weeks to help head off an emergency assembly session on Iraq."[548] Greenpeace released the text of a communication from the United States to UN representatives around the world leaked by an "incensed" UN delegate. It stated, "Given the highly charged atmosphere, the United States would regard a General Assembly session on Iraq as unhelpful and as directed against the United States. Please know that this question as well as your position on it is important to the US." It warned/threatened that "the staging of such a divisive session could do additional harm to the UN." [549]

The US threats were effective. Under the headline, "That's it," Greenpeace's team at the UN reported April 10,[550]

"Amid growing signs that support for a General Assembly session on Iraq was dwindling, and that a likely outcome was something like 50 votes in favour, 40 against, and 100 abstentions; and with the rapidly developing situation on the ground in Iraq, the Arab Group at the UN met at 3 PM today and within ten minutes decided to 'postpone' their request for a General Assembly session on Iraq. There is no timetable for 'unpostponing' the request, and our reading is that the situation will have to deteriorate VERY substantially for this initiative to move out of the 'dead letter' category, where it is now firmly ensconced."

Some hoped the Uniting for Peace strategy might be used to shape events even after the US conquest of Iraq. In May, 2003, human rights and anti-war groups including Amnesty International, Greenpeace International, and the Anglican church formed a "Uniting for Peace Coalition" that called for an emergency meeting of the U.N. General Assembly to counter US proposals for post-war Iraq.[551] It seemed like an appropriate signal for me to bow out of a role for which I was only marginally suited and which I had only taken on to fill an apparent vacuum.

The principal criticism I received of my effort came from leftists who argued that the UN was inherently a creature of US imperialism and that I was giving false hope that it might be something else. From friendlier forces I received the comment that an effort of this kind really required an organizational center and staff. I couldn't have agreed more.

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[548] Arieff.
[549] "Us to UN: Butt out," www.greenpeace.org/news April 1, 2003.
[550] Sidebar updates http://www.greenpeace.org/international_en/news/details?item_id=196577 April 10, 2003.
[551] "Human rights, antiwar groups fight Iraq resolution, *Reuters*, May 21, 2003.

## Terminating the Juggernaut

As US tanks rolled into Baghdad, I began trying to figure out the lessons of the unsuccessful struggle to prevent the war and how to apply them to the struggle ahead.

For the second half of the 20th century, the US had been the world's dominant superpower. But its power always depended on a system of alliances with other powers. The first President Bush's Gulf War Coalition represented the acme of this approach. But in the post-Cold War era, as the US emerged as the world's only superpower, US strategy shifted toward unilateralism. This was already apparent during the Clinton Administration in the gradual abandonment of the multilateral treaty process and the deliberate decision not to seek UN authorization for the bombing of Yugoslavia.

Some veterans of the first Bush administration blamed the survival of Saddam Hussein's regime on US deference to its allies, the United Nations, and international law. They raised the drift toward unilateralism to a matter of principle. In a long series of position papers they argued that the US should create "full spectrum dominance" in military power and use it to intimidate or eliminate any regime that didn't conform to its wishes.

It became increasingly clear that this group dominated the administration of the second George Bush. They aimed to free the world's only superpower to act unilaterally against those it defined as enemies and to demand obedience, rather than just cooperation, from all others – including countries like France and Russia that sometimes acted like sovereign nations. They seized on the 9/11 terrorist attacks as a heaven-sent opportunity to implement this agenda.

Once the US had toppled Saddam Hussein's regime, I started working on a strategy paper called "Terminating the Bush Juggernaut."[552] The primary purpose was "to help frame a dialogue on strategy among the many people and forces worldwide that have an interest in or the capacity to contribute to halting the Bush juggernaut." I also hoped to "counter the hopelessness" induced by the juggernaut's "image of invincibility" by showing there was at least one viable strategy for halting it. It was published as a "Discussion Paper" by a "Think Tank Without Walls" called Foreign Policy In Focus, which distributed it to anti-war gatherings and over the Internet immediately after the US occupied Iraq.

When I was working as a self-styled "Quaker military analyst" during the Vietnam war I became enamored of the "situation reports" prepared annually by the North Vietnamese general Vo Nguyen Giap and extensively excerpted in the *New York Times*. These presented an integrated analysis that ranged from detailed conditions on the battlefield to the political dynamics in the world's capitals. From Tim Costello I learned about Sartre's idea of a "totalization" –Tim compared it to what's in the mind of a boxer just before he throws a punch -- in which knowledge of the social and personal past was organized around the purposes of a particular actor in a particular time and place. These models

[552] Jeremy Brecher, "Terminating the Bush Juggernaut," *Foreign Policy in Focus* May, 2003.

hovered somewhere in the background as I tried to analyze how to deal with an out-of-control superpower.

"Terminating the Bush Juggernaut" was in effect a thought experiment. I examined the actions that various players had taken during the campaign against the Iraq war and tried to envision how they could be varied, combined, and extended to be more effective. While my eyes were focused on the historical situation we confronted, I drew extensively – if only partly consciously – on my emerging heuristic regarding the process of social change.

My basic goal was to make a case for collective action for collective security against the Bush administration. I started from the premise that the US government under Bush represented an on-going threat to the peoples and nations of the world that they would have to address sooner or later. No single force was able to halt the Bush juggernaut. An effective strategy therefore required cooperation among different forces that had different views and interests. Containment of US aggression required "global self-defense." "Such 'collective security' has been necessary in the past, and it is necessary now, to halt attempts at global domination."

A wide range of forces composed the "other superpower" that had opposed the US attack on Iraq and had the interest and/or capacity to contribute to terminating the Bush juggernaut. Global public opinion, grounded in global norms, overwhelmingly opposed the unprovoked US aggression against Iraq and the continuing drive for global domination. The global peace movement that emerged in opposition to the Iraq war could be a force if it was able to move on from just opposing war on Iraq to resisting the Bush team's broader program. Many governments that had long been subordinate to US hegemony refused to support the attack on Iraq at the UN or to contribute troops; their policies in the post-war era were an open question.

The Bush juggernaut had vulnerabilities that the "other superpower" could make use of. Its underlying weakness was the illusion that 5% of the world's people could rule the other 95% by dictation – especially when that 5% in turn represents the interests of only 5% of its own people. The Bush administration violated global norms shared by most of the world's people and to some extent by its governments. The US economy was highly vulnerable, needing to borrow more than $500 billion a year from abroad to pay for imports. The US suffered from "imperial overstretch," lacking military manpower, transport, or colonial administrators anywhere near sufficient to implement the Bush administration's dreams of global imperial dictation.

Bush also had vulnerabilities at home. While traditional US hegemony had broad support, especially among elites, Bush's policy of unilateral dictation did not. Bush's domestic polices were generating huge budget deficits that undermined the bases of consent at home. Its attacks on the rights of women, labor, and minorities could lead to counter-mobilizations. Its incursions against constitutional human rights protections won support during the terrorism panic but might breed resistance from conservatives as well

as liberals in the long run. Pressure from outside could make use of these vulnerabilities, undermining support for Bush and encouraging internal resistance.

I proposed "nonviolent sanctions" as a means for the "other superpower" to take advantage of these vulnerabilities. In its broadest definition, a sanction is simply "that which induces observance of law or custom." Nonviolent sanctions, as conceived by Gene Sharp, "aim to undermine the opponent's social, economic, political, and military power" by "withholding or withdrawing the sources of support needed by the opponent to maintain power and to achieve goals."[553] The purpose of sanctions would be not to punish Americans but "to encourage the American people, government, and institutions to repudiate the Bush administration's pursuit of global domination and aggressive war and instead to embrace international law and widely shared global values." Sanctions should express "not anti-Americanism but rather a commitment to global norms."

I described a number of such actions that had already been taken or discussed. Just the threat of a cutoff of financial flows into the US could bring a catastrophic fall in the dollar. So could a decision by oil exporting countries to invoice oil in Euros instead of dollars. A campaign for individuals and institutions not to hold US Treasury securities, modeled on the campaign for divestment from apartheid South Africa, could be conducted by social movements even without governmental involvement. US bases around the world could be made targets of campaigns for expulsion. Nations could withdraw from cooperation with the US "war on terrorism," international trade agreements, and other diplomatic and economic objectives. The legality of US actions could be challenged in international courts and, through individual civil disobedience justified by an international law defense, in national courts.

Crucial to an effective strategy was cooperation among the elements of the "other superpower." During the lead-up to the Iraq war, many governments had cooperated at the UN and elsewhere. Russia, France, and Germany directly coordinated their anti-war maneuvering in what the Bush administration dubbed the "coalition of the unwilling." Meanwhile, the peace movement had coordinated its action in more than 100 countries. "Terminating the Bush Juggernaut" provided a detailed analysis of how these forces might cooperate to force a change on the US government.

My approach was largely an extension of the "Uniting for Peace" campaign. I proposed that the peace movement fight to force every government to join the "coalition of the unwilling." That coalition should become a "Shadow UN" that would work to isolate the US and eventually use the UN General Assembly to circumvent US domination of the Security Council and legitimate sanctions against it.

I didn't expect to instantly persuade peoples, movements, and governments of the need for collective action for collective security. Rather, I hoped to focus attention on past and future experience in a way that would help them draw that conclusion over time based on their own experience.

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[553] "Terminating," p. 18.

Obviously I did not succeed. In the aftermath of the US conquest of Iraq, the Bush juggernaut proceeded with little effective constraint. The "Coalition of the Unwilling" returned to cooperation, albeit reluctant, with the US. The Security Council legitimated the US occupation of Iraq. Within a year the Bush juggernaut was in a shambles as a result of its own contradictions. The result was not a reassertion of global norms, however, but intensification of global disorder.

Perhaps the greatest "success" of the Bush administration was to stymie efforts to address the real problems facing the world, from global warming to population growth to world poverty. Much of the world came to despair of doing anything constructive that the US government wouldn't disrupt. This "success" has lasted long beyond the demise of the Bush administration.

While Bush was no Hitler, the failure of collective security against US aggression reminded me of the Axis threat in the years before World War II. From early in the rise of fascism, some in both elite and popular circles around the world advocated "collective security." Many historians concur that vigorous diplomatic action even in the late 1930s could have halted Nazi expansionism in its tracks without war. But Britain, France, and the Soviet Union at various times all made separate deals with the Nazis, and the US long stood aloof from the fray. As the Nazi vote grew exponentially in the early 1930s, the German Communist Party belittled the threat and instead of seeking a united resistance to Nazism attacked the socialists as "social fascists." People do not necessarily choose common preservation, even when the alternative is catastrophic.

The tendency toward domination and even dictation on the part of the US will be with the world for a long time. Growing world chaos and the breakdown of constructive response to global problems is the price the world is paying for failing to unite to restraint US power.

## War Crimes Watch

On the eve of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the anti-war movement organized the largest simultaneous global demonstrations in history. But once the U.S. attacked, most Americans rallied behind the President and the peace movement became a diminishing force. Even as the occupation ground on and popular doubts gradually reemerged, organized opposition remained limited and isolated.

Meanwhile, more and more American war crimes were revealed. Could we, I wondered, draw on the legacy of international law based "constitutional insurgency"[554] from the Vietnam era – of which I had once been so skeptical – to challenge the Iraq war? And whether we could or not, was I personally willing to be complicit in my country's war crimes? I didn't know the answer to the first question, but the answer to the second question was no. As I wrote in the article "Resist U.S. War Crimes,"[555]

> Most Americans hold these truths to be self-evident: Torture is wrong; attacking another country that hasn't attacked you is wrong; occupying another country with your army and imposing your will on its people is wrong. These policies are not only immoral. They are illegal.
>
> Most Americans believe that even the highest government officials are bound by law. They reject Attorney General-designate Alberto Gonzales' view that the law is whatever the President says it is - that if the President says something isn't torture, then it's O.K. to order it.
>
> Most Americans don't agree that their president can unilaterally annul treaties like the Geneva conventions. They don't accept, as Gonzales put it in a 2002 legal memo, that if the President simply declares there's a "new paradigm" he can thereby "render obsolete Geneva's strict limitations on questioning of enemy prisoners."
>
> Aggression, military occupation, and torture were the war crimes, crimes against peace, and crimes against humanity for which the Axis leaders were prosecuted at the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials after World War II. The U.S. has supported similar charges against Slobodan Milosevic and Saddam Hussein.
>
> But what about the U.S. attack on Iraq, which Kofi Annan has bluntly called "illegal"? What about the leveling of Fallujah and the targeting of hospitals and urban neighborhoods? What about torture at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo? If a single standard is applied, these too are crimes of war. . .

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[554] See "Global constitutional insurgency" above.
[555] Jeremy Brecher, "Resist U.S. War Crimes," January 25, 2005 by *CommonDreams.org* http://www.commondreams.org/views05/0125-31.htm

How many Americans can honestly claim to know nothing about this "illegal activity"? It's reported in detail in the daily newspapers and shown in full color on the nightly news, from the phony reports of Iraq's "yellowcake" uranium to the shooting of ambulances to the horrors of Abu Ghraib.

In 1967, faced with evidence of the napalming of villages and massacring of civilians in Vietnam, a distinguished group of Americans signed a "Call to Resist Illegitimate Authority." They declared the Vietnam War illegal under U.S. and international law and pledged to support young people who were resisting the draft.

When the Johnson administration charged world famous pediatrician Dr. Benjamin Spock, Yale Chaplain William Sloan Coffin, and others with conspiracy to "aid, counsel, and abet" resistance to the draft, it identified the "Call" as their first overt act.

There's no draft yet, but there's plenty of resistance. The Pentagon acknowledges 5,500 desertions since the Iraq war began. Army Reserve and National Guard recruitment is plummeting. Many in the military are deciding not to reenlist.

"60 Minutes" recently interviewed U.S. resisters in Canada and reported that "conscience, not cowardice, made them American deserters." One of them, Specialist Jeremy Hinzman of Rapid City, South Dakota joined the 82nd Airborne as a paratrooper in 2001 and served in Afghanistan. But when he was ordered to Iraq, he went to Canada instead. He explained to "60 Minutes," "I was told in basic training that, if I'm given an illegal or immoral order, it is my duty to disobey it. And I feel that invading and occupying Iraq is an illegal and immoral thing to do."

Senior officials like Alberto Gonzales set the policies that led to Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib. Nearly 140 low-level military service members have been disciplined or face courts-martial for abusing detainees. Instead of being punished, Gonzales is being rewarded with the job of U.S. Attorney General.

It's time for all Americans to face our responsibility to halt Bush administration war crimes. It's time to give our support to those who are refusing to participate in those crimes. It's time for a new "Call to Resist Illegitimate Authority."

I for one will say right now that I support those who refuse illegal orders to participate in this illegal war. I know there are many who will join me.

To Alberto Gonzales, I would like to say that I encourage all Americans, military and civilian, to disobey orders based on your memos justifying torture. I say it's their legal right, indeed their legal and moral duty, to disobey such illegal orders.

> Gonzales may disagree. In the era of the misleadingly named PATRIOT Act, he may follow the example of the Johnson administration and bring charges against those who encourage resistance to military authority. If he does, he will test whether a jury of American citizens will agree that the law is whatever the President says it is -- even if that includes torture and an illegal war.

I helped draft a "Call for Affirmative Measures To Prevent the Commission of War Crimes by the Bush Administration."[556] My friend John Humphries, a Quaker peace activist, worked with the Connecticut interfaith group Reclaiming the Prophetic Voice to organize a series of actions around such a call.

But many mainstream peace activists were wary. As one well-known leader told me in 2005, "War-crimes talk pushes people away. People don't want to hear it. Polls indicate that the population says under some circumstances torture is OK, and that what's being done is not torture. People blame bad apples. They want to prosecute the bad apples so they can have a cleaner war. Besides, they say, we're dealing with horrible people who cut off people's heads. What is our end goal? If our objective is to stop the occupation, then war crimes is not the best angle."[557] Another national leader proposed to organize a national event around a call to resist war crimes, but was dissuaded by his staff. He told me, the understanding and groundwork for doing this has not yet been laid.

I concluded that a "literary struggle" making the case for the responsibility to oppose U.S. war crimes in Iraq was needed to lay that groundwork. I asked Brendan Smith and Jill Cutler if they wanted to co-edit a book on U.S. war crimes in Iraq. Both answered yes without even sleeping on it. The book, which was finished in barely three months, was titled *In the Name of Democracy: American War Crimes in Iraq and Beyond*.[558]

As a complement to the book, Brendan and I established War Crimes Watch as "an educational project designed to help Americans probe our government's responsibility for war crimes and our own responsibility for halting them." Its objectives were:

> To inform Americans about the law of war crimes as embodied in the Geneva Conventions, the UN Charter, the precedents of international war crimes tribunals, the U.S. War Crimes and Anti-Torture Acts, the U.S. Army Field Manual, and other sources.
>
> To educate Americans about the accountability of public officials and the responsibility of citizens for war crimes committed by their country.

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[556] Jeremy Brecher, "An 'Affirmative Measure' to Help Prevent the Commission of War Crimes by the Bush Administration," *Foreign Policy in Focus*, December 28, 2004 http://www.fpif.org/fpiftxt/1225

[557] Jeremy Brecher and Brendan Smith, "War Crimes: The Posse Gathers," *Foreign Policy in Focus*, December 2, 2005 http://www.fpif.org/fpiftxt/2970

[558] Jeremy Brecher, Jill Cutler, and Brendan Smith, eds., *In the Name of Democracy: American War Crimes in Iraq and Beyond* (New York: Metropolitan/Holt, 2005.)

To make known the credible evidence for past, current, and planned future war crimes by the U.S. government.

To place the question of accountability for possible U.S. war crimes at the center of our national political discourse.

To encourage citizen, civil society, and governmental investigation of possible war crime activity and the application of law enforcement procedures to violators.

In addition to detailing daily reports of new U.S. war crimes in Iraq on the website, Brendon and I wrote twenty or more short pieces relating current developments to our underlying analysis of war crimes and constitutional crisis, mostly for the *Nation* magazine website and widely reposted around the web, with titles like "War Criminals, Beware," "Torture and the Content of our Character," and "Where are the Good Americans?"[559]

In a signed *Nation* magazine editorial called "The Pincer strategy,"[560] we noted a convergence from left and right of a deep concern about Bush administration threats to constitutional rule of law in the US. A report from the rightwing libertarian Cato Institute identified a whole slew of constitutional violations by the Bush administration, including "the denial of habeas corpus, the violation of international torture conventions, efforts to deny the right to a jury trial and the erosion of war powers restrictions." In words that might have spilled from the mouth of anti-war activists like Cindy Sheehan or Scott Ritter, Cato concluded that we now have "a president who can launch wars at will, and who cannot be restrained from ordering the commission of war crimes, should he choose to do so." We raised the possibility of a "law and democracy" movement

> "framing the efforts of diverse allies--protesters, civil liberties and human rights groups, military lawyers, legislators and others--in terms of the enforcement of constitutional principles. This alliance should be presented as pro-law, pro-Constitution and engaged in a long-term project of democratic restoration."

One day I was called out of a meeting for a phone call from anti-war organizer David Solnit. He told me that the first commissioned officer to publicly refuse to fight in Iraq was about to go public and was asking for support. Shortly thereafter, First Lieutenant Ehren Watada held a video press conference saying, "It is my conclusion as an officer of the armed forces that the war in Iraq is not only morally wrong but a horrible breach of American law." Lt.Watada explained, "Although I have tried to resign out of protest, I am forced to participate in a war that is manifestly illegal. As the order to take part in an

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[559] http://www.thenation.com/search/search.mhtml

[560] Jeremy Brecher & Brendan Smith, "The Pincer Strategy," *The Nation*, June 26, 2006 http://www.thenation.com/doc/20060626/brecher

illegal act is ultimately unlawful as well, I must as an officer of honor and integrity refuse that order." His participation, he added, "would make me party to war crimes." [561]

Brendan and I were able to publicize Lieutenant Watada's stand in a series of articles on *the Nation* website and to prepare materials for his support campaign. One of the most inspiring occasions of my life was spending two days interviewing and hanging out with him.

When he learned he was being sent to Iraq, Lieutenant Watada had begun reading up on the war so that he could explain to his troops what they were fighting for. Instead, he concluded that the war was based on false pretenses. The war violated the Constitution and War Powers Act, which "limits the President in his role as commander in chief from using the armed forces in any way he sees fit." Watada also concluded that "my moral and legal obligation is to the Constitution and not to those who would issue unlawful orders."

He further argued that the war was illegal under international law. "The UN Charter, the Geneva Convention and the Nuremberg principles all bar wars of aggression." The Constitution makes such treaties part of American law as well.

The military conduct of the occupation was also illegal: "If you look at the Army Field Manual, 27-10, which governs the laws of land warfare, it states certain responsibilities for the occupying power. As the occupying power, we have failed to follow a lot of those regulations." The "wholesale slaughter and mistreatment of the Iraqi people" is "a contradiction to the Army's own law of land warfare."

When he first discovered the truth about the war, he thought he had no alternative to going, even though it meant violating everything he believed. Then he realized he could refuse.

"The one God-given freedom and right that we really have is freedom of choice," Watada said, echoing the profound message of Mohandas Gandhi.

> I just want to tell everybody, especially people who doubt the war, that you do have that one freedom. And that's something that they can never take away. Yes, they will imprison you. They'll throw the book at you. They'll try to make an example out of you, but you do have that choice.
>
> When you are looking your children in the eye in the future, or when you are at the end of your life, you want to look back on your life and know that at a very important moment, when I had the opportunity to make the right decisions, I did so, even knowing there were negative consequences.

[561] Jeremy Brecher and Brendan Smith, "Lieutenant Watada's War Against the War," June 26, 2006, http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/06/13/opinion/main1706260.shtml Sources for the various quotations are provided there.

While such efforts to raise the question of U.S. war crimes in Iraq have been met with evasion and denial, it is an issue that is not going to go away.

When contemplating the genocide of the Jews, Hitler is reported to have asked sarcastically, "Who now remembers the Armenians?" – referring to the Armenian genocide of less than two decades before. But historical memory is not so easily expunged in today's world. My friend Grant Hanessian recently visited Turkey and reported that – eight decades later -- the Armenian massacre was one of the three leading issues in the Turkish media.

I expect that our war crimes in Iraq will still be weighing on the American conscience equally far into the future.[562]

[562] Edit note: This chapter will go on to tell about the movie *In the Name of Democracy* that was based on the book, the outcome of Lt. Watada's case, and the continuing struggle over US war crimes in Iraq.

## China is near

Since the emergence of corporate globalization in the 1980s, it had been evident that the labor movement had to go global or go extinct. Workers around the world shared a common interest in fighting the globalizing corporations, the policies they were imposing on the global economy, and the consequent "race to the bottom," yet steps toward cooperation to that end were agonizingly slow. Gradually over the next two decades, American unions gave growing lip service to the need for "global unionism." But often this seemed to mean little more than a fruitless, even imperialist, strategy of U.S. unions trying to export US unionism to other countries.

How could the barriers to real global labor cooperation be overcome? Tim Costello came up with the idea of creating a bridge-building organization whose specific purpose was to encourage cooperation among unions and their allies across national borders. He asked Brendan Smith and me, along with a Latin America labor and environmental organizer named Claudia Torrelli, to work with him on what we dubbed Global Labor Strategies. Tim and Brendan were the front line of this work; Claudia was a kind of roving ambassador; I served as a sort of back office, helping with writing, research, and strategizing.

One of the greatest weaknesses, both in the effort to develop a global labor movement, and in our own networking toward that end, was the almost complete chasm between workers and worker organizations in China and those in the rest of the world. China allowed only one union, which was officially allied with the ruling Communist Party and whose workplace officials were often managers of the very companies whose workers they were supposed to represent. It was officially shunned by U.S. and most other foreign unions on the grounds that it was government dominated.

In the face of China's move to a market economy and the destruction of its "iron rice bowl" social safety net, Chinese workers engaged in tens of thousands of strikes and protest movements – vaguely reminiscent of the mass strikes I had described during the industrialization of the U.S. But foreign labor movements were playing little role in defending these workers' rights or helping them to organize.

U.S. unions maintained a nationalist and protectionist framework that portrayed Chinese exports as a threat to U.S. jobs – rarely noting that the bulk of growth in U.S. imports from China were actually produced by western corporations and their subsidiaries. With its growing ability to produce at both the high and low ends of the technology spectrum, China was becoming the wage-setter for the entire global economy. It provided the "bottom" for the race to the bottom for work ranging from the most unskilled assembly lines to the highest of high-tech. Without some kind of opening to Chinese workers, the effort to build global solidarity against global capital would always be crippled.

One morning in 2006 I got an email from Tim with a news article from the *South China Morning Post* about a new labor law the Chinese government was proposing. The article

began, "Plans for a new law regulating employment contracts have sparked protests from foreign companies concerned it will put more power into the hands of the government-backed trade union." It went on to say that "foreign companies have already started lobbying" the National People's Congress against the law.[563]

Another article from the same newspaper a few weeks later added, "The European Union Chamber of Commerce in China has expressed concerns at a proposed mainland labour law aimed at providing more protection to workers. It fears the law will increase production costs and create employment conflicts." The Chamber's opposition included a not-so-veiled threat to pull investment out of China if the law was passed. Chamber president Serge Janssens de Varebeke said,

> The strict regulations of the draft new law will limit employers' flexibility and will finally result in an increase of production costs in China. An increase of production costs will force foreign companies to reconsider new investment or continuing with their activities in China.[564]

The Chinese labor legislation, let alone the corporate efforts to oppose it, had barely been mentioned in the U.S. press. Tim, Brendan, and I immediately sensed an opportunity to tell a new story about China. We launched into a crash investigation of the proposed law. A friend working in China leaked us a 42-page document submitted to the Chinese government by the American Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai (AmCham) demanding changes in the draft legislation. Based on this and other sources, GLS produced a report titled *Behind the Great Wall of China*.[565] It began:

> US-based corporations are opposing legislation to give Chinese workers new labor rights.
>
> US-based global corporations like Wal-Mart, Google, UPS, Microsoft, Nike, AT&T, and Intel, acting through US business organizations like the American Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai and the US-China Business Council, are actively lobbying against the new legislation. They are also threatening that foreign corporations will withdraw from China if it is passed.
>
> China's Draft Labor Contract Law would provide minimal standards that are commonplace in many other countries, such as enforceable labor contracts, severance pay regulations, and negotiations over workplace policies and procedures. The Chinese government is supporting these reforms in part as a response to rising labor discontent.

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[563] Bill Savadore, "Firms say new labour law is a step backwards," *South China Morning Post*, March 21, 2006

[564] Shi Jiangtao, "New labour law would bring conflicts, European firms fear," *South China Morning Post*, April 22, 2006.

[565] Global Labor Strategies, *Behind the Great Wall of China: U.S. Corporations Opposing New Rights for Chinese Workers. Opposition may harm workers in the US and other countries*. 2006.http://laborstrategies.blogs.com/global_labor_strategies/files/behind_the_great_wall_of_china.pdf

> Corporate opposition to the law is designed to maintain the status quo in Chinese labor relations. This includes low wages, extreme poverty, denial of basic rights and minimum standards, lack of health and safety protections, and an absence of any legal contract for many employees.
>
> Low wages and poor working conditions in China drive down those in the rest of the world in a "race to the bottom." The opposition of corporations to minimum standards for Chinese workers should be of concern to workers and their political and trade union representatives throughout the world.

Tim and Brendan developed a media strategy around the report and managed to interest David Barbosa, the *New York Times* reporter in Shanghai. They not only gave him the story, but spent many hours bringing him up to speed on the history of labor law and its significance in China. The outcome was a front page article in the *Times* based on our report.

> China is planning to adopt a new law that seeks to crack down on sweatshops and protect workers' rights.
>
> The move, which underscores the government's growing concern about the widening income gap and threats of social unrest, is setting off a battle with American and other foreign corporations that have lobbied against it by hinting that they may build fewer factories here.
>
> Hoping to head off some of the rules, representatives of some American companies are waging an intense lobbying campaign to persuade the Chinese government to revise or abandon the proposed law.[566]

Meanwhile, Brendan and Tim organized an international campaign against what was increasingly seen as a corporate scandal. International trade union organizations condemned the corporate lobbying. Human rights groups polled global corporations on their actions regarding the law and posted the results on the web. Brendan mobilized the leaders of the Progressive Caucus in Congress to issue a statement and draft legislation criticizing corporate influence. The report was translated into Chinese and Spanish and widely circulated on the web.

This campaign actually had an impact. Nike issued a statement dissociating itself from the AmCham lobbying. Under pressure from the European labor movement, the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China issued a "clarification" giving the

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[566] David Barbosa, "China Drafts Law to Boost Unions and End Abuse," *New York Times*, October 13, 2006.
http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/13/business/worldbusiness/13sweat.html?scp=2&sq=david+barboza+china+labor+contract+law&st=nyt

legislation a hearty endorsement and claiming – notwithstanding its previous statements -- that it had never opposed the law.[567]

GLS also contributed to a turnaround in the U.S. labor movement. The dramatic shift was illustrated by president James P. Hoffa of the Teamsters. In *Globalization from Below*, we had described Hoffa's virulent opposition to permanent normal trade relations for China. At a 2000 press conference at the National Press Club, Hoffa had said "What is going to happen in PNTR is that you're going to have a full employment program for people in China." Besides indicating that "a full employment program for people in China" was somehow something bad, Hoffa also managed to put a bigoted twist on the race to the bottom: "There's always somebody that will work cheaper. There's always some guy in a loincloth."[568]

But in 2007, Hoffa and a delegation of other leaders from Change to Win visited China, met with top union and party officials, and toured factories owned by American companies.[569] Hoffa told a news conference, "We felt it was time to get our head out of the sand and engage this enormous country." The reason? The need to resist the race to the bottom.

> The American union leaders say they do not intend to collaborate with China's only state-controlled labor union, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, but they hope that encouraging the government union to improve working conditions and wages in China will reduce the gap between costs in the United States and China. . . . American union leaders say that encouraging union leaders here may actually raise standards in China and around the world, thereby making American jobs more competitive.

Asked how working with China's labor union could improve the wages and conditions of U.S. workers, Hoffa replied, "The way we see that changing is to raise the standards in China. I think a rising tide raises all boats."

According to the *Times*, "American union leaders say they are angry that American companies are trying to oppose or weaken" the Chinese labor contract law. "We've been concerned with how American corporations have attempted to water down that law," Hoffa said.

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[567] Global Labor Strategies, "Why China Matters: Labor Rights in the Era of Globalization" (April, 2008) www.laborstrategies.org

[568] June 1, 2000 speech to National Press Club, broadcast on National Public Radio. Quoted in *Globalization from Below*, p. 54.

[569] David Barbosa, "Putting Aside His Past Criticisms, Teamsters' Chief Is on Mission to China," *New York Times*, May 19, 2007. The Teamsters union conferred regularly with LNS in this period and also commissioned an article from Tim, Brendan, and me for their membership magazine arguing that the real threat to American jobs came not from Chinese workers but from the global corporations that produced with cheap labor in China and sold the goods in the US.

And in a major shift, the International Trade Union Confederation – with support of the AFL-CIO -- voted to drop its Cold War era shunning policy and engage with the official Chinese union.

GLS always expected that implementation of the new labor law would be problematic. But we argued -- based on our knowledge of U.S. and European labor history -- that, when the government promises labor rights, workers are likely to take matters into their own hands and demand that those rights be implemented. And that seems to be just what happened. Auret van Heerden, head of the Washington-based Fair Labor Association, visited China right after the law went into effect and told *Newsweek*:

> I've never seen a law attract so much public attention. At the factory level people are talking about it everywhere. One of the things about the law is it doesn't rely on outside labor enforcement. Once you've got a written contract, there are all sorts of avenues open to a worker: the labor department, labor tribunals, or through other grievance mechanisms. So what you're seeing here is a change of approach where the government is saying, "We'll create a proper contract between workers and employers and give workers the means of enforcing their own contracts." The effect has been immediate. There have already been strikes about it; there have been employers who have panicked about the commitment the law would require, so they've tried to lay off or outsource workers. The workers struck, saying, "No, we're not going to accept that." There have been a couple of high-profile cases of strikes against dismissal involving Hong Kong-listed companies. Take the richest woman in China [Zhang Yin, CEO of Nine Dragons Paper], who owns a huge paper company. She tried to outsource guards and security cleaning services, and didn't want to give contracts. The workers struck. It's been an emblematic case: if one of the richest and most powerful businesswomen in China couldn't sidestep the law. [570]

In August, 2009 Tim told me that he had terminal pancreatic cancer. He died December 4, 2009. His widow, Susanne Rasmussen, told me that Tim said that of all the things he had done in his life, this effort to support Chinese workers had perhaps done the most to improve the lives – and increase the power – of ordinary people. Professor Liu Cheng of Shanghai Normal University, who drafted the law, wrote after Tim's death,

> I will never forget his contribution to Chinese Labor Contract Law. He is a friend of Chinese working people. The Chinese labor legislation is the turning point from deregulation to reregulation. So Mr. Costello's work is also a worldwide contribution. Working people of the world shall remember him forever.[571]

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[570] Jonathan Adams, "Chinese Union: New labor regulations designed to protect China's workers are already having an impact, according to an American-based watchdog," *Newsweek* Web Exclusive, Feb 14, 2008. http://www.newsweek.com/id/111027

[571] For a wide collection of materials and recollections of Tim, visit http://laborstrategies.blogs.com/global_labor_strategies/in-memory-of-gls-founder-tim-costello/

## Global warming

Can you date this quote?

> "It has been estimated that the burning of fossil fuels (coal and oil) add 600 million tons of carbon dioxide to the air annually, about .03 percent of the total atmospheric mass. . . Since the Industrial Revolution, the overall atmospheric mass of carbon dioxide has increased by 25 percent over earlier, more stable levels. . . This growing blanket of carbon dioxide, by intercepting heat radiated from the earth, will lead to more destructive storm patterns and eventually to melting of the polar ice caps, rising sea levels, and the inundation of vast land areas."

The statement was published in 1964 by social ecologist Murray Bookchin, who I got to know a few years later.[572] He portrayed what we now call "global warming" as an example of a "human parasitism" that "upsets virtually all the basic cycles of nature and threatens to undermine the stability of the environment on a worldwide scale."

Murray's analysis, almost completely disregarded at the time, had a huge influence on my thinking when I discovered a reprinted version in the early 1970s. My sense that history is on the wrong track, and that humanity needs to change its fundamental institutions, grew in large part out of that – today widely recognized – threat.

Whenever I had the opportunity, I tried to call attention to this threat. In *Common Sense for Hard Times*, published in 1976, Tim and I quoted environmentalist Barry Commoner:

> "The present course of environmental degradation, at least in the industrialized countries, represents a challenge to essential ecological systems that is so serious that, if continued, it will destroy the capability of the environment to support a reasonably civilized human society."[573]

Although the scientific warning was there, the public heard almost nothing about global warming until the 1980s. Then reports about it began appearing in the media.

August, 1988 was a hot month. Our milkman, Alex, whom I had known from childhood, complained as he made his delivery, "It's hot. It's awful hot. Do you think it has to do with this global warming?" The next day I wrote an op ed, published in the *Chicago*

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[572] Murray Bookchin, "Ecology and Revolutionary Thought," *New Directions in Libertarian Thought*, September, 1964, reprinted in *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, (Berkeleiy, CA: Ramparts Press, 1971). The book has been reprinted in the Working Classics Series of the AK Press (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2004)). The quotation appears on p. 22. My review of the book, "A Post-Affluence Critique," appeared in *Root & Branch* No. 4 (nd).

[573] Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello, *Common Sense for Hard Times* (New York: Two Continents/IPS, 1976) p. 134, quoting Barry Commoner, *The Closing Circle* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971) p. 215. We also tried to awaken consciousness of threats to the global environment in *Building Bridges* and other writings.

*Tribune* and *Los Angeles Times*, entitled "The Opening Shot of the Second Ecological Revolution."[574]

> "It started as a typical conversation about the weather. "Awfully hot," I said. "I talk with old-timers who can't remember anything like it in sixty, seventy years," my milkman responded. Then he continued,
>
> "It's probably this 'greenhouse effect.' If you ask me, it's a warning. All the poisons we're putting into the air and the water -- if we don't get our act together, we're going to make the earth a place that people can't live on."
>
> As a historian, I'm always on the lookout for subtle signs that indicate deep changes in social outlook. When that conversation shifted from local weather to the global biosphere, I felt I was witnessing the opening shot of the second ecological revolution.
>
> The first ecological revolution was based on a popular recognition of the links between the different aspects of the micro-environment: that you cannot poison the bugs without also killing the birds. That realization spawned a popular movement involving millions of people which has now reached everywhere, even the Soviet bloc and the Third World. The result has been an array of environmental legislation in dozens of countries.
>
> The second ecological revolution grows out of a recognition of the links of the macro-environment: that cutting rain forests in Costa Rica or burning coal in Gdansk may contribute to crop failures in Iowa and tree death in the Black Forest. This realization promises to bring about a second wave of environmentalism whose prime characteristic will be its commitment to international solutions.
>
> Recent environmental disasters are teaching us that the world's air and water cut across national boundaries as surely as DDT cuts across species boundaries. The radioactive cloud that rose above Chernobyl did not stop at the Soviet border but circled the globe. The acid rain that rises from U.S. smokestacks kills the forests of Canada. The cocktail of chemical poisons released by a warehouse fire in Switzerland flowed down the Rhine into Germany and Holland. The "greenhouse effect" resulting from burning too much fuel worldwide causes droughts in many parts of the world and the heat wave my milkman so clearly perceives as a warning.
>
> That warning is already evident to many and is rapidly becoming evident to many more: damage to the global environment threatens the basic conditions on which life depends and poses a clear and present danger that requires a global response.

[574] Jeremy Brecher, "The Opening Shot of the Second Ecological Revolution" *Chicago Tribune*, August 16, 1988. This text represents the as-written, not as-published version [\writing\worldec2].

Why aren't governments and politicians racing to meet this looming threat? The disturbing answer is that the measures we need to protect the global ecosphere will reduce the power of the world's most powerful institutions. National governments will have to accept international controls. Corporations will have to forego opportunities to make money at the expense of the environment. Military establishments will have to abandon programs that threaten the air and water. Beyond that, virtually everyone will have to adjust to substantial change -- though not necessarily deterioration -- in lifestyle.

The first ecological revolution began as a popular movement. It didn't wait for leadership from politicians. In fact, it imposed its own agenda on governments and economies, an agenda that ultimately limited the ability of politicians and corporate officials to pursue their interests at the expense of the environment.

The second ecological revolution will similarly have to impose its agenda on governments and businesses. It will have to say that preserving the conditions for human life is simply more important than increasing national power or private wealth. And it will have to act globally -- with international petition drives, worldwide demonstrations and boycotts, and direct action campaigns against polluting countries and corporations.

A baby step toward international responsibility was taken last year when, in the face of mounting popular concern, more than 40 nations agreed to protect the ozone layer by limiting the use of chlorofluorocarbons. The next logical step would be a binding international agreement to protect the atmosphere by limiting the production of the "greenhouse gasses" that raise the earth's temperature.

The prime ministers of Canada and Norway recently called for such an agreement. But William A. Nitze, United States Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Environment, Health and Natural Resources, responded that it would be "premature at the current moment to contemplate an international agreement that sets targets for greenhouse gasses."

Premature? Then when will it become timely -- how many crop failures, heat waves, and environmental disasters from now? And in the meantime, how does Mr. Nitze propose to protect us from the clear and present danger that degradation of the global environment poses to our security? Does he believe it is something that the free market or greater military strength can solve? How long does he think people will ignore something as close as the air they breathe and as insistent as the weather?

The words of my milkman bear a warning for political and business leaders: There is more to the second ecological revolution than hot air."

In *Global Village or Global Pillage*, we warned that "Global warming, desertification, pollution, and resource exhaustion will make the earth uninhabitable long before every

Chinese has a private car and every American a private boat or plane." We argued that the solution lies in "converting the system of production and consumption to an ecologically sound basis. The technology to do this exists or can be developed, from solar energy to public transportation and from reusable products to resource-minimizing production processes."[575]

Global warming finally hit America's radar screen in 2006 with Al Gore's documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*. A while later I was contacted by Joe Uehlein, former secretary-treasurer of the AFL-CIO's Industrial Union Department, former director of the AFL-CIO Center for Strategic Campaigns, and prominent labor rock and roll musician. Joe had retired from the AFL-CIO to win the labor movement to the idea of sustainability. He asked if I knew anyone who could do some research for him on unions and climate change. After talking with Tim and Brendan, I said, why not us? The result was the Labor Network for Sustainability, which has worked at every level from top labor leaders to the rank and file to engage workers, unions, and their allies sustainability and climate protection.[576]

More than twenty years after "The Opening Shot of the Second Ecological Revolution," The election of President Barrack Obama and a Democratic congress gave many climate protection advocates hope that the US had finally awoken to the threat of climate change. But by late 2009 it was clear that the US was instead preparing to prevent the Copenhagen climate change conference from agreeing to the binding greenhouse gas emissions reductions that climate scientists say are necessary to preserve the earth as we know it. I wrote a piece called "World Leaders Fiddle While the World Burns: Time for a New Climate Strategy" that tried to apply as much as I could of what I've learned about social movements and social change to the problem of global warming.

> Obama's climate czar Carol Browner said last week there will be no U.S. climate protection legislation before the Copenhagen conference and that she doesn't know if a global agreement on binding cuts in greenhouse gas emissions can be made in Copenhagen. She added that she had hope for progress because the world's top leaders recognize global warming is a problem.
>
> As the torturous Copenhagen negotiations and the already-inadequate U.S. climate protection legislation falter, the earth is being imperiled by a failure of its political systems. We know what needs to be done to halt global warming; we have the technology and resources to halt it; we know the consequences of not doing what we know must be done. If the "world's top leaders" recognize that "global warming is a problem" and do nothing about it, they are part of the problem, not part of the solution.
>
> While the earth burns, the "world's top leaders" are standing around pointing the finger at each other like a bunch of arsonists trying to distract the world's attention from their handiwork. The U.S. attacks China for its growing carbon

[575] *Global Village or Global Pillage*, p. 183-4.
[576] www.labor4sustainability.org

emissions. China, backed by 130 other third world countries, justly attacks the developed countries for their failure to take responsibility for their damage to the planet's atmosphere – but then continue their plans to build new climate-destroying coal-fired power plants week by week. The EU piously condemns the U.S. position, but doesn't care enough to take the Americans on.

The failure of current climate protection strategies tells us that the current strategy of lobbying governments to fix global warming will not work.

In the past, the failure of establishments to solve problems that they and their people recognize has often led to the emergence of radical movements demanding real change. Remember, for example, how betrayed government promises for racial equality and nuclear disarmament helped spawn the civil rights, ban-the-bomb, and New Left movements of the 1960s.

The complicity of governments and the corporations and investors for whom they are so often speaking in the destruction of our biosphere may similarly help spawn a new climate protection movement: a convergence of those in the environmental, labor, food, globalization, anti-poverty, peace, student, and other movements who grasp the urgency and believe radical action is the only way forward.

We have learned a great deal more about the science of climate change and what must be done to halt it. But we have barely begun to discuss what kind of political change is necessary to do what must be done. Here are some principles to discuss for an alternative climate protection strategy:

1. Existing institutions, specifically states and markets, have decisively proven themselves unable to halt the plunge toward destruction of the biosphere.

2. National and world political systems are as dysfunctional for survival today as feudal principalities were in the past for protecting their people in the face of capitalism and the modern nation state.

3. States are not legitimate if they allow their terrain or their institutions to be used to destroy the global environment. They have no right to govern. They are climate outlaws whose authority it is not only our right but our obligation to challenge.

4. Property rights are not legitimate if property is used to destroy the global environment. Corporations that emit greenhouse gasses have no right to their property. They too are climate outlaws whose possessions it is not only our right but our obligation to challenge.

5. A climate protection movement must be conceived, not as governments agreeing to climate protection measures, but as people imposing rules on states,

markets, and other institutions. We can begin to apply these rules locally by direct action wherever we are; we can support each others' action around the globe; and we can support the right of all the world's people to monitor and halt climate destroying emissions.

6. The legitimation for policy and action must be global necessity, not just national or other limited interest.

7. The blockades of coal facilities by direct action that have recently emerged in countries around the world form a brilliant beginning to this process. A new climate movement must expand that effort to impose climate protection rules by direct action.

8. Governments, corporations, and other institutions that threaten the survival of the planet should be subject to global popular boycotts and sanctions.

9. National and international economic policies must be redesigned to maximize global resources going to climate protection, rather than competing over the location of "green" production.

We need to make true for climate protection what President Dwight D. Eisenhower said about peace: "I think that people want peace so much that one of these days government had better get out of their way and let them have it." Popular demand forced competing governments to agree to a nuclear test ban treaty. Today global popular demand for climate protection should utilize the same dynamic to tell governments and corporations that they will be regarded as nothing but outlaws if the continue to destroy the earth's environment. [577]

Such a strategy is developed further in the proposal for a human survival movement in Part 7 below.

[577] http://laborstrategies.blogs.com/global_labor_strategies/2009/10/the-collapse-of-official-climate-protection-discussion-points-for-a-new-climate-movement.html

## Conclusion to Part 6: Social experiments

The social experiments described in Part 6 arose in response to diverse concrete problems.

The Brass Workers History Project responded to the way working people were cut off from their own history. The solution was to "close the loop" by creating a means to connect them with the experience of other workers in the past. The continuing public history work in the Naugatuck Valley extended this to a variety of ethnic communities and to a disempowered and disparaged region. This work also tried to counter the fragmentation of the region by connecting people of different backgrounds with each others' experiences.

Cultural identity in the Waterbury (and American) context seemed to face two choices: a fragmentation into separate "balkanized" ethnic identities or assimilation into a "mainstream" US culture that largely reflected dominant institutions and social groups. The Waterbury Ethnic Music Project was an effort to develop, in conjunction with ethnic community activists, a multiculturalist alternative.

The Naugatuck Valley Project was created specifically as a response to the deindustrialization of the Waterbury region. Workers and communities were powerless in the face of distant corporations that were buying up and closing their factories. The NVP brought together the workers directly affected and the organizations that represented the interests of the affected communities. It pooled varied forms of leverage available to its constituent groups to force other actors to negotiate with it. It attempted to secure local communities more control over their resources.

Corporations hold power over communities and workers largely because of their ownership of productive resources. The NVP used the buyout of a brass mill and the establishment of Seymour Specialty Wire, an employee-owned company, to transfer the power of ownership to local workers.

The disempowerment of workers includes many dimensions besides lack of ownership of their immediate workplace. Cooperative Home Care Associates challenged many dimensions of workers' powerlessness. As an employee-owned company, it provided workers control through an elected board of directors. In the workplace it also focused on providing the knowledge necessary to exercise that control; restructuring the work process and daily work relations; nurturing informal "hallway" dialogue and formal teams and workers councils to encourage discussion and formation of workplace public opinion. It also attempted to empower its workers vis-à-vis the market by organizing political, economic, and social forces to modify the demand side of the market and by linking service providers with clients through Independence Care System managed care cooperative. My work at CHCA provided one more feedback link through which employees could construct an understanding of the company and its environment.

A core aspect of disempowerment of poor and working people and their communities is the concentration of capital, knowledge, and other resources in a small elite. The Connecticut Community Economic Development Fund was designed to transfer knowledge and capital to community-based enterprises that would provide jobs and meet local needs.

Conventional political action takes the form of political parties attempting to take control of the government by electoral or revolutionary means. This has often led to the cooptation of opposition parties and/or the re-concentration of power in a governing elite. Experiments with independent, non-electoral oppositions, ranging from the democratic opposition in Communist Poland to the Zapatista movement in Mexico, explored other ways to organize forces for social change around a program of democratizing state power rather than seizing it.

The era of globalization was accompanied by a breakdown of structures that had provided a degree of security and stability to working class life in many countries. The result was rapid growth of diverse forms of contingent work and increasing insecurity for those still in "regular" jobs. The National Federation for Fair Employment was formed to develop a common perspective and joint action among the varied groups who confronted the effects of contingentization. It made use of the form of a structured network operating through action groups to develop common programs and "coalitions of the willing" in the context of such diversity.

In the US, labor unions have been the principal institution workers have formed to pursue their interests as workers. But from early on, US unions developed an oligarchic internal structure in which power was concentrated in a leadership quite separate from the rank and file. The structures created for this purpose became less and less well adapted to the actual structure of the economy in the era of globalization and the dis-integrated corporation. Over the course of forty years, Tim Costello and I attempted to provoke a dialogue within and around the labor movement on these structural problems and to propose solutions ranging from radical democratization to new forms based on multiple direct links among those in the same occupations, industries, locations, and companies.

Globalization eroded the means that non-elite groups had used to assert some power within national contexts. In a series of books, articles, conferences, and talks I tried to encourage a recognition of that change – in effect, an "ecological shift." I envisioned this as one stream that would flow into the broad confluence that eventually became globalization from below.

As critiques of economic globalization developed, there were few venues for formulating and discussing alternatives. This reinforced the impression that "there is no alternative" to economic globalization. The Global Sustainable Development Resolution was an effort to draw on the ideas of diverse critics of globalization to formulate a working alternative that would show that alternatives were possible and open an arena for debate on what they should be.

The devastating effects of economic globalization created a wide range of responses around the world. But those challenging economic globalization had few global platforms to criticize it and present alternatives. They also lacked global venues in which to form common understandings, develop shared programs, and coordinate their efforts. The World Social Forum, and its proliferating regional and local Social Forums, established vehicles for both these functions. They have also served as a means through which their participants can broaden their focus, for example by addressing such issues as the perpetuation of the caste system and the US attack on Iraq.

There are widely accepted principles of world law forbidding, for example, one country to make war on another. However, the system of sovereign nation states provides little in the way of a mechanism for enforcing them, especially against great powers, in particular the United States. Civil disobedience against such crimes as illegal US attacks on Nicaragua and Iraq can be a form of "constitutional insurgency" that aims to enforce international law against rogue nations. Such actions are not only justified but required by the principles of the war crimes tribunals that followed World War II.

The United States was able to attack Iraq, despite almost universal global opposition, in part because of the US veto in the United Nations Security Council. A "Uniting for Peace" resolution in the General Assembly offered a possible way to circumvent this problem. A public campaign promoting the idea was a possible way to pressure those governments who claimed to oppose the war to move more effectively to prevent it, despite US pressure.

The growing unilateralism of the US, culminating in the policies of the George W. Bush administration, presented the world with the problem of an out-of-control superpower attempting to impose unilateral domination on the world. "Terminating the Bush Juggernaut" was a thought experiment to conceive ways that the different forces threatened by Bush's unilateralism could pursue collective security. It proposed ways to cooperate despite different values and interests and strategies to make use of vulnerabilities of the Bush administration through nonviolent sanctions. *In the Name of Democracy*, War Crimes Watch, and my support for war resister Lieutenant Ehren Watada aimed to use legal and constitutional principles to challenge criminal behavior by the US government.

The international networking of Global Labor Strategies, notably around international support for workers rights in China, sought to create new forms of solidarity among workers and their allies across national and historical boundaries. The work around climate change by Global Labor Strategies and the Labor Network for Sustainability tried to create new popular constituencies to address what was emerging as the greatest single threat to human survival.

These experiments were responses to specific situations. But there are some common patterns in their approaches to problem solving:

Several of these experiments involved closing a feedback loop so that it includes those able to provide knowledge about a problem, those affected by it, and those able to act on it. The Brass Workers History Project did this in one way by providing workers in a community knowledge about their own history to which they had not had access. The informational campaign around "Uniting for Peace" provided an international public knowledge that enabled people to act to put pressure on their own governments.

Several of these experiments encouraged de-centering. The Waterbury Ethnic Music Project and the Brass Valley Traditional Music Festivals invited people to see the valuing of their own cultural traditions and those of others as mutually reinforcing rather than conflicting. The World Social Forum encouraged people from very different movements, cultures, and locations to explore what interests and values they might have in common despite their differences. Such de-centering often involved the construction of links across existing boundaries.

Some of the experiments involved encouraging an "ecological shift" to a wider, contextualized perspective. The NVP promoted a perspective in which plant closings were not seen as the consequence of greedy demands by Valley workers, but rather as part of a reorganization of capital in which those workers and others elsewhere became the victim of competitive whipsawing by diversified corporations. My work on economic globalization encouraged social movements concerned with particular issues in particular locations to reconceive their problems and their possibilities for action in the light of transformations in the global economy.

Many of these experiments tried to empower people by taking advantage of other actors' dependences. The NVP forced Bridgeport Brass to negotiate the sale of what became Seymour Specialty Wire to its workers through a pressure campaign that implicitly threatened the company's reputation. Civil disobedience in the name of international law took advantage of the "legitimacy deficit" of countries that engage in aggressive wars. The proposals for nonviolent sanctions in "Terminating the Bush Juggernaut" made use of the financial and military overextension of US imperialism and the need of the American people and elites to avoid global isolation.

Some of these experiments involved countering domination. Cooperative Home Care Associates reduced the normal powerlessness of workers by making them owners of their company and establishing formal rules and informal practices that protected and supported them in the exercise of their powers. The Connecticut Community Economic Development Fund transferred financial and technical resources to community-based enterprises that normally had inadequate access to such resources. The analysis of structural problems in unions aimed to provoke a dialogue about union democratization. The proposals for blocking Bush administration unilateralism were designed to put limits on the aggressions of an out-of-control superpower.

Others of these experiments, conversely, aimed to counter disorder and failures of coordination. Cooperative Home Care Associates organized the players in the New York home care market in order to reduce the turmoil that was being created by rapid

expansion and contraction of demand. The North American Federation for Fair Employment countered the destruction of rules and practices that had produced stable employment by promoting new laws and norms that set minimum standards for all employers. The proposal to challenge the US attack on Iraq in the UN General Assembly by means of a Uniting for Peace resolution sought to overcome the blockage of coordination in the UN Security Council that resulted from the permanent members' veto power.

Many of these experiments involved the construction of network-style organizations among existing social actors. The Naugatuck Valley Project, for example, linked churches, unions, and community organizations for common purposes, without reducing their distinct organizations and identities. The North American Federation for Fair Employment associated unions, community organizing projects, and policy organizations. The campaign to support China's labor contract law informally linked unions and human rights groups around the world with labor activists and academics in China to force changes in the policies of Western corporations and business organizations. These network forms allowed the formation of common perspectives and the pooling of power while retaining independent initiative and autonomy in the constituent groups.

These experiments generally involved taking existing patterns and modifying them. Independent opposition centers like the democratic opposition in Poland and the Zapatistas in Mexico performed many of the classic functions of political parties but renounced their pursuit of state power. The strategy of taking the US threat against Iraq to the UN General Assembly made use of the Uniting for Peace procedure that had been used – primarily by the US, ironically – to overcome previous deadlocks in the Security Council.

Some of these initiatives involved thought experiments to construct alternatives. The proposals for restructuring the labor movement required imagining a type of organization based on multiple links of workplace, location, occupation, industry, and company that did not yet exist. The Global Sustainable Development Resolution involved imagining a process of transformation for the global economy that integrated a wide range of proposals that had been conceived primarily as the unconnected demands of particular groups.

Many of these experiments started with particular goals, but saw the emergence of new goals in the process of solving problems. Cooperative Home Care Associates started with the goal of creating a workplace that would be an island of decency for its workers, but in order to achieve and preserve that result found itself trying to restructure the whole home health care industry in which it operated. The World Social Forum started primarily as a platform for debating the proponents of economic globalization, but evolved to be a space for the convergence and interaction of social movements and a vehicle for challenging other problems ranging from US aggression to the persistence of the caste system.

Many of these experiments failed to achieve their goals. But there is no trial and error learning without error. Even if all we learn is that something doesn't work and something about the reason for its failure we know more than when we started. From the failures of Seymour Specialty Wire the NVP went on to create an employee owned home health care company that incorporated many of the lessons learned from the SSW experience. The strategy I laid out in "Terminating the Bush Juggernaut" was largely based on what I learned from the failures and mistakes of the Uniting for Peace campaign.

These experiments prove nothing, but they can serve a heuristic purpose. They suggest patterns that can be transferred, modified, combined with others, and used to improve action in other contexts. They make it more plausible that certain approaches are worth trying in modified form and in other situations. They justify further experiments – in thought and in the world. In Part 7 I propose just such an experiment -- a "human survival movement."

We are unlikely to know enough about the historical process and social relations to be able to predict accurately what will and what will not work. But that doesn't mean we can't increase our ability to guide social processes from below, while learning to forestall new forms of domination and disorder as we do it.

The experiments recounted here are just a few out of thousands that can contribute to that process. Napoleon used to say that every private in his army carried a marshal's baton in his knapsack. Let us say instead that everyone who wants to help solve such problems has laboratories for experiments all around them.

# PART 7: SAVE THE HUMANS?

## Introduction to Part 7: Save the humans?

A quarter-century ago, when "Save the Whales!" was a popular slogan, a *New Yorker* cartoon showed one whale asking another, "But can they save themselves?" In the early 21st century, with the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the burgeoning consequences of climate change, experts and ordinary people alike are asking each other whether we humans can indeed save ourselves from the threats we have created.

This Part is a "thought experiment" to envision the construction of a "save the humans" or "human survival" movement. Its purpose is to stimulate discussion of a possible movement for human survival, what such a movement might be, and how we might contribute to its emergence. Sharing these ideas is itself a social experiment that might illuminate our possibilities for action.

When Tim and I wrote *Global Village or Global Pillage* in 1994, economic globalization presented huge problems to people all over the world, but there were only minimal and scattered responses. We used those prefigurative actions, our analysis of the problem, what we knew about the history of social movements, and many of the ways of thinking about change presented in this book to project a movement of "globalization from below." In this Part I am trying to do something similar for the problem of human survival. My emerging heuristic is not capable of predicting the future; but it can help develop strategies for action that may plausibly improve our ability to realize our ends – in this case, our survival.

Sixty years after the first appearance of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists'* famous "doomsday clock" indicating how close humanity is to catastrophic destruction, the clock continues to move closer to midnight, while the sources of possible doom multiply. The drift toward doom continue unabated year after year, decade after decade, despite our knowledge of the threats, and despite the semblance of official action to combat them.

A group of interconnected obstacles have prevented people from taking the obvious rational steps for eliminating the threats to our continued existence. Some are structural. Many people feel powerless to act because of lack of democratic control over nations. The nation state system itself generates conflict and unaccountability. The UN and other international institutions established to promote international cooperation to solve problems are dominated by major states and have little means to protect the world's people from actions that threaten survival. The US, as the "world's only superpower," has actively undermined efforts to control military and environmental destruction by means of international governance. Corporations and markets are increasingly unconstrained in their production of pollutants and their political pressure for destructive environmental and military policies around the world.

Other obstacles to effective change are political. Powerful interests oppose effective democratic regulation of threats at local, national, and/or transnational levels for reasons of ideology, greed, or defense of institutional prerogative. Popular constituencies that share a common interest in reducing threats to survival have conflicting interests and approaches as well. Many people doubt that collective action is likely to lead to solutions rather than more problems. And while there are many specific proposals for solving the threats to survival, there seems to be no clear way forward to implementing them.

Formation of a transnational movement specifically targeted against the threats to human survival may be a way to circumvent these obstacles. Such a movement could be powerful because it would represent the most profound common interests of individuals and groups. Addressing the apparently disparate issues of nuclear proliferation, climate catastrophe, and other threats as part of the broader problem of ensuring human survival could provide a basis for collective action to establish and enforce rules to end such threats.

The emergence of a movement for human survival might resemble that of the movement against economic globalization in the 1990s. In response to new problems and threats, groups emerged in different places around varied issues and utilizing different forms of action. They gradually discovered each other, engaged in dialogue, and began coordinating their actions. The result was what we know today as the global "anti-globalization" or "global justice" movement. A similar process of emergence and convergence can enable disparate groups to emerge and converge around a shared survival frame.

This process is most likely to succeed if it takes the form of interconnected advocacy networks. Such networks can help establish a common frame; initiate and coordinate campaigns; and help members support each other's campaigns and establish new alliances.

The basic changes needed to ensure human survival are straightforward: greatly reduce the carbon and other destructive materials we put into the environment and progressively eliminate military weapons, preventing their use in the meantime. This requires establishing and enforcing rules that forbid such practices. Many of those rules already exist, but are not enforced. For example, aggressive war is prohibited by the UN charter, and many environmental treaties ban various types of pollution, but violations of these rules are not subject to effective sanction. Ultimately human survival will require extending the accountability of governments for fulfilling their national and international obligations. A movement for human survival will seek to establish that accountability.

A movement for human survival will require a combination of persuasion and power. Power will be exerted through campaigns to force governments and institutions to enforce existing laws that protect human survival; to establish new laws at all levels; and to directly pressure institutions to halt behavior that threatens survival. These campaigns will be conducted by broad global alliances that include many different kinds of forces.

They will mobilize people and institutions to use nonviolent sanctions to force polluters and war mongers to change their behavior.

"A short history of doom" provides a quick overview of the threats to human survival and the way human beings have – and haven't – responded to them. "The causes of doom" analyzes the social sources of these threats and of their perpetuation. "A movement for human survival" proposes a possible response. "Developing the frame" sketches a shared interpretation that might unite such a movement. "Emergence of a movement for human survival" describes the process by which such a movement might arise and how its development might be encouraged. "Movement organization" advocates that a human survival movement take a network form. "The process of change" draws on patterns of social change described elsewhere in this book to lay out a process by which the causes of doom might be overcome. "A human survival movement and social justice" describes the interplay between a survival frame and a social justice frame. "Forestalling unintended consequences" considers how a human survival movement might avoid creating new disorders and dominations.

The condition for human survival is a new strategy based on the cooperation of all to ensure the survival of all. I use the phrase "common preservation" to denote strategies in which people try to solve their problems by meeting their common needs rather than exclusively their own. None of us can count on survival, let alone well-being, for ourselves and those we care about, unless we take coordinated action to transform the current patterns of human life. Self-preservation for individuals and groups can now only be ensured through common preservation of our species and its environment as a whole.

The attempt to solve our problems by self-preservation at the expense of others now threatens the survival of all. Conversely, the survival of all has become the condition for the self-preservation of each. Therefore, to paraphrase George Fox, let us then try what common preservation can do.

## A short history of doom

Human beings have engaged in mass mutual destruction for much of our history. But only with the development of the atom bomb at the end of World War II did the self-annihilation of the human species become technologically possible. The awareness of that possibility has begun to penetrate our consciousness, but has barely begun to change the way we act and organize ourselves. The "drift toward unparalleled catastrophe" that Einstein warned of continues.

Over the succeeding decades, other human impacts on the environment also came to be perceived as threats to the human future. In 1977, political scientist Charles Lindblom wrote, "Relentlessly accumulating evidence suggests that human life on the planet is headed for a catastrophe. Indeed, several disasters are possible, and if we avert one, we will be caught by another." He enumerates population growth, resource shortage, and global warming. "All this assumes that a nuclear catastrophe does not spare us the long anguish of degeneration."[578]

In 1992, the writer and scientist Jared Diamond wrote, "Until our own generation, no one had grounds to worry whether the next human generation would survive or enjoy a planet worth living on. Ours is the first generation to be confronted with these questions about its children's future." Two "clouds" hanging over us raise these concerns: "nuclear holocaust" and "environmental holocaust." These risks "constitute the two really pressing questions facing the human race today."[579] The rapid acceleration of global warming in the early 21st century intensified such fears.

From the detonation of the first atom bomb, there was a worldwide impulse to make significant changes in human social organization. Some nuclear scientists and government officials called for international control of atomic energy. The "ban the bomb" movement proclaimed "co-existence or no existence."

The movement against nuclear holocaust was the common root of both the modern anti-war movement and the modern environmental movement. Concern about nuclear war was from the start concern about environmental destruction. The discovery that nuclear fallout could contaminate the entire world led to the rise of the nuclear disarmament movement and the treaty banning nuclear weapons testing; the possibility that nuclear war would bring ecocidal "nuclear winter" promoted the movement for a freeze on nuclear weapons. The spread of nuclear fallout provided a model for Rachel Carson's tracking of DDT through the environmental chain in *Silent Spring*. But over time, the environmental movement diverged from the peace movement. With some exceptions, environmentalism became largely a movement for legislative and regulatory reforms functioning in the arena of local and national politics.

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[578] Charles Lindblom, *Politics and Markets* (New York: Basic Books, 1977) p. 3.
[579] Jared Diamond, *The Third Chimpanzee* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992) p. 349-50.

Meanwhile, nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction proliferated and new environmental threats, above all climate change, emerged. Yet their implication for human survival has not yet produced significant changes in the way human beings organize our lives on earth, let alone changes adequate to ensure the survival of our species. Indeed, nations continue to accumulate more and more weapons while individuals and corporations alike pour more and more greenhouse gasses and other destructive pollutants into the environment.

As the failure of present strategies for controlling weapons of mass destruction becomes apparent, and as the devastation wrought by climate change becomes a daily reality, the emergence of a movement for human survival is increasingly necessary – and plausible.

## The causes of doom

Half a century ago at the peak of the cold war, sociologist C. Wright Mills published a controversial book-length tract called *The Causes of World War III*.[580] Seeking to analyze the causes of a possible future war in the same way that historians examine the causes of past wars, it described a world politics shaped by the rivalry of two power blocs led by the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. Each was governed by elites who were not responsible to the publics their decisions affected. The elites on both sides pursued a strategy Mills characterized as "crackpot realism" – a lunatic "military metaphysics" that saw bombs and missiles as the guarantee of security, even though the real effect of their use would be to guarantee mutual annihilation. Mills called for scholars, writers, scientists, and clergy to reject crackpot realism and put forward alternative programs around which disempowered publics could organize themselves and begin to hold governing elites accountable.

Mills focused on the social structures and interaction processes that generated the drift and thrust toward World War III. When he portrayed similar irresponsible elites pursuing parallel policies and caught in similar dynamics on both sides of the iron curtain, his refusal to hold either side blameless was excoriated by apologists for both. His proposals, however, foreshadowed the emergence of the global disarmament movement and the gradual rejection of the most virulent forms of crackpot realism by world leaders.

We live in a world that is in some ways very different from Mills'. The cold war and one of its two protagonists have vanished. Threats of doom come now not only from weapons of war but from environmental processes that were hardly imagined in Mills' day. Yet we still face self-inflicted annihilation. What would a similar exploration of the causes of doom look like today?

It would, of course, note the technological means that threaten human survival, from weapons of mass destruction, to greenhouse gas emissions, to emerging technologies like genetically engineered organisms. But, like Mills' analysis, it would need to focus primarily on the human actions and social processes that turn these into survival-threatening dangers and that overwhelm efforts to control them.

Human survival confronts a series of interlocked social patterns that have prevented people from eliminating the threats to our continued existence. These include:

*Lack of democratic control of nations.* People believe, often with good reason, that we have little control over our governments. We observe that the institutions of democratic control often have little efficacy, so efforts to influence government policy toward human survival appear futile. Government officials often seem to act in ways that have little to do with the reasons for which authority has been granted them. Special interests, ranging from corporations to military bureaucracies to wealthy classes to special religious, ethnic, and cultural groups appear to exercise impregnable hegemonic control. The ability of a

[580] C. Wright Mills, *The Causes of World War III* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1958).

country's people to control military aggression against another country or pollution by its corporations appears quite limited.

*Dysfunctional nation state system.* The historically evolved system of nation states is based on the idea of distinct peoples occupying separate territories each ruled by an independent government. Such a system leaves those outside a nation largely powerless to control its decisions about war and peace, its efforts to dominate and extract resources from others, or its pollution of air and sea. Nations can threaten the survival of people in other nations, yet the victims are powerless to stop them. The interactions of nations lead to arms races and wars that are not willed by anyone.

*Inadequate international institutions*. The devastation caused by World War II led to efforts to establish some degree of control over nation states. The United Nations Charter outlawed aggressive war and created institutional forms for international cooperation. The Nuremberg Tribunal established the responsibility of government officials and ordinary people to resist war crimes and crimes against humanity. A variety of other charters, treaties, and agreements established international controls over the actions of states. Many of these aimed specifically to counter the threats of war and environmental destruction that menace human survival. However, these instruments have had extremely limited means of enforcement. The prevailing interpretation of national sovereignty has limited their application. The domination of most international institutions by a few great powers, and their unwillingness to cede effective power to genuinely global institutions, have left common human interests, even for species survival, unprotected.

*Abuse of US power.* As the "world's greatest superpower," the U.S. has had disproportionate power to affect military, environmental, and other factors that determine the chances of survival. Over the second half of the 20th century, the U.S. encouraged a degree of international governance through the U.N. and other institutions, while strongly skewing their structures and decisions toward its own powers and interests and those of its political and economic allies. Starting in the 1990s, as the U.S. became the "world's only superpower," it first withdrew support from and then actively undermined efforts to control military and environmental destruction by means of international governance. Whether recent tentative steps toward reengagement with such issues as nuclear disarmament and climate protection will have meaningful results currently hangs in the balance.

*Lack of control of corporations and markets.* While in political theory the power to control events may lie with governments, in reality a disproportionate influence over what happens in the world today lies with economic institutions such as corporations and markets and the elites who control them. In the era of economic globalization, these institutions have extended their power worldwide. They are to a great extent beyond the control of any nation -- indeed, they exercise extensive control over governments. They even form alliances with national governments to pursue both economic and military operations that create threats to human survival. Their pursuit of wealth and power provides an incentive to avoid both national and international regulation.

*Interests in perpetuating threats to survival*. Some political and economic groups oppose effective democratic protection against threats to survival at local, national, and/or transnational levels. They may do so for reasons of ideology, greed, and/or commitment to the unlimited freedom and power of the institutions they represent.

*Modernized crackpot realism*: Today's drive toward doom is accelerated by its own version of crackpot realism, whose arguments are repeated ad nauseam to refute advocates of change. The dangers of nuclear and environmental catastrophe are greatly exaggerated. We can continue the status quo indefinitely. No basic changes in our social patterns are necessary to preserve our human life and avert catastrophe. Climate change and other environmental problems can be left to the market. Weapons of mass destruction and nuclear proliferation can be dealt with by the unilateral exercise of U.S. power. Any fundamental social change is impossible, even if continuation of the status quo threatens the existence of every individual and our species as a whole.

*Obsolete individual and group strategies.* Despite the new threats to our existence, people continue to pursue strategies that have already failed. For example, we may pursue individual well-being despite the fact that it can provide no shield against shared social destruction. Or we may look to our own nation state for security, even though alone it can provide us no protection against nuclear winter or global warming.

*Conflict in the interests of popular constituencies*. However much they may share a common interest in survival, different individuals, groups, institutions, and peoples also have interests that conflict with each other. They may even attempt to survive at each others' expense – for example by displacing the effects of destruction onto others. Such conflicting interests and strategies impede the pursuit of a common interest in survival.

*Reservations about collective action*. Many people fear that efforts at collective action will lead to massive and uncontrollable social disorder. They may also fear that the leaders and organizations of social movements may use their authority to pursue their own agendas, or even impose new forms of tyranny. The record of past social movements adds plausibility to such concerns.

*Lack of a clear way forward*. While there are myriad proposals to deal with specific problems like pollution or proliferation of particular types of weapons, there is little discussion of how to make the changes in social organization necessary to implement them. Even when faced with a threat to their survival, if people see no way to accomplish their objectives, they have little reason to act.

## A movement for human survival

While technology provides the means for our growing capacity to destroy ourselves, our failure to control its use results not from that technology but from our established social patterns. We seem to be locked into ways of acting and organizing ourselves that, instead of solving our problems, keep making them worse and worse. There is no shortage of proposals for controlling nuclear weapons, global warming, and threatening new technologies, but we seem to systematically block ourselves from implementing them. We seem unable to act to meet the most obvious and urgent common interest in our species' survival. So we despair of reversing the drift toward doom.

Our established social institutions and their leaders may make a show of trying to deal with these problems, but they are evidently unable to do so. As historical sociologist Michael Mann wrote, "The most significant problems of our own time are novel. That is why they are difficult to solve: They are interstitial to institutions that deal effectively with the more traditional problems for which they were first set up."[581]

If established social institutions fail to arrest the drift toward doom, where can we look for possible ways to do so? We know that in the past, social movements have sometimes made rapid and often unexpected change that countered apparently immutable social problems.

The international abolitionist movement in the course of a few decades eliminated slavery, one of the oldest and most widespread of human institutions, from the face of the earth. The sit-down strikes of the 1930s forced the mightiest U.S. corporations to come to the table to bargain with their employees. The civil disobedience campaigns led by Gandhi won India's independence from the world's greatest imperial power.

The worldwide anti-nuclear "ban the bomb" movement helped secure a nuclear test ban treaty, U.S.-Soviet détente, and international agreements restraining the arms race. The U.S. civil rights movement brought about the abolition of legal racial segregation in the American South. The anti-war movement helped force the withdrawal of half a million U.S. troops from Vietnam. The women's liberation movement turned the subordination of women from a generally accepted inevitability to something contested in every sphere of life and every country in the world.

The Solidarity movement and its general strikes led to the fall of Communism in Poland and helped bring about its demise throughout Eastern Europe and the USSR. "People power" movements have brought about the overthrow of authoritarian dictatorships from the Philippines to South Korea to Argentina. The Battle of Seattle and the global justice movement prevented the writing of corporate-dominated globalization into international law.

[581] Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, p. 32.

Even these accomplishments are a far cry from the worldwide social transformations we need to reverse nuclear proliferation and global warming. But they embody patterns of social change that may help us envision what kind of movement can help us make progress toward human survival.

The goal of a movement for human survival will be to create a vehicle through which people can pursue their interests and responsibilities for the survival of our species.

Such a movement can be powerful because it represents the most profound common interests of individual human beings, groups, and of humanity collectively. It therefore has the potential to initiate a broad global consensus and mobilize very large social forces on behalf of the changes needed for common survival.

At first glance, human self-destruction may appear to be a collection of separate problems. Global warming results from excessive carbon emissions. Destruction of the seas from overfishing. Nuclear proliferation from destructive weapons in untrustworthy hands.

But there are good reasons to treat these apparently disparate issues within a common frame. All are produced by uncontrolled power centers and their interactions. All need the same kind of interconnected changes in the organization of social power for their solution. Treating them as one problem may make it possible to unify the disparate social forces necessary to address them. And because they are all threats to human survival, they provide the broadest and most compelling reasons for collective action.

We can make a comparison to the conditions in which nation states formed in the 18th and 19th centuries. People faced many distinct problems, such as economic development, military security, law, and governance. But all had roots in the combination of small, despotic principalities and duchies with sprawling, poorly organized imperial dynasties. And all led to similar institutional changes – the formation of nation states -- to solve them.

A "save the humans" movement will need to counteract the main threats to our common survival. It will need to impose rules that halt global warming and other environmental destruction and make states subject to law enforcement. To achieve those goals it will need to establish a more just distribution of wealth and power and assure democratization and human rights.

A "save the humans" movement will link groups and ideas that are currently separated or even opposed. It will, for example:

- Link varied specific issues around the fundamental issue of human survival.

- Link problems like war and global warming to the institutional and legal structures that create, maintain, and render them insolvable.

- Link people across national boundaries.

- Link efforts to affect countries from inside and outside.

- Link mass movement techniques for popular mobilization to needed legal and institutional change.

- Link actions by governments, international organizations, and other institutions with those by popular organizations and social movements.

- Link the struggle for survival to other social needs, movements, and institutions.

## Developing the frame

Frames are ways that individuals and organizations define a problem, organize their beliefs about the causes of the problem, and develop ideas that inform action to deal with the problem. Frames have been defined as "conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action."[582]

While developing the frame for a movement for human survival must be an on-going process, the following are likely candidates for its frame:

Survival is a goal that is required to secure all other human goals.

People have an inherent human right to social self-defense for our common survival and an obligation to act for common human preservation. A human survival movement seeks to empower people to exercise that right and meet that obligation.

Survival requires a democratization of national and international institutions that allows people's common interest in survival to reshape human society. Such democratization represents a fulfillment of the principles articulated the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, other human rights documents, and the obligations of states to their peoples under international law.

Survival requires the restriction of actions by nations and institutions that threaten common survival.

Survival requires implementing existing international norms, rules, laws, and principles designed to halt threats to survival, such as the Kyoto agreement and other environmental treaties; the UN Charter prohibitions on aggression; the Nuremberg restrictions on war crimes; and the Non-Proliferation Treaty requirement that nuclear powers move rapidly toward disarmament.

Survival requires the elaboration of such obligations into a governance regime that eliminates the environmental, military, and other threats to human survival.

Where governments and international institutions are not taking the actions necessary to ensure a secure human future, it is up to the world's people to take those actions through popular monitoring and enforcement.

The possessors of means of destruction – military and environmental – must be made subject to control by their victims, which means all of us.

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[582]Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 3.

This movement is not a struggle of nation against nation. It is a global peoples movement to eliminate threats to human survival whatever nation, group, or institution may perpetrate them.

Human survival requires that the world's economy be converted to environmentally sustainable production and consumption. This includes demilitarization and a replacement of environmentally destructive productive techniques.

Survival requires rapid progress toward a global social justice that reduces the causes of conflict and gives all a stake in creating and preserving a sustainable global social order.

Such a movement will act on many of the same issues that its constituting movements already engage. The difference will be the frame it brings to them. For example, it will oppose actions like the US invasion and of occupation of Iraq. Similarly it will fight to restore US commitment to the entire range of international treaties that the Clinton and especially the Bush administrations effectively nullified. But it will frame such actions as part of a broader process of restricting the destructive powers of nations through democratization and world law.

## Emergence of a movement for human survival

The dramatic manifestation of the consequences of global warming in melting ice caps, vanishing islands, devastating storms, and disappearing species is rapidly putting the question of human survival front and center on national and global agendas. Indeed, global warming represents in particularly pure form the dilemmas of human self-annihilation. It cannot be escaped by anyone; even the wealthiest in the long run confront the same doom. No one group or nation – no matter how wealthy or how heavily armed -- can protect itself except through cooperation with others. Protection requires radical changes in the way our species lives. These realities – characteristic of all the environmental and military threats to human existence -- are being brought out most unambiguously by climate change.

While people around the world have stood aghast at the effects of global warming, effective action by either citizens or governments has barely begun – due largely to the barriers outlined in "The causes of doom" above.

This situation resembles the response to the emergence of corporate globalization in the 1990s. Even as the effects of globalization became increasingly evident, people's established means of addressing their problems became less and less effective. The process of developing a new, global form of action was polycentric, emerging in different ways in different places around varied issues and utilizing different forms of action. Gradually, but punctuated by sudden leaps, these efforts began to learn of each other, engage in dialogue, and coordinate common actions. The result was what we know as the global "anti-globalization" or "global justice" movement – aka "globalization from below."

A similar process of emergence is likely for a movement for human survival. It will undoubtedly have roots in existing environmental and peace organizations, especially those that are already connected internationally. It will most likely include new organizations that emerge to address such specific problems as global warming. It will undoubtedly draw on the global justice movement represented by the World Social Forum. It will include many who are responding to issues of survival within political systems at all levels. It will involve many organizations like unions and religious congregations whose primary purpose is not to address issues of survival, but which are drawn in by the concerns and interests of their constituencies. These will include many new recruits, such as the evangelical Christians who have begun to shift from a shunning of environmental concerns to a new focus on "stewardship."

Such a movement will nurture and promote both the emergence and the convergence of these forces. It will link them conceptually by helping them construct a shared frame for understanding and acting on the problems they face. And it will link them organizationally by constructing networks that facilitate coordinated planning and action.

## Movement organization

A movement for human survival can best take the form of interconnected advocacy networks. Participants will form overlapping networks for various issues, campaigns, constituencies, and targets.

Advocacy networks have been defined as "forms of organization characterized by voluntary, reciprocal and horizontal patterns of communication and exchange."[583] They can include NGOs, local social movements, foundations, media, religious congregations and denominations, trade unions, consumer organizations, intellectuals, parts of regional and international inter-governmental organizations, and parts of the executive and/or parliamentary branches of governments. These networks will undoubtedly evolve over time.

Advocacy networks provide a structure through which members can communicate, exchange information, learn from each others' experiences, and inform each other of plans and intentions. They can also themselves serve as vehicles for initiating actions. Such networks can help establish a common frame; help select objectives, initiate, and coordinate campaigns; help members support each other's efforts; and help establish and maintain alliances.

The network form will allow cooperation among people and organizations who have different agendas other than their common concern for human survival. Network participants can be highly diverse and may disagree on many matters, as long as they accept the network's defining frame of the issues that it addresses. Individuals can participate in them directly, whether or not they are formally affiliated through organizations. Segments of organizations can participate in them, and in the actions they launch, while other segments remain apart. For example, the environmental committee of a congregation or the health and safety committee of a union could participate without needing more than a generalized blessing of its parent organization.

The network form resists cooptation, since member groups can simply withdraw and reconverge if "sell-out" or other abuse occurs at the top. It reduces fear of losing control of an organization because it allows constant recycling of power to the base.

An example of such a global advocacy network was the movement for a treaty banning land mines. It included international NGOs, religious denominations, local veterans groups, legislators, and even the governments of a number of smaller countries. The network allowed them to define objectives, present a common frame to the public, and coordinate their actions.

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[583] Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 8.

Such a movement will also need vehicles for research and discussion, somewhat protected from the exigencies of day-to-day politics, to provide for planning and self-correction.

## The changes to be made

The changes necessary to eliminate environmental and military threats to human survival are absurdly simple. We must greatly reduce the pollutants we put into the environment and progressively eliminate our military weapons, in the meantime preventing their use.

The barriers to achieving these results are not technical but social. Indeed, technical means to accomplish them have been extensively researched and are widely available. Rather, the problem is to establish principles, norms, rules, and laws that forbid humanity-destroying practices and to ensure that all parties agree or are compelled to implement them.

In many cases, the necessary principles, norms, rules, and laws already exist, but their adjudication is corrupt and their enforcement null. For example, aggressive war is prohibited under the UN Charter, but there is no adequate vehicle for interpreting and enforcing this law against powerful nations. Similarly nations that violate the Kyoto agreement and other environmental rules – not to mention the corporations they charter -- are not subject to effective sanctions. In other cases, new forms of international law and law enforcement are required to ensure survival.

A human survival movement will aim to establish law where disorder and domination now reign. It will demand that our countries, corporations, markets, and other institutions submit to a process of rulemaking and enforcement that protects all of the world's people.

This rulemaking and enforcement process will entail the redistribution of power from nations and corporations both upward and downward. It will require the empowerment of transnational institutions to define limits on the destructive actions of all actors. At the same time it will involve a process of democratization in which institutions become more fully subject to control by those they affect. To take but one example, the rules governing disarmament and pollution reduction might be established through global institutions, but their monitoring and enforcement might be conducted by international inspection teams that included technical experts and grassroots representatives from both inside and outside of the institutions and countries being regulated.

Ultimately human survival requires extending the accountability of governments for fulfilling their national and international obligations. Governments are responsible to their own people not only under their own laws and constitutions, but increasingly under emerging definitions of sovereignty under international law. They are increasingly responsible to other governments under the UN and international law. A movement for human survival will insist that governments fulfill their obligations to their own and other peoples not to engage in or allow acts that contribute to human self-destruction. It will hold all governments ultimately accountable to humanity as a whole.

The transition to sustainability can be greatly eased by alternative ways to perform those functions that are worthwhile but currently dependent on survival-threatening behaviors.

Reduction in use of fossil fuels will be easier if alternative energy sources are developed. Disarmament will be more acceptable if alternative means are established for resolving conflicts. A movement for human survival will encourage such alternatives to expand hand in hand with the reduction in threats to survival.

## The process of change

A human survival movement will use a combination of persuasion and power. Persuasion is likely to be unusually effective because survival is a compelling interest shared by all. Power will nonetheless be necessary because there are individuals, groups, and organizations who oppose -- on grounds of ideology, greed, and/or institutional role -- the policies that are necessary to ensure human survival.

A movement for human survival will engage is several kinds of campaigns:

*Campaigns to force governments and institutions to enforce existing laws that protect human survival*. These include, for example, the Kyoto agreement on reduction of greenhouse gasses, the UN Charter prohibition on aggressive war, and the Non-Proliferation Treaty's requirement that existing nuclear powers move rapidly to eliminate their nuclear weapons.

*Campaigns to establish new law through treaties and international organizations, and to forces changes in the prevailing interpretation of existing laws*. The campaigns for a treaty against land mines and an agreement protecting the world's climate provide good examples of campaigns for new laws. The partially successful campaign to have the International Court of Justice declare nuclear weapons illegal provides an example of a campaign for new interpretations of the law.

*Campaigns to halt threats to survival by acting directly against those whose behavior threatens survival*. The dramatic actions of Greenpeace and other environmental and peace groups in interfering with nuclear testing, whale hunting, $co^2$-promoting airport and power plant expansions provide some images of what such action might entail. Such actions will generally involve alliances of actors inside and outside of target countries, corporations, and institutions. They are likely to use a wide range of pressure techniques, such as shunning, shaming, boycotts, strikes, occupations, embargoes, and the like, that make use of targets' vulnerabilities and dependencies. Where such campaigns are successful, the new pattern will be extended to other instances to establish new norms, rules, and eventually law.

These campaigns will be conducted by alliances that may include citizens of a country, government officials, foreign citizens and governments, international institutions, and local, national, and global organizations in civil society. They will coordinate actors inside and outside of each nation, corporation, or other target institution; they will also coordinate the actions of social movements with those of sympathetic government officials. They will use nonviolent sanctions imposed by people and governments to halt military, environmental, and other threats to human wellbeing. They will aim not only to unify those pursuing what is necessary for human survival, but to undermine, isolate, fragment, and where necessary criminalize those who are opposing it.

The movement for human survival will be a vehicle for establishing, interpreting, and enforcing the laws that are necessary for human survival. Its actions will be justified not by the pursuit of private interest but by law and human necessity. Where that conflicts with national laws as interpreted by current authorities, it will insist that the imperative of human survival must prevail.

## Human survival and social justice

The movement for human survival will emerge into a world that is characterized by vast inequalities and injustices. These include disparities of wealth and income within and between nations; oppression of peoples through imperialism and occupation; exploitation of workers; oppression of women; discrimination based on racial, ethnic, religious, and other differences; and a wide range of other violations of human rights. A movement for human survival can all too easily become a vehicle to help some people survive and prosper at the expense of others. It can only succeed, however, if it instead deliberately pursues the survival and well-being of all.

There will be complex relations between the general struggle for survival and the struggle of poor, oppressed, and exploited people against domination and for justice and equality. The least powerful are in many cases those whose survival is most threatened; global warming, for example, is already having devastating effects on marginalized people in the third world. The perpetrators of environmental and military threats are often also the same individuals and groups who seek to maintain injustices, making them potential common targets. Oppressed groups are potentially key power players in campaigns against threats to survival. Struggles for the interests of the oppressed make governments and elites shift their resources to the needs of their own people, rather than pursuing the aggrandizement of themselves and their powerful supporters. But the oppressed can also have interests that augment threats to human survival; for example, the hydrocarbon energy resources of third world countries may help them reduce poverty, but at the same time increase global warming.

As part of its strategy, a movement for human survival must aim to create the conditions of survival for not just for the species as a whole, but for every human being. All proposals for change should incorporate a "just transition" that provides ways to rapidly establish for all the international human rights standards that define essential minimums for survival. Only such a commitment will provide a direct interest in the human survival movement to each person on earth.

## Forestalling unintended consequences

While the use of social movement power to expand democratic and global control over social institutions may have benefits, it also presents certain risks. Social movement organizations and leaders can themselves become undemocratic, even tyrannical. They can pursue their own interests instead of common ones. They can also bog themselves and their members down in intractable conflicts that perpetuate rather than solving problems. Governments, even democratized ones, can use their increased powers to pursue conflict and domination. International institutions can become unaccountable bureaucracies or new bases of domination for themselves or those who control them. Institutions shaped for one purpose may be unable to adapt to changing needs.

Both social movements and the institutions they promote need to establish safeguards against such developments. Three principles can help define such safeguards:

- Particular actions, whether by movements or governmental organizations, must operate on the basis of wider norms and laws that draw a line between the pursuit of the general interest and the aggrandizement of private interest, and that establish accountability for staying within that line. Insurgency must abide by the implicit global constitution that it seeks to implement.

- Authority granted to institutions is always derived from those who grant it and should not be extended to other purposes without their consent.

- All social arrangements must allow for adaptation to unanticipated change. Institutions we build must include ways that they can be changed.

Unless a movement for human survival exemplifies such practices, many people will have reason to be leery of it.

## Conclusion to Part 7: Save the humans?

These proposals are designed to suggest a way to counter the problems presented in "The causes of doom" above that have prevented people from taking the obvious rational steps for eliminating the threat to our continued existence.

*Lack of democratic control of nations.* The movement for human survival will use a combination of social movement techniques and political action by actors inside and outside of nations, corporations, and other institutions to establish controls over their survival-threatening activities.

*Dysfunctional nation state system.* The movement will promote the duty of governments to eliminate threats to human survival and means of popular enforcement to compel them to do so.

*Inadequate international institutions*. The movement will promote the capacity of international institutions to eliminate threats to human survival and their accountability for doing so.

*Abuse of US power.* The movement will bring together a broad coalition of internal and external partners to make use of persuasion, political pressure, and nonviolent sanctions to reverse the US's current contribution to the threat of human omnicide.

*Lack of control of corporations and markets.* The movement will make use of expanded powers of government and international organizations, and the direct power of allied social movements, to limit actions by corporations and markets that threaten human survival.

*Interests in perpetuating threats to survival*. The movement will seek to persuade all people of their common interest in ending threats to human survival, while pressuring and where necessary criminalizing those who perpetuate such threats.

*Conflict in the interests of popular constituencies*. The movement will draw together the common interests of popular constituencies by using a frame that emphasizes shared threats; utilizing a network form of organization that encourages cooperation in areas of common interest despite differences; and pursing a "just transition" that ensures the full range of human economic, social, and political rights for oppressed and discriminated against groups.

*Obsolete individual and group strategies.* The movement will emphasize the failure of established strategies to deal with the new threats and offer alliance to those who will modify their established patterns.

*Reservations about collective action*. The movement will make use of the network form of organization to encourage continuous control from below; encourage participatory

democratic control of social institutions; and insist that actions of the movement and the institutions it initiates function within the principles of law rather than private self-interest.

*Lack of a clear way forward*. The proposal for a movement for human survival includes both the changes that are necessary to provide for human survival and the new forms of coordinated social action that are necessary to make those changes.

This proposal may not provide the best approach to the problem of human survival or even of constructing a movement to secure it. It is only intended to provide a starting point, an approach plausible enough to encourage others to develop and correct it.

Such a project will be an uncertain venture into the unknown. But as scientist and novelist C.P. Snow said in 1960 of the risk of trying to limit nuclear weapons compared to the certainty of a global catastrophe:

"Between a risk and a certainty, a sane man does not hesitate."[584]

Indeed, a human survival movement might echo the closing words of the *Port Huron Statement*:

"If we appear to seek the unattainable, as it has been said, then let it be known that we do so to avoid the unimaginable."[585]

[584] C.P. Snow, "The Moral Unneutrality of Science," *Science*, January 27, 1961.
[585] Students for a Democratic Society, *Port Huron Statement*, 1962.
http://coursesa.matrix.msu.edu/~hst306/documents/huron.html

# CONCLUSION: COMMON PRESERVATION

I told you that to tell you this:

In the era of mutual destruction, our self-preservation is possible only through common preservation.

New patterns of common preservation are necessary, but are they possible? The answer is, people create them every day, and have done so throughout human history. And what happens is possible.

If human beings were mechanical products of our genes or our environment, such a transformation would hardly be possible. But we human beings are actors, counter-actors, adaptors, transformers, problem solvers, self-correctors – in short, equilibrators. We apply our patterns to reshape the world; at the same time we also reshape our patterns so as to better reshape the world.

In the face of what seem like overwhelming forces and a cruel fate it is easy to despair. But we are not helpless. We are not like a dress before the iron. We are acted on by our world, but we can also act on it.

We may seem to be in the hands of blind forces that are hurtling us toward destruction. But we don't have to act blindly without regard for the consequences of our action. For we are not blind. We have the capacity to observe the consequences of our action, to evaluate them, and to modify the way we act in the future. Call it learning or call it a feedback loop, it means that we are not forced to keep playing the same broken record. We can equilibrate and re-equilibrate our action.

Nor are we restricted to learning by trial and error. Language allows us to represent our world and ourselves in our minds and to conduct thought experiments on them. And through language we can share our knowledge and our thinking, make common plans and decisions, and guide our action jointly. We can think about things in new ways. We can equilibrate our thinking.

Our current life strategies are leading to our mutual destruction. But we can recognize the danger and we can equilibrate our strategies. If our way of making things is producing devastating climate change, we can modify our way of making things. If our way of governing ourselves threatens to unleash nuclear holocaust, we can change the way we govern ourselves. They are, after all, nothing but what we make them.

It's true that we are divided into many often-conflicting groups separated by boundaries that impede our ability to cooperate in our common interests. But we are not – either as individuals or as groups – closed systems. "No man is an island, entire unto himself." We survive only through our relations with the world and with each other. Our groups

are not entirely sealed off from each other, but mingle and intersect and overlap. People are continually equilibrating the relations among their groups to bring them closer to their needs. We can modify our groups and construct new ones that allow us to connect and cooperate to forestall our mutual destruction and realize our common preservation.

We all have goals that at times are stumbling blocks to common preservation. They can often discourage us from pursuing common preservation, and make us believe that others will never join in doing so. To realize common preservation we don't have to abandon our individual and group goals. But we do have to recognize that they now cannot be realized unless we subordinate them to the goal of common preservation. We have to re-equilibrate our goals, rearranging their priorities and reconsidering what is really most important to us.

We see individuals and groups pursuing their own ends without coordination and often in conflict. We see the results of their lack of coordination in unintended side effects like global warming and interaction effects like military arms races and economic races to the bottom. But we have the capacity to overcome this disorder by equilibrating our coordination. We can mutually assimilate each others' patterns and mutually accommodate them to each other to achieve our common ends.

We face powerful people and institutions some of which, some of the time, will refuse to do what is necessary for our common survival. But their domination depends on the cooperation and acquiescence of those who obey their authority. If enough people choose to do so, we have the means to obviate their power by ending our acquiescence.

As individuals we cannot overcome either disorder or domination. That is why solving our problems requires a process of mutually developing new common preservations.

Our new common preservations can liberate us from disorders and dominations. But they can also be the seed of new disorders and dominations. To forestall that possibility, we must ensure that the new patterns of common preservation we construct provide for on-going re-equilibration to nurture coordination and limit the concentration of power. To do so we can make use of network forms of coordination through which we mutually share information, planning, and the guidance of action to realize our goals without giving up our own capacity to act.

The task we have to accomplish is unprecedented. But the means we need to accomplish it are proven and at hand. We need to address each other as equilibrators: as people who, through our mutual interaction, have the capacity to create new patterns of common preservation that can halt our course toward mutual destruction. We need to use our capacity for equilibration to identify how our strategies are going wrong; propose corrections to each other; test them out; evaluate the results; and test again.

The poet William Blake instructed us to water the Tree of Life, which can penetrate the "stone walls of separation" with a "mingling of soft fibres of tender affection."[586] In his vision of Jerusalem, a community transcending the inhumanity of his day, he prophesied,

> Mutual shall build Jerusalem
> Both heart in heart and hand in hand."[587]

A transformation from mutual destruction to common preservation is possible, for we equilibrators have the capacity to transform our own patterns. But that transformation is anything but inevitable. It depends on what we people, we equilibrators, choose to do. To paraphrase Martin Luther King, Jr., we can live together as brothers or perish together as fools.

[586] *Jerusalem*, quoted in Erdman, *Blake: Prophet Against Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969) p. 471.
[587] *Jerusalem*, plate 27.

# L'ENVOY

Our era has been haunted by Walter Benjamin's image of the Angel of History.[588] The Angel, looking toward the past, sees "one single catastrophe" which "keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet." The Angel would like to "make whole what has been smashed." But "a storm is blowing in from Paradise." The storm "irresistibly propels him into the future" while "the pile of debris before him grows skyward." This storm, Benjamin concludes, "is what we call progress."

Much of what has been called "progress" is undoubtedly a continuing catastrophe. But it cannot be blamed on a storm blowing from beyond the earth. History is made by living people interacting in the world. If a storm is piling up wreckage, that storm is the product of our own action. And we are not irresistibly propelled anywhere. We can stop, look, and listen. We can see what it is we are doing. We can share our understandings of what we see. And we can agree to change it.

Shall we try?

[588] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 1940.

# INTERIM REPORT: HEURISTICS FOR COMMON PRESERVATION

## Introduction to Interim report: Heuristics for common preservation

Sometimes it happens: Different people are affected by the same problem. None of them can solve it alone. But they discover that by acting together in new ways they can create new solutions. I have called this process the emergence of common preservation.

From compiled hindsight, thought experiments, and actual experiments, we can learn something about why the emergence of new common preservations might be possible; what can block it; and how those blocks can be overcome. This "Interim report" sums up what I have found useful for understanding common preservations and for conducting "thought experiments" for new ones. It represents a distillation of themes presented more concretely in the rest of the book.

These ideas are presented as heuristics: "a method to help solve a problem, commonly informally."[589] They are ways of thinking that are worth trying out in particular situations to see if they are useful for "interrogating the evidence." They are tools for the workshop of common preservation.

We know from history that new common preservations really do emerge from time to time. And we can observe a general pattern in the social movements described in this book:

People experience a problem they can't solve using their current patterns of individual and combined action. They may try to deny or ignore the problem, or they may despair and give up trying to solve it. But sometimes they seek new solutions that require new social relations. They test new forms of action that require new forms of coordination. They begin to share information, ideas and plans. They debate the implications of past experiments and the likely result of new ones. They come up with further modifications of their action patterns and test them in turn. They are often stymied by failures of their experiments. But their combined effort may give them new power to solve their problems. It may also create new problems – problems that may in turn require new common preservations to overcome.

This may be a common pattern, but what accounts for it? How and why does it happen? The answers may be of practical significance. Understanding why common preservation, and the emergence of new common preservations, is possible at all can help us see why they do not arise in certain particular situations, and shed light on what might be done to reduce the obstacles to them. Identifying the kinds of problems that require new common

[589] Wikipedia.

preservations for their solution, such as disorder and domination, helps identify what such solutions might be. Showing the "fit" between problems and their solutions helps identify what kinds of possible solutions might be worth testing. Seeing why new solutions may in turn produce new problems helps find ways to forestall untoward results. These heuristics present patterns that can be applied – and modified – to understand the emergence of common preservations in the past and to guide their emergence in the future.

The first three chapters deal with very general processes that make common preservations possible. "Problems" characterizes new common preservations as responses to problems – disequilibriums or gaps that can't be overcome by currently established means. "Solving problems" presents the capacity for equilibration that is shared by living beings, but takes a particular form in human beings, as the means by which problems are typically solved. "Thinking and doing" examines the parallel roles of tacit "thinking without thinking" and explicit representation and communication through language in the emergence of new common preservations.

The next two chapters look at the problem-solving, equilibration process in terms of its relation to purposes. "Transforming means" looks at the way people change their strategies, for example by a shift from self preservation to common preservation. "Transforming ends" looks at the way purposes themselves can change in the course of the equilibration process.

The next four chapters consider the way new common preservations can emerge through different kinds of change in the relations among individuals and groups. "Transforming entities" examines the role of changing boundaries in the emergence of new common preservations. "Transforming coordination" explores how new patterns of joint action emerge; how they can increase participants' power; and how that can provide a motive for new common preservations. "Transforming differentiation" examines the division into different roles that accompanies coordination and the problems it can present for common preservation. "Transforming power" distinguishes equally and unequally shared power, shows the roots of unequal power in dependence, and examines the multilateral character of the power that results.

The next four chapters address how common preservations can counter various types of problems. "Countering disorder" explores how common preservations can address the problems that lead to failures of coordination and unintended side effects and interaction effects. "Counter domination" considers how new common preservations can deal with unequal power rooted in unequal dependence. "Counter disorder combined with domination" examines how common preservation can address power centers creating chaos through competition to control people and resources. "Forestalling new disorder and domination" suggests proactively limiting future problems by incorporating the means of countering them in new common preservations.

"Conclusion" sums up the heuristic patterns proposed for understanding and encouraging common preservation.

## Problems

The emergence of new common preservations requires that many people abandon their current strategies and shift to new ones that depend on complex new relationships with other people. The process may be costly and the results uncertain. People are unlikely to make such a shift unless they share serious problems that give them a strong motivation to do so. Therefore new common preservations normally represent a response to a problem.[590]

The idea of a problem is illustrated by the story I was raised on of the little boy who never spoke. He grew to be two, then three, then four, and his parents grew more and more worried. Then suddenly one morning he remarked, "There's not enough salt in the oatmeal." His parents, astonished, exclaimed, "You can talk!" The boy replied, "Of course I can talk." "Why didn't you ever talk before?" "Because up to now everything has been satisfactory."

A problem is a situation that someone considers unsatisfactory. John Dewey and the tradition of pragmatism interpret a problem as a disturbance in the normal on-going process of life.[591] It provides the starting point for inquiry that might lead to adaptive action.

Jean Piaget interprets a problem as a gap. It is something that existing patterns of thought and action cannot assimilate without changing themselves or the world. Such a gap creates an imbalance or disequilibrium. Disequilibrium, far from being abnormal, is a normal condition. And it is what drives equilibration – the search for solutions to problems that will create a new equilibrium.

Problems present themselves in a variety of forms. As needs: There is something we need and don't have, the lack of which impedes our functioning. As desires: We want something that we don't have. As ethics: Something is morally wrong. As norms: Someone violates our beliefs about how someone in their position should behave. As violations of expectations: Our experience contradicts what we anticipated, and now we don't know what to expect. As preferences: We compare what exists to some other possible state and find it lacking.

It is tempting but fruitless to seek a single formulation to which all such gaps can be reduced. These different kinds of gaps -- of needs, wants, values, norms, expectations, and preferences -- are not fixed or rigidly distinguished. As E.P. Thompson put it, "Inside every 'need' there is an affect, or 'want', on its way to becoming an 'ought' (and *vice versa*)."[592] What they have in common is a gap between means and ends or a conflict among different means and/or different ends.

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[590] Equilibration itself doesn't require a pressing problem. Anyone who watches children at play can frequently see the emergence of new equilibrations, individual and collective. But collective shifts in the strategies by which people live their lives are unlikely without a compelling problem.
[591] See "Learning by Doing" above. See also Mac Brockway (Tim Costello), "Keep on Truckin'."
[592] *Poverty of Theory*, p. 363.

Problems can be disregarded, denied, or despairingly accepted as unchangeable reality. But they can also be viewed as gaps between what exists and what potentially could be.[593] They can thereby be transformed into needs to be fulfilled, obstacles to be overcome, interests to be realized, or problems to be solved. Such gaps can provide motives: conditions of individual and collective actors that incite them to action.

Some problems can be solved by individuals. Some can be solved by collectively applying existing social patterns. But some can only be solved by transforming existing social patterns. What leads to new forms of common preservation are problems that can't be solved in some other way.

When the boy with too little salt in his oatmeal complained to his parents, they may simply have passed him the salt cellar. But suppose he had been living in India under British rule. The British salt monopoly laws forbade Indians to make salt, thus keeping the price prohibitively high for many Indians. Solving the boy's salt problem may have required new forms of action and new forms of coordination among different people's actions – for example, the salt marches, initiated by Gandhi, to make salt in defiance of British law.

The idea of a problem to which people respond by creating new solutions can serve as a heuristic for understanding the emergence of new common preservations. In writing about the economic globalization of the late 20th century, for example, I repeatedly used the emergence of a problem as the starting point for understanding the emergence of new social patterns. The plunging economic growth rates and plummeting corporate profits of the 1970s led corporations and their intellectual handmaidens first to advocate economic nationalist and Keynesian solutions, then to promote globalization and neoliberalism. National governments and national economic regulation made a problem for corporations seeking to lower their costs through globalization; they promoted new institutions like the World Trade Organization to solve it. The established corporate patterns of vertical and horizontal integration became a problem in a global economy with vague and shifting market boundaries; to solve the problem, corporations moved to a core-ring structure in which all but core functions could be outsourced anywhere in the world.

New problems and new solutions were not limited to corporations and their supporters, however. Collapsing commodity prices created problems for poor countries; they responded by trying to act collectively to establish new trade arrangements embodied in a "New International Economic Order." Corporate-led globalization presented a problem to workers and unions, who found themselves thrust into a competitive "race to the bottom." After the failure of economic nationalist strategies, many of them turned to new forms of international labor solidarity to resist the race to the bottom.

[593] A central theme of Herbert Marcuse's was the need to judge societies and social practices against their own potential. A society that provided less freedom than its own capacities made possible, for example, practiced "surplus repression." Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon, 1964).

A wide range of people, from consumer advocates to AIDS activists to local food producers, faced problems as a result of global competition and new global trade rules. Their established strategies were oriented toward national economies that were being dis-integrated. Yet they were poorly connected to other people around the world who faced the same problems, and from potential allies who faced different problems, but ones that had the same cause. The diverse set of problems caused by globalization eventually led to the emergence of globalization from below, also known as the global justice or anti-globalization movement, and such new organizational responses as transnational advocacy networks and the World Social Forum. Thus the problems created by globalization led to a process that produced new common preservations.

The "social experiments" which I observed and participated in throughout my life have almost always been responses to problems. We developed the Brass Workers History Project because working people's own knowledge and insight was not getting adequately reflected in the emerging field of labor history, and conversely the knowledge that was being created by the "new labor history" was rarely reaching working people and their communities. The Naugatuck Valley Project was formed because the collapse of the brass industry was devastating working people and their institutions, yet there was no vehicle through which they could attempt to influence the forces that were overwhelming their communities. The Connecticut Community Economic Development Fund was a response to the crash of the Connecticut economy in the 1980s, and more specifically to the need of community-based businesses for capital and capacity-building.

The effort to promote a UN General Assembly "Uniting for Peace" resolution against a US attack on Iraq was a response to the problem created by the U.S. veto in the Security Council. The international labor and human rights mobilization in support of China's labor contract law was the result of the problem created when foreign corporations tried to gut the law – which would have perpetuated the downward pressure on labor conditions throughout the world created by China's "wild west" employment practices.

In each of these cases, a problem or disequilibrium led to a process of problem solving or equilibration that ultimately produced new common preservations.

In the past half century the human capacity for mutual destruction has been globalized. People have developed the capacity to disrupt, oppress, and kill -- through warfare, environmental destruction, and deprivation -- millions of other human beings near and far. Half a century ago human beings developed for the first time the capacity to exterminate our species as a whole -- either rapidly through nuclear holocaust or slowly through destruction of the natural environment. Those of us now living share these problems.

While human beings have always had problems, there are two things new about the problems of our era. Our species has developed the capacity for self-annihilation. And global forces have a growing power to pass unimpeded through national boundaries. As a result, problems are increasingly global and species-wide. So solutions cannot be just for restricted groups. And no restricted group can solve the problem of providing a

secure future for itself without solving the more general problem of providing a secure future for everyone. Self-preservation requires common preservation. The proposal in Part 7 for a "human survival movement" is a response to this problem.

## Solving problems

People can create new patterns of common preservation because we are equilibrators. We can vary our action to close the gaps between our ends and the conditions we face. Among the ways we can vary our action is to coordinate it with others in new ways that better realize our common ends.

If what people do were completely determined by the social system in which they live, or by those in positions of social power, or by uncontrolled social forces, they could not create new common preservations. But life isn't like that. Living beings guide their action from within. They act to realize their own ends.

We, like other living beings, are not simply dictated to by our environment; we also impose our own patterns on the environment. We can pursue goals in a changing environment by changing our actions to compensate for the changes in our environment.

That doesn't mean that our actions are fully determined by some unchanging program within us, however. We not only change our environment, we also change ourselves. We preserve ourselves by changing our environment; but we change our environment by changing ourselves.

This capacity to equilibrate belongs not only to individual living beings, but also in some degree to the groups they comprise and the ecosystems of which they are part.

Many social theories assert that individuals and societies gravitate toward some kind of equilibrium, a balance of forces.[594] But such an approach is notoriously inept at dealing with social change. In it what might appear to be change must actually be just the realization of a predetermined equilibrium or status quo.

Equilibration as I interpret it, following Jean Piaget, is very different from such equilibrium models. In this approach, the default state of individuals and groups is *dis*equilibrium. Whatever equilibrium there is results not from a static balance of forces, but from an active process of compensation that overcomes imbalances. Indeed, it is disequilibrium that drives the effort to establish new and better equilibriums. Problems are the parents of solutions.

Such equilibration is possible because of feedback loops. Feedback loops are circular flows of information that use the results of past action to guide future action. A feedback loop allows an entity – whether an organism, an individual, a group, or even a man-made device – to guide its action to realize its ends. If information indicates a discrepancy between the desired ends and the existing situation, the entity acts to counteract or compensate for the gap. It then compares the result of its new action with the ends it sought to realize. If the action has not successfully achieved its objective, the entity uses

[594] The structural-functionalism of Talcott Parsons, for example, held that to survive and maintain equilibrium with respect to its environment, a social system must maintain its "latent pattern." See Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970).

the information – the "feedback" -- from its previous action to correct its subsequent action so as to close the gap and align its means and ends more effectively. Indeed, it may not just correct its current action; it may incorporate the correction in its patterns to improve its action in the future.

The cybernetic idea of guidance through a feedback loop spells out the intuitive idea of trial-and-error learning. Trial-and-error learning occurs through the correction of error. Error represents a gap between what is intended and what actually results; improved action reduces that gap. Pragmatism regards such gaps as problems to be solved. In cybernetics they are known as deviations from goal to be corrected. Piaget calls them disequilibriums, to be resolved by a process of equilibration.

Equilibration provides a template for understanding the emergence of new common preservations. For example, African American civil rights groups organized for decades to support legal challenges to segregation. Despite some victories, the segregation of schools, lunch counters, and transportation in the South continued unabated. The experience of continuing segregation illustrates feedback. The reflection on and discussion of it illustrate the evaluation of past action by comparing its effects to the ends for which it aimed. Disappointment with the results led to experiment with new modes of struggle. They in turn led to the militant direct action phase of the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s.

This process – problem-solving, correction, or equilibration -- works in a paradoxically negative way. A cybernetic system realizes a goal not by calculating how to reach it, but by progressively reducing the deviation from it. Gregory Bateson pointed out how cybernetic explanation contrasts with conventional causal explanation: "We consider what alternative possibilities could conceivably have occurred and then ask why many of the alternatives were not followed, so that the particular event was one of those few which could, in fact, occur."[595] Such explanation is non-deterministic in the sense that actors could have decided to act differently, and if they had different results would have been possible.

Action realizes an intent by counteracting or compensating for the divergence from that intent. A dog that chases and catches a rabbit attains the goal of catching a rabbit; but it does so by eliminating the distance that initially separated it from the rabbit. An example of this process is military theorist Liddell Hart's idea of an "indirect strategy" – one in which an enemy is defeated not by applying superior force, but by weakening and fragmenting its capacity to act. Equilibration by one actor can create disequilibrium or even destruction for another.

But counteraction does not necessarily imply antagonism. Violence and war are counteraction, but so are offering mutual cooperation and making a deal.[596]

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[595] Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, (New York, Ballantine, 1972) p. 399.

[596] The conceptualization of a goal does not necessarily correspond perfectly to the closing of a gap. Therefore a problem may be solved, a gap closed, and equilibrium established without the goal as the actor conceived it being realized. Successful adaptation can occur without the actor having a valid knowledge of

We can often observe trial-and-error learning without being able to fully account for how it works. In intelligent animals, trial-and-error learning is easy to observe but hard to explicate; the same can be true for humans. It's not just wired-in instinct; some kind of cognitive unconscious or "thinking without thinking" must be at work. Such tacit knowledge and learning can contribute to the emergence of new common preservations. We can identify and make use of such capacities, even if they are produced by means that we don't yet understand.

Equilibration can help explain the emergence of social movements, mass strikes, and similar forms of social action. In the case of the women's liberation movement, for example, the pervasive strategy of female advancement through higher education left women's social subordination intact and led to innumerable experiences of personal frustration with discrimination on the job and relegation to the role of "just a housewife." The "feedback" from those experiences led hundreds and eventually millions of women to shift to a strategy that challenged prevailing social roles.

The action of living beings is not just random; it is organized into patterns.[597] These patterns represent the general features of an action. They are built up in and inherited from the past – biological, historical, and personal. The particulars of particular situations are assimilated to them. So each act is both a particular act in a particular situation and an instance of the broader pattern.

The guidance of action by patterns means that trial-and-error learning is not simply a matter of a stimulus mechanically reinforcing one or another response. Rather, the person or other entity must assimilate the "stimulus" to their own patterns and accommodate their patterns to make them more effective. Such patterns make it possible for individuals and groups to be active, rather than merely reactive. When something happens to them, their response is determined not just by the impinging event, but also by their pre-established patterns.

The same general patterns may be applied over and over again, but they must be applied in ways that fit particular situations. They adapt or accommodate to particular situations on the basis of feedback about their past effectiveness. This can happen genetically through the Darwinian process of natural selection or in individuals and groups through trial-and-error learning.

Such patterns can be more or less fixed. Even the simplest organisms have some capacity to change behaviors that are not producing their intended results, but most of their behavior is "wired-in" genetically, leaving only a modest possibility for variation and

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how it occurred; often we just "feel our way" to a solution and regard it as a solution when the problem is resolved.

[597] Gregory Bateson points out that patterning is equivalent to the concept of redundancy in communications theory. "The message material is said to contain 'redundancy' if, when the message is received with some items missing, the receiver is able to guess at the missing items with better than random success." "Redundancy and Coding" in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, p. 413-14.

learning. Their behavior is primarily guided by instinct – fixed patterns developed by evolutionary adaptation. In more intelligent creatures, instinct is less rigid and more subject to modification by learning. They can make use of accumulated hindsight, drawing lessons from past experience to improve their ability to act effectively not just in the present but in the future. They not only change what they do; they learn from the feedback from their own action to change it for the better.

In human beings, instincts have atrophied and the patterns that guide human action are more the product of learning. The result is the enormously greater variability of human action. People can combine patterns; break them down into components; modify them; abandon them; and invent new ones. People who once made jungle huts can make skyscrapers; people who once made war can become peacemakers – and vice versa. While instinctive patterns like eating and copulating remain a factor, the range of human actions among different individuals, societies, and eras is so great that instinct can't explain very much of the variation. While many other species engage in common preservation, their patterns are largely set by instinct.[598] Because their instincts have atrophied, humans can develop new common preservations.

The loop connecting initial patterns, actions based on them, feedback of the results, and an improved pattern can help explain both the apparent stability of social patterns and their periodic transformation. Each application of a pattern is both an expression of the continuing pattern and a new act, distinct from all others. It is therefore both a preservation of the pattern and a change. In a cybernetic interpretation, preservation and transformation are not opposites, but different aspects of the same process. Entities maintain themselves by changing and change in order to maintain themselves. The women who initiated and joined the Women's Liberation Movement made a change that transformed the world. Yet in doing so, they drew on their established purposes and on established patterns of action they modified for the new strategy – kaffeeklatsch morphed to consciousness-raising group. This represented, from one perspective, a radical change in strategy, but it also represented a continuity both of means and of ends.

Equilibration may seem to imply a gradual process of adaptation with no sharp discontinuities. But that is not necessarily so. The harder gaps are to close, the larger the changes in practices and goals necessary to address them – the less assimilation to existing patterns works and the more accommodation of those patterns is necessary. In such cases, equilibration takes the form not of minor adjustment but of transformation.

Transformation, however, does not mean total change with no elements of continuity. Indeed, transformation in mathematics can mean a process in which some variables change while the algebraic or geometric structure is preserved.[599]

Even the most revolutionary action makes use of existing social resources, seeks to realize some pre-existing values, and seeks to preserve the continuity of human life, even

[598] See *Chimpanzee Politics* for a fascinating glimpse of the intermediate balance of instinct and invention observable in the self and common preservation strategies of one of our closest relatives.
[599] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transformation_(geometry)

while it challenges a wide range of existing conditions. Bolshevism represented a transformation but also a continuation of the Russian revolutionary tradition dating to the Decemberists and the Narodniks. Lenin was constantly trying to adapt Marxist theory to the conditions of Russian society and the contemporary world crisis. After the Russian Revolution he explicitly compared the Bolshevik cadre ruling Russia to the aristocratic class that had ruled it before. Mao drew much of his military and political strategy from the history of Chinese peasant revolts and the martial arts practices of Tai Chi. Even the most radical movement to "turn the world upside down" seeks to transform the world, but also to preserve it.

When modest adjustment won't work, yet people haven't created a successful transformation, they can often experience a period of flailing, in which old patterns don't work but new ones haven't been discovered. That can search for new patterns without immediate success. There can therefore be a period of accumulating discontinuity before new solutions are found.

Often old patterns have to be extinguished for new ones to take hold. Sometimes they have to be deliberately dismantled or destroyed. In such cases there is a dramatic quality to equilibration: Whether new equilibrations will be discovered, or whether they will prevail, hangs in the balance.

Equilibration does not offer a sharp dichotomy between "revolution" (a complete rupture of past and future structures) and "reform" (changes that occur within the continuity of a dominant structure). Consider, for example, the black civil rights movement that emerged in the South in the 1950s. From one perspective it embodied a sudden, radical, and unexpected transformation. In a few short years, an oppressed and apparently acquiescent population electrified the world with demonstrations, sit-ins, and mass civil disobedience.

Yet a deeper look reveals the continuities within the black community. The struggle for liberation had roots going back to slave rebellions, black participation in the Civil War, and Reconstruction. The black churches, often seen as the very emblem of black submissiveness, expressed as well as repressing an aspiration and an ideology of freedom and maintained an organizational structure able to resist pressures from the white community. The emerging freedom movement drew on the music, language, spirit, mass participation, and leadership traditions of the black church, but used them for a purpose and in a way that was largely novel and that was initially opposed by many church leaders.

Equilibration has guided my approach to the social experiments in which I've participated. Much of my work has been directed to closing feedback loops so that people can see the results of their action and modify their patterns accordingly. In the Brass Workers History Project I tried to present the history of non-elite groups back to non-elite groups to contribute to their action in the future. In my work on U.S. war crimes in Iraq I aimed, with little success, to create a feedback loop that would lead at least some Americans to grasp that, if they hoped to move toward a more secure world

based on constitutional democracy and international law, they had to support the application of constitutional and international law to their own leaders.

One feature of thinking based on equilibration is that it cannot predict the future, because historical development cannot be reduced to chains of independent causes and effects which determine that future. Instead, the feedback from an action may loop back to the actor and, by correcting the pattern that guides such actions, lead to a completely different result, even in otherwise identical circumstances. What an equilibration approach can do is identify established patterns, the problems they may come up against, and the range of solutions that may be available to address them. Such a way of thinking may be more useful than deterministic prediction for people who are trying to decide how to act in response to their problems. It can help us find better solutions – including, for example, new common preservations.

## Thinking and doing

When we observe the emergence of new patterns of common preservation, we can see equilibration -- aka trial-and-error learning or the correction of action by feedback – at work. But we can also observe people thinking, talking, and writing. Most of what people do is incomprehensible without reference to their use of language. The emergence of common preservation is a product of trial-and-error feedback learning, but one that is made far more potent (though by no means superseded) by the use of language and the expanded capacity for thinking and communication it allows.

Even simple feedback processes involve representation. A fish's sleek body "represents" the properties of hydrodynamics that have been selectively bred into it. The patterns that guide an animal's or an infant's action are representations of those actions.

Such representations don't require the use of language or other signs – they are tacit. Piaget's remarkable experiments on "the reach of consciousness" show that even children who have mastered language are able to conduct highly skilled activities that they are nonetheless unable to describe accurately in words.[600] Even for adults, a great deal of action is guided by patterns that are not fully represented in or directed by language or other signs, but that are nonetheless effective in accomplishing objectives within the environment.[601] Malcolm Gladwell's 2005 book *Blink* emphasized the value and effectiveness of "thinking without thinking."[602]

However, in early childhood human beings start developing another mode of representation– representation by language and other language-like systems of signs such as pantomime and mathematics. Such representation expands what people can do both internally and externally.

Internally, people use language to represent themselves and their environments to themselves. This allows them to conduct operations -- virtual mental actions -- on representations of objects, themselves, and their own action.

Thinking with language is not an alternative to the feedback process, but part of it. In place of a simple comparison between intention and result, thinking allows feedback loops to include incredibly complex, interacting, developing, multileveled representations and virtual operations on them. Such thinking is likely to involve a mingling of tacit and explicit forms, some accessible and some inaccessible to consciousness, some the object of others, and constantly affecting, testing, and revising each other. This process goes on

[600] See also Jean Piaget, *Sociological Studies,* on the nature of tacit operations vs. propositional operations in social relations.

[601] The processes by which such tacit or unconscious knowledge and action is constructed are deep and complex. Recent research indicates that they involve both regulation by gene expression and regulation that can best be understood as trans-individual. See Ernest L. Rossi, *The Psychobiology of Gene Expression* (New York: Norton, 2002.) They may also involve forms of "distributed processing" or "neural nets" that as a functioning whole may represent phenomena through their propensity to respond, but that don't map any particular object or event to any particular representing element.

[602] Malcolm Gladwell, *Blink: the Power of Thinking Without Thinking* (New York: Little, Brown, 2005).

within and between people and their environments. It might be described by Gregory Bateson's phrase "ecology of mind."

There is no trial and error learning without error. But what if the experiments are performed mentally? Representation by language and other signs allows "thought experiments" on virtual objects that can go beyond the here and now and test possibilities without having to carry out actual experiments. We can ask ourselves, "What would happen if . . .?" And we can use our knowledge about the world to provide a probable answer, though one that is never certain without testing in the world. We can grasp relationships and design effective actions without always having to conduct trials and suffer errors. We can equilibrate not only real situations but those we represent in our own minds.

Mental representation makes it possible for us to learn not only from our own experiments but also from observation. We can treat an action that we didn't take as if we had taken it ourselves and observe the consequences. A great deal of knowledge, from astronomy to history, operates through such observation of "natural experiments."

People can represent not only their own action but also their own thought processes. As a result, they can think critically about their own thinking and that of others. This provides a vehicle for correcting contradictions among different observations and the patterns into which they are fitted. For example, *Brass Valley* portrayed the way in which Waterbury's employers had blamed the city's economic decline on workers' excessive wage demands at the same time that they were milking the local plants and investing the money elsewhere. Over subsequent decades this critical perspective gradually entered the local discourse on deindustrialization, so that now public discussion will often include the role of corporate strategy in the demise of Waterbury's brass industry.

The ability to represent one's own thought processes makes possible an "ecological shift" in which elements initially considered in isolation are re-represented as parts of a larger pattern or system of interaction. *Strike!*, for example, portrayed workers shifting from seeing their situation in a purely individual context to seeing it in terms of conditions they share with other workers. *Global Village or Global Pillage* described the American labor movement's shift, albeit incomplete, from viewing globalization in an economic nationalist "unfair foreign competition" frame to a global "race to the bottom" frame. Such an ecological shift can provide a new understanding of problems and possibilities which in turn can suggest new forms of common preservation as the solution.

The ability to represent one's own thought also makes possible a "de-centering" in which one's own initial viewpoint is re-represented as only one viewpoint among others with which it can be coordinated. *Strike!* described workers reinterpreting their own viewpoints in the light their interaction with the viewpoints of others – for example, putting their conflict with another ethnic group in the context of employer manipulation. *Globalization from Below* told how multiple, isolated national movements interacted with each other in ways that increasingly led to a common perspective. This process was greatly accelerated by the emergence of the World Social Forum. Such de-centering and

coordination of viewpoints is often a critical feature of the emergence of new common preservations.

Representation by language is significant not only for internal thinking, but also for external communication. Language makes it possible for people to share their representations of their own actions and of the world. Indeed, human language must be acquired by each individual from others before it can be used internally, however much the potential to do so may be pre-established genetically.[603] While animals and infants can communicate through gestures and the manifestation of internal states, the human use of signs lets people share their internal mental operations.

Language allows people to engage in cooperative thought experiments – sharing the process and results of actions on representations. This in turn makes it possible for people to guide their action jointly – to deliberately coordinate the action of different people to produce a combined result. A great deal of what social movements do is to construct such representations, conduct virtual operations on them, and then try those operations in practice. Over the course of a quarter-century, for example, the Naugatuck Valley Project identified problems ranging from plant closings to gouging landlords to kids with no place to play; discussed and developed possible solutions; and tried them out in practice.

Much of Piaget's work was devoted to trying to show how mental operations using signs grow out of what he calls "sensory-motor" activities or "concrete operations." But Piaget often seemed to believe that eventually operational thought develops into a system of logic which becomes independent of experience and action.

In practice, however, there remains a major role for "tacit," action-and-experience-based knowledge both in life and in social problem solving. Purely verbal behavior can become a "head trip" cut off from experience and action. Theory without practice and without testing against evidence can be as misleading as practice that is not subject to critical reflection. Each plays a role in guiding human action and can play a role in finding better solutions to problems.

It is living, experiencing, acting, and thinking individuals and groups who address problems and try to create solutions. Thinking is one part of that overall process. But the process involves a continuing and evolving back and forth between thinking and the other aspects of life.

By seeing this process at work in history, people can assimilate elements of it and use them to improve their own problem-solving. In *Strike!*, for example, I tried to show workers facing oppression and developing both tacit and explicitly verbalized understandings of what to do about it. The book emphasized strongly – perhaps too strongly – the role of tacit knowledge and learning in working class action. It argued that people could act intelligently without necessarily being able to articulate explicitly their

[603] Fortunately, for purposes of this book we do not need to delve into the contested terrain of the nature of language and its balance of learning and innate knowledge.

underlying reasoning. But it also portrayed workers articulating to each other their understandings of their situations; debating alternative plans of action; conducting individual and joint "thought experiments" regarding the likely effects of different courses; making explicit plans to coordinate their action; and reconsidering past conclusions in the light of action's results. It described, for example, groups led by a cobbler and a railroad machinist in Sedalia, Missouri, in 1884, who met "night after night, discussing the condition of workers and how to change it, debating various labor philosophies and their implications for immediate action." From these groups came the leaders of future strikes in the area.[604]

*Building Bridges* described how separate social movements discovered their need for each other and their ability to cooperate, and how that experiential learning led to explicit formulations and further concrete experiments in cooperation. *Globalization from Below* showed how frustration with the failure of established forms of action in national frameworks led both to trial-and-error experiments with new forms of global action and explicit verbal formulations of the nature of globalization and what to do about it.

The proposal in Part 7 of this book for a human survival movement illustrates the idea of a thought experiment. It takes representations abstracted from past actions and tries to combine them in new ways to address the novel situation we face today. We can share such ideas and, if they seem worthwhile, try them out.

Common preservation involves critical thought, shifts in ways of thinking, the sharing of ideas, and other expressions of verbal communication by arbitrary signs. But is not just a matter of ideas and thinking. Equilibration acts both on virtual objects and on real ones. The emergence of common preservation is a historical and social process embedded in people's entire way of living. It involves words, but it also involves experiences, actions, and feelings. Tacit and explicit knowledge, learning, and communication are mingled in its emergence.

[604] *Strike!* (1997 edition) p. 39.

## Transforming means

Strategies are coordinations between ends and means. The equilibration of ends and means can leads to new strategies of common preservation.

As Tim Costello and I wrote in *Common Sense for Hard Times*:[605]

> Each of us evolves a strategy for living in the world. It is pieced together from what we learned as children, what we have observed others doing, what we have learned from our own experience and the ideas we have of what might work in the future. Such strategies can be quite conscious plans and decisions or they can be largely a matter of unconscious habit, just repeating what an individual – or his social group – has 'always done.'[606]

Such strategies do not exist in a vacuum, but in interaction with people's actual conditions:

> Strategies that are well adapted to real social conditions work – people find their activity meaningful and useful in getting what they need and want. But when realities change, the old strategies may stop working; accepted practices no longer 'make sense' or achieve their objectives.

People use such strategies as individuals, for example by getting a particular kind of education to get a job. Individuals use participation in groups as a strategy, for example by participating in a union to get a raise. Work groups, ethnic groups, classes, genders, and many other kinds of groups use and modify their strategies to advance their interests. Whole societies can pursue strategies of economic development, or imperialism, or westernization.

The concept of change in strategy is close to the idea of adaptation in the pragmatism of John Dewey. I applied this approach in *Strike!* to explain the emergence of mass strikes. I wrote that mainstream labor historians rightly emphasized the "evolutionary adaptation" of trade unions to the existing structure of American society. But this adaptation had repeatedly broken down. At that point, "a new evolutionary process starts up as workers search experimentally for new forms of organization and action." Mass strikes are "essentially the result of the breakdown of existing modes of adaptation and the attempt to find new ones." They are therefore "pragmatic" rather than "utopian." But pragmatism properly understood "envisions adaptation not simply as an acceptance of the status quo, but as a transformation of it."[607] Adaptation, in short, was not a mechanical process caused by change in external conditions, but a result of workers' own active quest for new solutions – solutions which could involve not only changing themselves but changing the world.

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[605] P. 4-5.

[606] Our concept of strategy was influenced by Alfred Chandler, *Strategy and Structure: Chapters in the History of the American Industrial Enterprise* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1962).

[607] *Strike!*, 1997 edition, p. 316.

Adaptation or the emergence of new strategies can be understood as a type of equilibration. In the case of mass strikes, people acting on the basis of their established patterns discovered that those patterns ceased to solve their problems, usually because changing conditions rendered them ineffective in reaching goals.[608] This led people to try new forms of action, such as new forms of solidarity and rebellion. If they succeeded, the initial pattern might be modified and the new form of action become normal. If the new actions failed, they might be abandoned, or they might lead to still further modification of previous patterns. The new patterns seen in mass strikes are the result of such processes. And as radically different from previous actions as they may seem, they result from transformative modifications that still preserve a degree of continuity with previous practices.

Equilibration of strategy can similarly be used to interpret the response of American labor to globalization.[609] In the decades following World War II when American productivity led the world, American labor provided strong support for trade policies that would open up foreign markets through reciprocal reduction in tariffs. But globalization created new problems for American labor. Strategies that had evolved to provide institutional stability for unions and a rising standard of living for workers grew less and less effective in the face of corporations willing and able to close US operations and move them abroad if their demands were not met. Initially organized labor shifted to conventional economic nationalism and protectionism. But this strategy did not succeed in reducing the effects of globalization on American workers. So gradually a new strategy based on countering the "race to the bottom" by transnational organizing and public policies designed to "raise the bottom" emerged. This changing response to globalization illustrates how, under changing conditions, feedback combined with reflection may lead to the transformation of strategies.

This is what I am trying to do with the idea of a "save the humans" movement as a response to the doomsday threats of global warming and nuclear annihilation. Today, our actions are generating feedback -- war, impoverishment, environmental destruction – that tells us we're failing to achieve our goals. Our strategies are not working. Indeed, they are leading to our self-destruction. Our goals cannot be realized without a shift to a strategy of common preservation.

[608] Such gaps might also arise for other reasons, for example because people had developed new aspirations or because new possibilities had emerged, or because established patterns came into conflict with each other. See next chapter, "Transforming ends."
[609] See above, "Responding to change: A new labor internationalism."

## Transforming ends

Means can change through equilibration to realize established ends. But ends as well as means are part of the feedback loop that produces equilibration. Can ends themselves be equilibrated? Or do they lie outside the equilibration process? Can the emergence of new patterns of common preservation result from and/or produce new goals? Or are new common preservations merely new means to realize goals that are already established?

At any one time ends may appear as given. But a deeper investigation usually shows they have emerged through individual and shared history and natural history. Ends, too, can be shaped and reshaped by equilibration.

Ends do not exist in isolation from other ends. Some ends are more important than others. Some are means for realizing others. Many of the links among ends are circular, so that they depend on each other for their realization. The successful pursuit of ends requires that they be coordinated with other ends, and that in turn may require that established ends be accommodated to each other. In short, ends must be ordered and coordinated – equilibrated.[610]

Ends, values, and goals are part of an overall structure or network of intended results. As people face new conditions, address new problems, and try new strategies, this overall network or structure of goals may change. A new goal may emerge because it is necessary to reach an established one. An established goal may be abandoned or become inactive because it is too costly to reach or because it interferes with a more important one. A goal may be extinguished because it is no longer necessary for reaching some other goal that it originally helped to realize.

Feedback from experience therefore may lead an end to be elevated or abandoned because the effort to achieve it was more or less beneficial. New goals may be adopted as means to existing goals. They may subsequently become goals in their own right. And goals may be abandoned because other, more important goals may be achieved in ways that are incompatible with them or that render them unnecessary.

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[610] Jean Piaget addresses this question in terms of the "coordination of values." Man "believes in a multiplicity of values, orders them hierarchically and thus gives meaning to his existence by decisions that constantly go beyond the limits of his actual knowledge." Jean Piaget, *Insights and Illusions of Philosophy*, pp. 211, 209. For Piaget's interpretation of some of the factors affecting the coordination of values, see "Explanation in sociology," p 43, in *Sociological Studies*. "The individual in isolation is aware of certain values, determined by interests, pleasures, pains, and affectivity in general. These values are spontaneously systematized within the individual. . . the 'law of least effort' expresses the relationship between minimum work and maximum result; the work itself, and the energy expended by the subject therefore constitute values for the individual, which are balanced against the object of use, and which condition these objects. The role of rarity in the mechanism of choice equally leads to an individual quantification of value." Exchange of values with others, however, "socially consolidates values and transforms them by making them dependent, no longer only on the relationship between a subject and objects, but also on the total system of relationships between two or more subjects, on the one hand, and objects, on the other hand."

The history of workers movements illustrates this process. Workers have goals. But when their ability to realize those goals is stymied, they have to reconsider either their goals or their means to reach them. A goal that is impossible may be abandoned: Many workers in the Great Depression gave up on the idea that they might someday become independent entrepreneurs, and therefore became more open to collective action with other workers. Or new goals may be adopted as means to achieve established ones: Workers discover that the need for a decent wage requires solidarity among workers, which they then may adopt as a goal in itself because it proves generally to lead to a better life.

*Strike!* emphasized such emergent goals. Workers might start with purely individual goals for better wages, economic security, and dignity on the job. But to realize these they had to pursue other goals, such as solidarity and organization. The pursuit of those goals led in turn to new experiences and new traits. Solidarity, for example, might start simply as a practical means to win better wages and working conditions. But in the course of struggles it might become a value in itself, an end to be pursued in its own right, and therefore a desirable basis for reconstructing society. *Strike!* presented this process as the key to the emergence of new goals in the course of mass strikes and as the reason that mass strikes could lead to social transformation.

The equilibration of ends helps make possible the emergence and solidification of new common preservations. Common preservations are likely to emerge initially to help reach an existing goal. But they may then became goals in their own right. Workers often begin to cooperate in response to a specific grievance, but remaining united may thereupon become a goal in itself. Other goals that interfere with their solidarity may then be put aside or the need for them met in some other way.

More generally, common preservation may begin as a means to self-preservation. But if it proves itself as a strategy, it is likely to become more than that. It becomes the normal and preferred way of dealing with problems as they arise. Under such conditions, common preservation can become an end in itself, one that is recognized as necessary for both individual and common survival and well-being.

Ends take many forms. They may express needs that are required for survival or functioning; wants that are experienced as feelings of desire; values that express a hierarchy of motives; norms that reflect ethical principles; and preferences that rank one condition relative to others.[611]

The motives that lead people to pursue particular ends are immensely varied. Some are undoubtedly rooted in biological instinct. The hunger mechanism, for example, clearly motivates people to seek and eat food. But in humans even instincts are subject to a high degree of modification: Many people will starve rather than eat human flesh and some will fast to death in service of a higher cause.

[611] See "Problems" above.

Some ends result from the mechanisms of human attachment, in which strong emotions become associated with people, objects, or ideas.[612] People will sacrifice their own interests for those of a beloved; some will die for a principle or a flag. Such ends may also have biological roots, but their expression in human history has been infinitely varied. They also change over time, as seen in such phenomena as religious conversion and falling in – and out of -- love.

Some ends have been assimilated from other people. This may result from observation and imitation. Or it may be produced by education and indoctrination. Such internalized ends may form the basis of action or they may be given mere lip service.

The coordination of ends takes place in close connection with the potential for their realization. New ends can emerge as a result of new opportunities and capacities: The abolitionist leader and ex-slave Frederick Douglass once said, the slave with a cruel master craves a kinder master; the slave with a kind master craves no master at all. Labor historian David Montgomery once said that what workers want is a function of what they believe they can realistically get. The goal of global domination developed by the neo-conservatives of the George W. Bush administration emerged at least in part due to their belief that such a goal had become realistic because the major forces that had limited US power, the Soviet Union in particular, had vanished.

Conversely, goals may be given up as too costly, that is, too damaging to other goals, or as unrealizable. Most American corporations in the 1930s wanted a union-free environment, but in the context of the sit-down strikes they decided they would be better off accepting some kinds of unions than having to engage in continuous and devastating class conflict.

People may give up goals that are means to other goals because they find alternative means to reach their ultimate goals. After World War II, American workers in the unionized sector largely abandoned the goal of public provision of health care because most won health insurance coverage through their employers.[613]

Conversely, new goals may be adopted as necessary means to achieve other goals. For example, Trotsky argued that in the period preceding the Russian Revolution, workers became committed to the 8-hour day. While they did not initially aim to make a revolution, they gradually concluded a revolution was the only way to secure and defend the 8-hour day. They therefore adopted revolution as a goal.[614]

The emergence of new ends to realize existing ones underlies the basic theme of this book. We live in an era in which all sane human ends are put in jeopardy by the threat of mutual destruction.[615] A wide range of individual and group ends, starting with survival,

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[612] See John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss*, and Peter Marris, *Loss and Change*.
[613] Jeremy Brecher, "Doctor Wall Street: Howe the U.S. Health-care System Got So Sick" *Z*, June, 2008
[614] Leon Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (Pathfinder, 1980).
[615] Those who pursue insane goals, such as global destruction for its own sake, or who are willing to disregard the consequences of actions as merely the pettifogging of the "reality based community," may not

are impossible to achieve under current historical conditions unless we address such problems as environmental destruction, military omnicide, global impoverishment, and political and social oppression. So correcting those problems must itself become an end for all who wish to achieve the goal of survival and well-being for themselves and those they care about.

Today, even self preservation cannot be reliably protected by individuals and restricted groups acting on their own. Common preservation is therefore the necessary condition for realizing their other goals.

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be persuaded by such arguments. But people with highly diverse and even conflicting values and worldviews can share a recognition that their various goals can only be achieved through common preservation.

## Transforming entities

For new patterns of common preservation to develop, often boundaries have to change and new entities have to emerge. They are able to do so through a process of equilibration.

Common preservation is an activity of distinct entities – otherwise it would simply be self preservation of a single entity. And yet, if those entities were entirely isolated islands, they would never be able to act together for common ends. Understanding common preservation requires resolving the apparent paradox of entities that seem separate yet also connected.

In social movements, isolated individuals become part of a group and act in concert. As movements and organizations evanesce, individuals may return to isolation.

The history of mass strikes provides many examples of the transformation of people from isolated individuals to part of a movement or group. The boundaries between craft, occupational, ethnic, and racial groups fade as their members began to act on their common interest as a class. Conversely, communities that had seemed united can become divided by class conflict into separate warring groups.

The science of ecology provides one way to address this paradox. It is based on the idea that individual organisms and particular species are part of ecological niches and a wider biosphere whose interactions cut cross their boundaries. The dispersion of strontium-90 produced by nuclear testing and the spread of DDT in the food chain revealed by *Silent Spring* showed not only the connectedness of the environment but its importance for human well-being and its vulnerability to human activity.[616]

The Marxist tradition provides another way to address this paradox. An old philosophical saw holds that "Every thing is what it is and not another thing."[617] But in Marx' dialectical thought, "objects," or "entities," far from being separate "things," are in a constant state of change that leads seemingly distinct things to turn into their opposites. What seem like isolated and competing individual workers, for example, can turn into a unified working class.[618] Individuals are part of and determined by society, but they are also distinct individuals – "social individuals." Human individuals are part of nature but distinguished by the fact that their action is guided by consciousness (whatever that might be). The truth is in the whole, but the whole is determined by the contradictions among the parts.

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[616] Modern biology has further shown the complexity of system boundaries, for example in the cases of slime molds and bacteria. References to come.
[617] Bishop Joseph Butler.
[618] See E.P. Thompson's detailed study of this uncompleted process in *The Making of the English Working Class*.

Marxist dialectic tries heroically to overcome what seem like insuperable either/ors. But it can be incredibly slippery. If things are always turning into their opposites, is there any way to hold meanings steady long enough to test them against evidence?

Ludwig von Bertalanffy's ideas about open systems and semi-permeable boundaries provide another way to explore both boundedness and connectedness, both stability and change. While his general systems theory originated with biological organisms, it focused on the most general features of systems, which included human individuals, groups, and minds.

In general systems theory, boundaries are patterns that impede the passage of something – "zones of lowered permeability."[619] Boundaries make possible systems: entities that maintain some degree of patterning through the interaction of their parts. Without boundaries, systems would be dissolved by the flux of the universe.

In a closed system – think of a pendulum or the solar system -- opposing forces balance each other so that the pattern of the whole is maintained. But such a closed system can persist only because it is walled off from anything in the environment that might disturb its equilibrium. We know that in reality friction leads pendulum clocks to run down and that the solar system will eventually go out of balance and the planets fly together or apart.

Bertalanffy described a different kind of entity he called an open system. An open system actively compensates for variations in the environment through the interaction of its parts. Such a system can maintain patterns and pursue goals amidst the flux of the universe. In Piaget's language, a closed system expresses an equilibrium; an open system requires equilibration in order to persist.[620]

The secret that makes an open system possible is a boundary that is semi-permeable – that lets some but not all things pass. It allows the import of energy and information that can counter the tendency to entropy. It blocks the import of disorder that would disrupt the system. And it expels poisons and waste products that would disorganize the system.

Organisms, people, social groups, and institutions are obvious examples of such open systems. All are able to counter the forces of entropy and maintain some degree of order and stability amidst flux by patterns that vary to counter the effects of a changing environment. All preserve their stability through boundaries, but their boundaries are only relative, not impermeable.

Boundaries define entities or wholes. But no entity is an island, entire unto itself; "each is part of the Main." Every boundary of an open system is a semi-permeable membrane,

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[619] Boundaries are patterns maintained by actions. Boundaries are also a case of differentiation. Boundaries whose permeability varies are selective compensations – i.e. equilibrations.

[620] The relationship between cybernetics and open systems would make a good puzzler for intellectual historians. One way to look at it is that a cybernetic system represents a type of open system with highly specialized "relations among parts" for processing information.

through which some but not all things penetrate. The semi-permeability of boundaries allows open systems to interact with their environments in spite of their boundedness. Semi-permeable boundaries make life itself possible, since they allow organisms to import energy, materials, and information needed to sustain life while excluding or expelling that which would disorganize or kill them.

Open systems are semi-independent. They control much of their own action. Their boundaries insulate them from the unmediated impact of their environment. Their feedback loops allow them to vary their own action in ways that are shaped by their own patterns, not just by the causal impact of their environment. Indeed, they are often able to affect their environment. But at the same time they are dependent on their environment for meeting their needs and realizing their ends. The great bulk of a nation's economic activity may take place within its borders, and yet it may be heavily dependent on certain imports from abroad, for example.

The idea of open systems resolves some of the paradoxes of common preservation. Human beings can be both bounded and yet connected with the world beyond themselves. They can be relatively independent and yet also part of social groups and natural environments. They can be partially dependent and yet also originators of their own action.

Open systems can form a hierarchy. The environment of one open system can consist of one or more other systems. Conversely, many open systems contain subsystems that maintain their own stability and patterns. Semi-permeable boundaries can separate a system from and at the same time connect it with the larger systems of which it is a part.

Systems sometimes nest neatly within each other. In biology, cells nest in organs, organs in organisms, and organisms in biological niches that in turn are part of larger natural systems. Such nesting may also characterize some human phenomena. Human groups may nest spatially: neighborhoods in towns, towns in regions, regions in nations. Or they may nest in organizational hierarchies: platoons in brigades, brigades in divisions, divisions in armies.

But there is often something too neat about such nesting for understanding human relations. Neat nesting is the exception rather than the rule among bounded social entities. More often human systems overlap. Individuals belong to many organizations; organizations include individuals who are also members of other organizations. Entities can be bounded and yet spatially dispersed: Corporations, languages, and social movements operate across national boundaries. Ethnic groups, religions, and families may be spread in global diasporas, yet retain strong boundaries between themselves and outsiders. To grasp the actual contours of human social life and organization, open systems theory has to allow for such overlap and dispersal.[621]

[621] The formation of social groups – aka collective or concerted or inter-individual subjects or actors-in-common -- is addressed in "Transformation of coordination" below.

Michael Mann's *The Sources of Social Power* presents an alternative to the model of "nesting" systems. As Mann summed up his approach, "Societies are constituted of multiple overlapping and intersecting sociospatial networks of power."[622] Because people have multiple goals, they form multiple networks of cooperation. Indeed, these networks even cut across the boundaries of what are conventionally thought of as separate societies. So even a society is not a unitary, tightly bounded entity, but rather a "network of social interaction" whose interaction is relatively dense and stable only in comparison to the relatively less intense interaction that crosses its boundaries.[623]

Mass strikes exhibit a wide range of intersecting and overlapping boundaries among distinct entities. Individuals act as individuals, but also as part of nuclear and extended families, social networks, ethnic and religious groups, workgroups, companies, and industries. They are often members of unions, but also of churches, political parties, companies, fraternal orders, and many other organizations. In periods of mass strike, the boundaries among these different entities are often transformed. Ethnic and religious boundaries, for example, may become far less salient, while boundaries between different classes became far more formidable.

Transformation of boundaries is an important aspect of many kinds of social change. In early modern Europe, nation states unified independent principalities while they also fragmented the Roman Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire into separate national religious and political jurisdictions. In the wake of the American revolution, colonies established independence from the British empire, but also became subsidiary parts of the new United States of America. More recent examples include the reduction of boundaries among European states through the evolution of the European Union; the breakdown of Yugoslavia into its component states; and the convergence of social movements represented by globalization from below. Each of these examples represents an equilibration of the organization and boundaries of entities.[624]

The idea of open systems, corrected by an emphasis on overlapping and intersecting networks, provides a way to deal with some of the complexities of real historical situations. It can help understand overlapping phenomena like class, race, gender, family, nationality, location, ethnic identity, and multiple others without having to reduce some of them to other, purportedly more real or fundamental, ones. It can help understand how social activity organized in one way, say by ethnicity and race, can rapidly be transformed by social movements and mass strikes to being organized another way, say by class. And it can help understand how the seemingly impregnable boundaries of nations could, in the era of globalization, be subverted increasingly easily by corporations, communications, and global social movement networks.

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[622] Mann, Vol. 1 p. 1.

[623] Mann, Vol. 1, p. 13. Mann's view, though presented as a critique of systems approaches, is very close to what I was trying to get at with my approach to overlapping systems and subsystems.

[624] For historical boundary change, see also Saskia Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

The idea of multilevel systems with semi-permeable boundaries can also help understand the convergence of social movements seen in "globalization from below." Movements and organizations once strongly enclosed by national borders and sectoral objectives increasingly linked across national boundaries and supported each other's efforts, often assimilating some of each others' objectives in the process. Yet these movements retained distinct identities even while functioning in some ways as parts of a single movement.

As the example of globalization from below shows, the transformation of boundaries and the emergence of new entities can be an intentional process of equilibration. For example, *Global Village or Global Pillage* developed the concept of the "Lilliput strategy" as a deliberate linking of distinct organizations, movements, and constituencies in different countries to form a network that could function as a global movement to resist the race to the bottom. By transforming their mutual relations, these groups could – and in fact did – create a new concerted historical entity, generally known as the global justice or anti-globalization movement, with its own organizational embodiments like transnational advocacy networks and the World Social Forum.

The idea of multilevel open systems also guided *Global Vision's* exploration of alternatives to either a top-down globalized "new world order" or a return to atomistic and/or predatory nationalism.

> In place of the current concentration of power in dominant states and transnational corporations, globalization-from-below implies a redistribution of power both upward and downward to a global but decentralized multilevel system. . . . Globalization from below's simultaneous emphasis on local empowerment and on transnationalization may seem contradictory, even paradoxical. But in fact the two directions are interdependent . . . Diversity and local empowerment can be goals for global institutions, rather than barriers to their development.[625]

A similar emphasis on changing the nature of boundaries underlies my effort to envision a "human survival movement." The people of the world are divided from each other by many kinds of boundaries, in spite of our common interest in common preservation. We don't need to eliminate all boundaries. But we do need to lower those that prevent us from cooperating with each other to create a viable basis for the continuation of human life on earth.

[625] Jeremy Brecher, "Introduction," in Jeremy Brecher, John Brown Childs, and Jill Cutler, eds., *Global Visions: Beyond the New World Order* (Boston: South End Press, 1993) p. xix.

## Transforming coordination

However great their individual capacity to act, and however strong their common interests, people cannot pursue those interests jointly unless they can coordinate their action. Common preservation requires coordinated action for the common benefit of the actors. Indeed, it is the potential benefit of acting in concert that gives people a motive for shifting to new common preservations.

Coordination means that actions are guided with reference to each other and their combined effect. To construct a new coordination, patterns must reciprocally incorporate each other and vary so as to produce joint action intended to accomplish a joint goal: They must mutually equilibrate. Just as action involves an adaptation of the actor to the object of action, so coordination requires a mutual adaptation of different patterns and different actors to each other. As Piaget puts it, coordination requires mutual assimilation and accommodation. Such coordination can increase the range of conditions that can be counteracted and reduce the cost of doing so.

Coordination among different people creates collective power beyond that of the separate individuals whose actions are coordinated. It's a sociological truism that "persons in cooperation can enhance their joint power over third parties or over nature."[626] Coordination also makes those who benefit from that power dependent on it and on each other.

To achieve a goal or compensate for a gap through inter-individual coordination is to form what is often called a collective actor, but which might be better called an inter-individual or concerted actor or actors-in-common. Becoming part of a concerted actor does not prevent individuals from also continuing to be individual actors. Nor does it require entirely abandoning individual perspectives and interests. But it does require mutually varying one's patterns in order to adapt to the patterns of others.

A group is a concerted actor to the extent that it is actually able to compensate for deviations from its goals. Coordination can thus be the starting point, rather than the result, of group formation. The workgroups described in *Strike!* often recognized themselves as groups – for example, as "guerilla bands at war with management" – only after they had already begun to resist management in practice. Similarly, working people often recognized themselves as part of a class only after and as the result of observing and participating in large scale mass actions.

Coordination does not require formal organization; there can be, as the subtitle of a recent book put it, "organizing without organizations."[627] Millions of people participated in

[626] Michael Mann, Vol. I, p. 6, paraphrasing Parsons.
[627] Clay Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing without Organizations* (New York: Penguin, 2008).

peace rallies, demonstrations, and meetings without ever signing a membership card for an anti-nuclear or anti-Vietnam war organization. Organizations came and went, split and merged, and yet people continued to act in concert. In mass strikes, hundreds of thousands of people organized themselves to act in concert, sometimes over the length and breadth of a continent and across the lines dividing occupations, races, ethnicities, genders, and established organizations, often using many different organizations or none at all to do so.

This concept of coordination explains why social movements can engage in concerted action over such a wide field without anyone giving anyone else orders about what to do. Recognizing the needs of the movement, each participant adjusts their action both to those needs and to the other participants.

A concerted actor is made possible by semi-permeable boundaries that separate individual actors without preventing them from coordinating their action. Actor and environment are neither identical nor detached and independent. A concerted actor is an open system, composed of individuals and/or groups as subsystems, and autonomous in relation to its environment but only relatively so.

People have many different wishes, needs, and goals, and therefore they form varied patterns of coordination to realize various ends. The prevailing patterns of coordination have been evolved over time in response to the past needs and problems of individuals and groups.

Coordination may take varied forms. It may be self-coordination among members of a group, or it may be directed by a distinct individual or group. It may be ad hoc or institutionalized. It may be diffuse, as in a market or a common language, or it may be highly organized, as in an army or bureaucracy. It may be voluntary, coerced, or a combination of the two. It may be direct, as when a group of people join together to lift a heavy object. Or it may be indirect; in a market, for example, an individual simply exchanges commodities with another individual, but by doing so becomes part of a wider set of interactions that provide both the benefits and the constraints of coordination.

Economists distinguish three ways coordination can be organized: command, as in an army; feedback without direct communication, as in what the economists call a "perfect market"; and decentralized sharing of information and intentions, as in a network.

In command systems, control of coordinated activity is assigned to a particular individual or group. The coordinator is granted authority over the activity of others. Authority can be conceived as an agreement of those who are subject to the authority to obey those who exercise authority.[628] Such agreement may represent free or coerced consent or a combination of the two. Coordination by authority is proactive: Coordinated action is first planned by one party and then implemented by another. This type of coordination prevails in corporations, governments, armies, and what economists generally refer to as "hierarchical organizations."

[628] See Lindblom, *Politics and Markets*.

In systems with multiple actors who do not know each others' intentions, coordination may be produced by individuals and groups adjusting their actions to the *effects* of other's actions. In what economists define as "perfect markets," for example, individuals act in response to the cumulative effects of buying and selling without knowing each others' intentions.[629] They are coordinated by the famous "hidden hand" of the market. Such coordination is decentralized and reactive: Decisions are made in response to the unplanned cumulative effects of previous actions. The spontaneous evolution of a common language, for example, involves an adaptation of each user to cumulative changes whose origins are in most cases unknown to them.[630]

In knowledge sharing systems, people may coordinate their actions by providing each other information about their capabilities and intentions and then mutually adjusting their plans on the basis of that shared information. Such coordination is characteristic of a nonhierarchical, non-authoritarian group. Some economists have begun referring to this pattern of coordination as a network.[631] Such coordination is decentralized but proactive: Decisions are made by individuals and groups based on knowledge of the capabilities and intentions of others.

Human coordination may develop through simple trial and error learning, that is, feedback. Alternatively, it may develop through a collective process of representing needs, goals, problems, and conditions and constructing thought experiments in how to address them. That process requires communication and the construction of shared representations of objects and actions. Piaget calls this crucial process "de-centering" or the reciprocal assimilation and accommodation of viewpoints. In everyday speech we call it "give-and-take."

Coordination may be highly fluid, as in social movements. But it may become increasingly stable, developing from a single act to a tacit pattern to a rule. Patterns of coordination that persist or reproduce themselves over time become social structures or institutions.[632] They may be maintained simply out of habit, tradition, or recognized self-interest, but they may also be reinforced by some kind of sanctions. They may be integrated into a system of law that is widely accepted as binding. They may be incorporated as units within still larger patterns of coordination.

Workers' concerted action, for example, has often begun with strikes and protests against particular acts of abuse. Such actions may become traditions: In the Akron rubber plants,

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[629] This process is interpreted by Adam Smith as a "hidden hand" and by Marx as "the fetishism of commodities." "Market signals" are often equated to "feedback," but they regulate very differently from the active compensation described in "Solving problems" above.

[630] Deliberate efforts at linguistic reform, such as the attempts by Noah Webster and the French Academy to inculcate "correct" American or French language usage, represent attempts to replace such unplanned mutual adaptation with command.

[631] See, for example, Walter W. Powell, "Neither Market nor Hierarchy: Network Forms of Organization," *Research in Organizational Behavior* 12 (1990).

[632] The presence of coordination or institutionalization by no means implies an absence of conflict; conflict is common and sometimes endemic among coordinated or institutionalized patterns.

workers developed a pattern, and eventually a norm, that when one worker had a grievance with a foreman, their workmates would sit idle at their work stations until the grievance was settled. These practices were reinforced by stigmatization and other sanctions against violators. Eventually unions institutionalized this process and brought it under the control of labor law. Workers' coordination in turn became subject to the wider coordinations represented by the labor movement as a whole, government regulation, and the development of labor-management cooperation.

In an institution, people act and coordinate as a function of their roles, not just of their personal patterns and objectives. So patterns of action may continue as structures even though they do not express the actors' own desires. Armies go on fighting wars their participants know are already lost; corporations go on pouring carbon into the atmosphere even though their executives know it will lead to catastrophic global warming that will destroy their own children's environment. Such roles express a kind of alienation.

Established patterns of coordination may change in either of two ways. A concerted actor may modify its patterns. For example, a nation may act collectively to pass laws that restrict gender discrimination. Alternatively, the individuals or groups -- the sub-actors -- who compose a concerted actor may change their own patterns in ways that partially or completely dissolve the established coordination of the whole.[633] Participants in the Women's Liberation Movement refused to make coffee in the office, go first through doors, abandon careers when they got married, and stay in oppressive marriages, dramatically undermining the unequal coordinations of a sexist society.

Coordination and the equilibration of coordination are ubiquitous. *Strike!* portrayed capitalism as a system of coordination based on the authority of managers in the workplace and blind interaction in the market. Through the mass strike process workers create new forms of coordination with each other. Such coordination could take place directly in workplaces and communities among those who work and live together; through imitation of actions taken by others elsewhere; through informal committees and networks; and/or through formal organizations like labor unions. By coordinating their action, workers could augment their power.[634]

Economic globalization represented in part an expanded coordination of markets. Economic activities in one part of the world became coordinated with those in other parts in a way that they hadn't been when national boundaries were less permeable. Economic globalization also represented an expansion of command coordination by corporations that reorganized to function globally. Globalization from below was composed of new patterns of coordination, primarily networks, formed by social movements in response to globalization from above.

Many of the social experiments with which I have been involved produced new coordinations. The Naugatuck Valley Project, for example, coordinated the actions of

[633] This distinction may underlie some of what people mean when they distinguish "reform" and "revolution," though the two dichotomies are not exactly equivalent.
[634] See "Transforming power" below.

congregations, unions, and community groups in a region. The North American Federation for Fair Employment coordinated a variety of community organizations, advocacy groups, and unions on a continental scale. The Uniting for Peace campaign created a tenuous coordination among anti-war activists around the world, some governments and political structures, and several coalitions of governments.

The creation of new coordinations in the past makes it plausible that we can develop further forms of coordination to help solve our problems in the future.

A human survival movement would constitute a new set of coordinations. It would require the formation of common objectives. And it would require on-going assimilation and accommodation – give and take –to realize them.

Common preservation is linked to coordination in two ways. To realize the goals of common preservation, action must be coordinated. And it is the benefit of coordinated action that makes common preservation worth pursuing.

## Transforming differentiation

Where there is coordination, there is also differentiation into different roles. Differentiation can occur in activity: Some fish while others hunt. Differentiation can occur in space: One region produces bananas while another produces Christmas trees. Differentiation can occur in time: People dig iron ore out of the ground, process it into pure metal, and cast it into a frying pan or a cannon ball. When differentiation persists, it establishes a division of roles.

As Adam Smith pointed out long ago, if some hunt while others fish, the result is likely to be more skilled hunters and fishers together catching more prey. But differentiation can be a double-edged sword. Smith pointed out that an extreme division of labor may also reduce the capability of workers to a narrow specialty. Marx added that it can generate inequality, and even domination, as some roles become more powerful and better rewarded than others. Michael Mann argued that differentiation can make people unequally dependent on each other. And it can allow organizations to follow the decisions of those who control important positions, rather than the will of the members as a whole.

The collective power that results from differentiation can be one of the benefits of new common preservations. But those benefits may be unequally distributed. Differentiation can lead common preservation to become a new form of exploitation. And it can create differences of interest that serve as obstacles to new common preservations. If workers receive sharply differing wages on the basis of race or occupation, for example, they are likely to find it harder to agree on a common objective that embodies the interests of each.

Those granted greater knowledge, control, and authority may use them to accumulate a still larger share of knowledge, control, and authority. This is particularly true when a structure provides some with authority over others and when this authority is embodied in rules. In such cases, as we will see below, its result can be domination.

Roles can be changed by equilibration. Such equilibration can be seen in the history of capitalism. As individual craft production gave way to larger-scale factory-based production, factory owners took over control of production and its coordination. Society became differentiated into workers and capitalists. At a later point, management became professionalized and managers who ran businesses were increasingly differentiated from owners who had title to the enterprises.

Equilibration of differentiation can also be seen within labor organizations. Worker organization often started with informal coordination within and among workgroups that showed little lasting differentiation between leaders and led. As these relationships became institutionalized in labor unions, however, individual and collective leaderships became increasingly differentiated from the “rank and file.” This differentiation was

often justified as a necessity for efficient and effective action. It often led, however, to a divergence of interest between those in different organizational roles.

The differentiation of work functions can result from the deliberate policy of managers within workplaces and firms – something that the guilds had fought but that capitalists imposed. It can arise through the market, with greater gains going to those who became more productive through specialization. Or it can be created by common agreement within a network, for example when various groups concerned with contingent work created NAFFE's action groups and coordinating staff.

Differentiation makes those who benefit from it dependent on it and on each other. Without employers, workers are unemployed. Without workers, employers have no way to produce. Therefore differentiation, as we will see in the next chapter, provides a basis for differences of power.

If roles are temporary and easily cast off or exchanged, the impact of their differentiation is limited. But if differentiation continues over time, people's roles can become part of the way they are defined by themselves and others.[635]

Roles may also come to be treated as features of institutions rather than of the people who fill them. Individuals may come and go while the roles remain the same. Conversely, as long as they accept an institutional role, individuals may act in ways that conflict with their own interests and beliefs.

If different roles give different amounts of authority over an institution as a whole, the institution may be diverted from common purposes to those of the people in authority. If different roles confer different rights and responsibilities, the needs of some may be sacrificed to those of others. Different rights and responsibilities generate different interests, engendering conflict.

Differentiation of authority is likely to be particularly great if it is based on roles that oversee and direct the process of coordination itself. The differentiation between a carpenter and an electrician may have modest impact on opportunity and power, but the differentiation between a supervisor and a rank-and-file worker can be substantial. Such oversight roles put their holders in a position of greater knowledge and control of the whole and allocate authority to some people over the action of others.

While the differentiation of roles is inherent in coordination, it can be deliberately contained and reduced. The experiments with worker ownership at Seymour Specialty Wire and Cooperative Home Care Associates attempted, with varying success, to create something closer to participatory democracy in the workplace. Network structures like NAFFE's limit role differentiation and allow on-going redefinition of roles. Tim's and my proposals for restructuring of the labor movement sought to reduce the gap between the leadership and the rank and file.

[635] See discussion of roles and institutionalization in "Transforming coordination" above.

Today's social roles leave most of us without either power over or responsibility for social processes as a whole. Those processes are leading to mutual destruction, but it's no one's "job" to fix them. While we no doubt need the benefits of some role differentiation, all must share responsibility for the whole. We need a common role of sharing responsibility for common preservation.

## Transforming power

In a general sense, power is the capacity to accomplish a result. We have the power to abolish hunger or to destroy the world with nuclear weapons. But power is often used in a narrower sense as the capacity to make someone else do what they would otherwise not choose to do. It is the power of some people over others.

Such "coercive" or "distributive" power can help some people and prevent others from realizing their own ends. Powerful actors – think corporations and states, for example – can pursue their own interests and deny those of other, less powerful actors. And they can coerce less powerful actors to do their bidding.

Unequal power can be a barrier to common preservation. The need to counter such power can also provide a prime motive for developing new common preservations. The capacity of individuals and groups to equilibrate makes it possible for them to counteract coercive power through new common preservations.

We saw in "Transforming coordination" above that collective power is the result of coordination. Coercive or distributive power is the result of dependence.

Individuals and groups are inherently dependent on what is outside their boundaries to achieve their goals. Those who rely on coordination to realize their goals are, in addition, dependent on the coordinated group – the concerted actor. Differentiation of functions and roles creates an additional dependence on others who can do what you can't do.[636]

Dependence provides the basis of power. If I cannot achieve my goals without assistance or at least acquiescence from you, I am dependent on you and you have a degree of potential power over me. That potential power becomes real if you make use of my dependence to threaten or prevent the realization of my goals.

The idea that power is based on dependence contradicts a commonsense view of power as resting on violence – that, as Mao Tse-tung put it, power grows from the barrel of a gun. One may kill a person, it is true, in the same way that you kill an animal. But killing a person doesn't really give you power over that person, it merely renders them no longer a

[636] Such dependence is a characteristic of individuals and groups as open systems. However, as I began to study systems theory, cybernetics, and genetic structuralism, I was struck by their absence of a concept of power. There seemed to be no place for conflict between the interests of the parts or those of the parts and the whole. But open systems are inherently dependent on their parts and on larger systems of which they are part, providing a potential basis for power.
The multilateral character of dependence in open systems provides a basis for change that is rarely noted in systems theory. When systems contain multiple subsystems, those subsystems may be able to realize their goals in ways others than those prevailing in the present system. If -- as in the case of human beings -- they can represent and communicate alternative possibilities to each other, they can construct a shared alternative. Those who benefit from the prevailing system may attempt to prevent them from realizing that alternative. But because dependencies are multilateral, those seeking such an alternative may be able to establish new coordinations that permit them to implement it despite such opposition.

person.[637] Power over another consists in being able to make them follow your will rather than exclusively their own. And that is made possible by the utilization of dependence.

Of course, such dependence does not have to be parlayed into power. A parent may be in a position to starve a child to death, but never use or even threaten to use that power. Workers may have the capacity to strike, but never brandish let alone use it. To exercise actual power, an actor must take advantage or threaten to take advantage of dependence.

Power relations can be equilibrated because dependence is rarely if ever unilateral. For example, as Marx pointed out long ago, workers as individuals are dependent on employers because employers control society's means of production; people who do not possess the means of production have no way to gain a livelihood except by selling their capacity to work to those who do.

But, conversely, employers are dependent on workers as a group. It is the labor of workers that realizes employers' goal: the expansion of their wealth. This dependence provides workers a potential power over their employers. If they collectively withdraw their labor – for example by soldiering or striking – that potential power can be realized.

This mutual dependence of workers and their employers is one instance of a more general pattern. Just as employers are dependent on workers as a group, so all who wield power are in reality dependent on others. Generals are dependent on privates and on the governments who fund their armies; politicians are dependent on voters, campaign contributors, and parties; governments are dependent on the compliance of their citizens and on legitimation by other countries. Utilizing this dependence can provide power. As *Strike!* put it,

> "Ordinary people – together – have potentially the greatest power of all. For it is their activity which makes up society. If they refuse to work, the country stops. If they take control of their own activity, their own work, they thereby take control of society."[638]

The power of the powerful depends on the collaboration of some and the acquiescence of others. It is the activity of people – going to work, paying taxes, buying products, obeying government officials, staying off private property – that continually recreates the power of the powerful.

The actual or threatened withdrawal of such collaboration or acquiescence provides a power that can counter the power of the powerful. And because coordinations are maintained by the participation of their sub-units, the possibility of such withdrawal is

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[637] One is dependent on another for one's survival, of course, if they are in a position to threaten it. So the point here is that vulnerability to violence is a subset of dependence, not an alternative to it. And the ability to make use of violence itself depends on many other sources of power, as Gene Sharp emphasizes. Reference to come.

[638] 1977 edition, p. viii.

always at hand. No matter how much power the powerful may have, they are always dependent on others to realize their goals. This is why those who are not in positions of institutionalized power are nonetheless able to make change through concerted action.

Reflecting on the Russian Revolution of 1905, Gandhi wrote, "Even the most powerful cannot rule without the cooperation of the ruled."[639] Gene Sharp, who analyzed hundreds of historical examples of nonviolent action in the three volumes of his *Politics of Nonviolent Action*, concluded that the base of nonviolent action is that "the exercise of power depends on the consent of the ruled who, by withdrawing that consent, can control and even destroy the power of their opponent."[640]

This analysis does not apply exclusively to nonviolence. Even in war, victory typically results not from physical annihilation of the enemy but from the withdrawal of support of the population for the war effort ("loss of morale"), defection of political supporters of the war, withdrawal of allies, and change in policy by ruling groups in response to the presence or threat of such factors.

Dependence may be direct, as in the case of employers and workers. But in societies with multiple institutions, patterns of dependence also tend to be multiple. A corporation, for example, depends on the labor of its own workers, but also on a supportive legal structure, sources of revenue, protection against threats from rivals, favorable public policies, and many other conditions dependent in turn on varied forms of social coordination.

To be effective, an actual or threatened withdrawal of cooperation must be coordinated among individuals and groups whose support or acquiescence is important for the powerful. For that reason, action for social change often requires alliances and the parlaying of different forms of dependence into a coordinated expression of power.

Globalization from below has often taken the form of new global alliances that used complex dependencies to block new trade rules and force giant corporations to back down on issues like AIDS drugs for Africa and regulation of genetically engineered food. Independent, non-electoral oppositions in Germany, the US, Poland, Mexico, and elsewhere attempted to exercise power outside of established political institutions by utilizing dependencies of dominant groups on support from their own populations. The worldwide effort to circumvent the US veto in the UN Security Council by taking the US attack on Iraq to the General Assembly tried to counter US domination by means of an alliance of states whose support the US needed for its long-term goals.

Today's uncontrolled power centers – including nation states, particularly the world's only superpower, military establishments, corporations, markets, and powerful political interests -- pose a threat to human survival. But these power actors are actually made up of, and dependent on, the very people whose future prospects they threaten. The key to

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[639] Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Indian Opinion*, November 11, 1905.
[640] Gene Sharp, *The Power of Nonviolent Action* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973) *Part One: Power and Struggle*, p.4.

countering their domination is to make use of that dependence. That is how new common preservations can realize their objectives, in spite of those who oppose them. The proposal in Part 7 for a human survival movement embodies a strategy for counteracting the power of the powerful by utilizing their underlying dependence.

## Countering disorder

Two patterns make it difficult for individuals and groups to solve their problems without new common preservations. When individuals and groups do not or cannot coordinate their action, so that their action does not express their common purposes, the result is disorder. When some individuals and groups make use of the unequal dependence of others to coerce them into acting in ways they otherwise would not choose, the result is domination. [641] Each may be remedied by corrections that produce common preservation, but the solutions in each case are somewhat different. This chapter deals with disorder; the next with domination; the following one with their combination.

Much of what goes on in the world cannot be explained as the result either of deliberate intent or of blind causal forces independent of human intent. Rather, much results from the interactions of deliberate human actions, their unintended consequences, and natural forces – a mixture of "praxis" and "process."[642] An economic crisis, for example, grows out of deliberate human actions – selling stocks, demanding payment of loans, and the like. Yet the interaction of these actions produces a result that is not willed, or sometimes even foreseen, by anyone.

When the actions of individuals, groups, and organizations are poorly coordinated, their combined effect may result not in the achievement of their goals, but rather in a disorder in which nobody achieves anything. Actions deliberately or inadvertently counteract each other.

It is not hard to understand why there can be disorder. As Gregory Bateson put it in his essay "Why Things Get in a Muddle," there are many more ways for things to be disorderly than orderly. If many individuals, groups, and institutions are pursuing their own goals and interests, their action is unlikely to be well coordinated unless something causes it to be so.

The normal situation of workers under capitalism illustrates such lack of coordination. Individuals and groups often pursue their own interests without coordinating with others. Organizations of workers within trades, companies, and industries function as isolated units poorly coordinated with each other. Even within unions, rank and file workers are often unable to coordinate with each other because the channels of communication and the control of action run exclusively to the top rather than directly connecting the rank and file.

As a result of this dis-coordination, action is often futile or even counter-productive. Workers compete with each other for jobs and advancement, thereby undermining their

[641] Various thinkers have made similar distinctions. Karl Marx observed that capitalism combined anarchy in the market with domination in the workplace. American political scientist Charles Lindblom contrasted market failures and political failures. Jean Piaget distinguished two impediments to "ideal equilibrium": failure to coordinate with the viewpoint of others and acceptance of an imposed external viewpoint.
[642] Sartre defines the realm of non-praxis as the "practico-inert."

own power. Different groups are unable to pool their potential power, leaving them at the mercy of their employers.

Further, when people act to achieve a result, they often produce other results as well. These are unintended consequences of their action. For example, global warming is being produced as an unintended result of burning fossil fuels in cars, factories, and homes. No one is burning oil, gas, or coal in order to warm up the atmosphere, yet that is the result of actions that are only intended to warm houses, manufacture products, get from place to place, make a living, or make a profit. Similarly, as E.H. Carr wrote, "It is difficult to believe that any individual willed or desired the great economic depression of the 1930's. Yet it was indubitably brought about by the actions of individuals, each consciously pursuing some totally different aim."[643]

Unintended side effect may result when an action produces both the intended effect and other effects. Oxidizing fuel oil produces heat but also carbon dioxide. Raising the price of a commodity may increase the vendor's immediate profit, but it may also reduce the demand for the commodity. Brutality toward a slave may produce immediate submission, but also a resolve to run away or rebel.

In a more complex form, the intended effect results in subsequent secondary interaction effects that were not intended. A ball skitters off the side wall of a billiard table and accidentally hits another ball. Apparently harmless CFC gasses produced as refrigerants, once released in the atmosphere, rise to a level where they are changed by solar rays into chemicals that destroy the earth's protective ozone layer. Such unintended interaction effects occur because human actions take place not in a vacuum but in a larger context or system.

Unintended consequences may even form a self-reinforcing loop. No one intends an arms race, but if each country is determined to produce more weapons than its opponent, the result is not the superiority each pursues but rather a self-perpetuating cycle of escalations.[644] In such patterns, the dynamics of deliberate human action may actual mimic those of unconscious natural processes. For example, uncoordinated human action may produce bifurcations and phase changes like those studied by complexity and chaos theory.

Unintended consequences may result simply from lack of knowledge about the effects of one's actions. The impact of CFCs on the ozone layer or of fossil fuels on the earth's climate were unknown until fairly recently. But lack of knowledge of consequences is often the result of the way consequences are distributed. The stockholders of a global corporation that destroys the environment in a distant land as a side effect of drilling for oil are unlikely to experience the destruction. The local people whose livelihood is destroyed may be well aware of the side effects of the drilling, but be unconnected to the

[643] Carr, p. 64.

[644] In cybernetic theory this phenomenon is known as "deviation-amplifying feedback" or "positive feedback." It was the bête noire of Norbert Wiener. The term "positive feedback" has developed such different connotations in common language that it is now confusing to use it for its original meaning.

decision-making process that controls it. Slaves may successfully conceal from their owners the determination to resist or escape that brutality is producing. In such cases no feedback loop connects those taking action and those experiencing its side effects.

Economists discuss unintended consequences under the rubric of "external effects" or "externalities" because they involve costs or benefits that are "external" to the entity that produces them. For historians, unintended consequences reflect the "irony of history," in which human action so often has an impact far different from what the actors intend.

Unintended consequences may lead to self-defeat or even self-destruction. Burning of fossil fuels may destroy the atmospheric balances on which human life depends. Efforts by one community or country to become more competitive economically by reducing wages and environmental protections may provoke even greater reductions by others, leading to a competitive "race to the bottom" that drives down conditions for all. Nuclear weapons designed to deter attack may provoke accidental war and consequent omnicide. Such patterns of self-destruction are reminiscent of the mechanical sculpture, installed briefly in a New York museum, which over the course of a few hours systematically dismantled itself into a pile of junk.[645]

Action that undermines its actors' own objectives embodies a kind of alienation. Marx' famous analysis of the alienation of labor presents workers as engaging in labor that is not determined by their own purposes but by those of an employer and ultimately by the capitalist system's inhuman drive to accumulate capital; at the extreme of such alienation, slaves may even forge their own chains. Such alienation can be built into a social structure like capitalism or slavery or even into a material object. The mill that Akron rubber workers used to produce tires also produced mangled arms; today's fossil fuel-based system of production and consumption cannot function without producing the greenhouse gasses that threaten the society, species, and ecosystem on which it depends. An organizer described a meeting in a Minnesota church basement promoting a state economic conversion law where a worker stood up from the audience and expressed such alienation:

> "I work at a factory where we produce parts for nuclear weapons. I have a wife and two daughters that I support. I carry their pictures in the top of my lunch box. Every day I look at them for lunch. I know that I'm providing for their current needs while at the same time I'm helping to destroy their future."
>
> He added, "Thank God for what you're doing." Then he started to cry.[646]

Countering disorder requires equilibrating not just the actions of individual actors, but their patterns of interaction. It requires creating new coordinations. That may involve many elements of equilibration, such as creating new feedback loops; new means of communication; "thought experiments" to test possible action; new forms of regulation;

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[645] The sculptor may have been Marcel Duchamps or Yves Tanguey.
[646] Mel Duncan, "Making Minnesota Connections," in *Building Bridges*, p. 164.

new modes of counteraction; changing boundaries; agreement on plans for cooperative action; new limits on acceptable behavior; and means to evaluate the actual results.

For example, countering global warming requires new feedback loops that monitor the effect of human activity on global climate. At first such loops just involved scientists; the result was that knowledge about global warming was cut off from those in a position to affect it. The scientists next drew in global policymakers through the UN, but discovered there was not enough public support to implement the changes they knew were necessary. The feedback loop now must be extended to include the world's people – the true victims of global warming and the only force able to counter it.

The creation of new channels of communication is often a feature of the process of overcoming disorder. The communication network created by the Committees of Public Safety in Britain's American colonies – of which Paul Revere's midnight ride stands as an icon—provides a classic example. The creation of new kinds of Internet-based communications networks to coordinate political action are an up-to-date example.[647]

Public research and debate often represent "thought experiments" to propose and test alternatives to disorder. For example, the debate in the 1990s on a "new financial architecture" for the global economy produced a wide range of plans for countering the irrational bubbles and busts of financial markets and the maldistribution of resources they produced. The failure to implement those plans found its reward the "great recession" of 2008.

During the 1930s minimum wage laws and other "fair labor standards" were legislated at a national level to counter the "race to the bottom." Labor unions organized workers and developed industry-wide bargaining to reduce labor costs as a factor in competition through a unified wage floor. More recently, the European Union developed a "social dimension" with many such standards to forestall a race to the bottom in an integrating Europe. The fight for international labor rights and standards pursued a similar strategy in the era of globalization. NAFFE aimed to counter the insecurity in working class life that was created by the replacement of standardized by contingent work by helping contingent workers become an organized force that could impose new rules on workplaces and labor markets.

Countering disorder may require institutionalizing patterns of variable actions that can compensate for varying conditions. An example is the system of government budget surpluses and deficits propounded by Keynesian economics to counter the variations in the business cycle.

The ability to coordinate may be impeded by boundaries. In Depression-era New Haven, for example, young Italian women working in garment sweatshops were forbidden by their parents to fraternize with male, often Jewish garment union organizers picketing their shops. The result was an inability to organize around common interests. At Lesnow Bros, an important shirtmaking factory, a rebellious young Italian worker named Jenny

[647] See *Here Comes Everybody: Organizing without Organizations*.

Aiello decided she would sneak out and talk with the men. The result was the Lesnow strike of 1933, the breakthrough that led to the organization of shirtmakers throughout the Northeast.[648]

New common preservations to limit disorder often involve limits on acceptable behavior. These may simply be shared norms, such as the "netiquette" agreed to by people who participate in a common Internet network. They may be embodied in new agreements like the Montreal Protocol banning of CFC emissions. They may involve binding rules or laws, such as the arms control agreements of the 1970s that for several decades effectively restricted the most provocative interactions of the nuclear arms race.

All of these new common preservations are ways of promoting improved coordination for its positive benefits and to reduce the disorder that results from unintended side effects and interaction effects. All are ways to increase collective power by coordination. All arise through new equilibrations.

Unintended side effects and interaction effects can be difficult to change because people resist giving up the benefit of their action's intended purpose. Fixing them may therefore also require changing or finding a substitute for those patterns. If people destroy the local ecology because they are seeking oil for energy, they need to find a less destructive way to drill for oil or an alternative source of energy or a way to make do with less energy. If people build weapons to enhance their security, ending an arms race is more likely if other ways can be found to protect their security, such as mutual disarmament or resolution of contested issues.

The disorder of ecological destruction, wars, and global economic chaos threatens us all. The human survival movement proposed in Part 7 represents a thought experiment in how to counter it.

[648] My interview with Jenny Aiello is in the collection of the Greater New Haven Labor History Association.

## Counter domination

Sometimes people are unable to solve their problems not simply because they can't coordinate their action, but because powerful individuals or groups prevent them from doing so. Then it is not enough for common preservations to improve coordination. They must also stop the powerful from impeding joint action by others in their own interest.

If the dependence among actors is equal, it constitutes balanced interdependence. The parties are equally free to coordinate or not to coordinate their action. But where dependence is unequal, some actors have more power, at least potentially, than others.[649] Those in some roles have a greater opportunity to realize their goals than others. They also have an unequal opportunity to counter the efforts of others to realize their goals. This leaves those whose goals can be blocked dependent on those who are in a position to block them. They can then be coerced into actions they would not freely choose because those with more power can manipulate the consequences of their refusing to comply. If this power is used on a continuing basis, the result is domination.[650]

Dominant actors can often use the dependence of others on them to parlay their power into still greater power. They may make use of the resources they command to employ supervisors to control those dependent on them; cultural producers to influence their minds and emotions; political and other mediating institutions to ameliorate or deflect their grievances; and guards, police, and soldiers to threaten them with violence.

Not all potential dependencies are utilized as effective power at any given time. If workers are unorganized, have no tradition of striking, and do not view themselves as a potential concerted actor, their potential power over their employer is only latent. But their employer's dependence on them exists nonetheless. Utilizing dependence – for example by organizing and threatening to strike – makes latent power actual. Domination can be countered by utilizing dependence.

People counter domination by creating new common preservations. Workers form informal work groups, unions, and strike committees. Nations form coalitions against aggressors. Oppressed groups threaten to withdraw their cooperation or to disrupt their oppressors.

Despite their diverse forms, these common preservations all aim to withdraw from the powerful the cooperation on which their domination depends. Such withdrawal may be direct, as when workers strike their employers or victims of discrimination hold a sit-in that halts business as usual. Or it may be indirect, as when supporters boycott a company that is being struck or one country restricts trade as a sanction against another that commits aggression or oppresses its own people. In complex modern societies with

[649] See "Transforming power" above.

[650] For a brilliant discussion of the way in which such dependence can be manipulated by those with power, see "2. Hitler and Roman Foreign Policy" in Simone Weil's essay "The Great Beast," *Selected Essays 1934-1943* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962) pp. 101ff.

many complex, overlapping forms of coordination, dependencies are often complex and mediated. As a result, power struggles often involve complex and evolving forms of coordination and alliances among different groups.

Such strategies make use of the multilateral character of dependence and power. And they make use of the capacity of those adversely affected to coordinate their efforts for their common preservation.

Countering domination generally involves reducing or eliminating the imbalance in dependence in either of two ways. Those who are dominated can develop the ability to coordinate their own activity without depending on tyrants or leaders: For example, workers in a workplace may organize themselves independently of management to gain more control of their conditions at work. Community members may form a consumer coop that removes their dependence on corporate supermarkets.

Those who are dominated can also put limits on those in authority. Human rights protections and democratization can limit the power of government officials. Institutions like the World Bank and the IMF can be stripped of some of their functions and authority. Armies and police agencies can be cut down to size or disbanded. The ability of corporations to conspire to cooperate against the public can be impeded by anti-trust policies. The abolition of an authority is the most restrictive limit; for example, the abolition of monarchy reduces a king's power to zero; the abolition of slavery eliminated the power of slaveholders over slaves.

Countering domination often starts with coordination of those affected to form a more powerful concerted actor. For example, workers organize unions; countries organize alliances for collective security.

Groups may try to change the underlying balance of dependence by reducing their own dependence. The national movement in the North American colonies before the American Revolution, for example, organized a campaign against imported British goods in part to reduce the colonies' dependence on them and thereby increase their freedom of action. Thomas Jefferson advocated for a large class of independent, land-owning "yeomen" farmers as a way to reduce the population's dependence on the wealthy and the state. Gandhi's program to encourage Indian villagers to produce their own cloth was an effort to reduce their dependence on imports from their British imperial rulers. Union strike funds relieve workers of the threat of immediate destitution should they walk off their jobs.

Conversely, groups may try to reduce the power of their opponents. For example, the divestiture campaign against Apartheid South Africa tried to weaken the regime by driving down the value of its investments and currency. The campaigns against dictatorships in Chile, Argentina, and Brazil aimed to delegitimate the rulers and therefore reduce their ability to command.

Groups may try to form alliances with others on whom the powerful depend. Sometimes these are strategic alliances designed to last over time, like the Blue-Green Alliance of Steelworkers and Sierra Club developed to promote "green jobs." Some may be more short-term, like the support committees that often develop around particular strikes.

Groups may also try to disrupt the alliances of their opponents. Corporate campaigns, for example, often attempt to isolate corporations from their investors and supporters in the business community, government, and the public.

When a group seeks to change power relations, the result is typically what Gandhi called a "matching of forces." When this involves subordinate and dominant groups, the matching is often asymmetrical – for example, dominant actors may use their control of wealth or police power, while subordinate actors may use withdrawal of cooperation or support of the population. If underlying power relations have indeed changed, the outcome is likely to be a new balance of power.

Once parties recognize a new balance of power, there is likely to be some kind of tacit or actual negotiation to establish a *modus vivendi*. Often both parties find some kind of settlement advantageous, even if they are not fully satisfied with the result and hope to continue the conflict in different ways in the future. Even surrender often ends with some kind of negotiation in which new power relations are acknowledged and a basis established for life to go on. Union/management bargaining, civil rights movement negotiations with local "power structures," and the roundtable discussions that ended some of the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe illustrate the process of formal negotiations. There can also be a tacit bargaining process in which parties mutually change their behavior in ways that are mutually understood as a basis for halting overt conflict. The détente in the Cold War during the 1970s involved many examples of such tacit tit-for-tats. Such modus vivendis may alternate with acute conflict in the pattern Mao Tse-tung characterized as, "Fight fight, talk talk."

Many of the social experiments with which I've been involved have tried in one way or another to counter domination. They have generally done so by linking those harmed by domination and their allies into new configurations that could make use of the dependencies of the powerful to gain a degree of power over them. The Naugatuck Valley Project linked local unions, churches, and community organizations to gain leverage over corporations active in the Valley. The strategy proposed in "Terminating the Bush Juggernaut" involved coordinating nations and movements to pressure the United States to abandon its course of aggressive war by imposing nonviolent sanctions on it.

Many threats to human survival are perpetrated or perpetuated by powerful actors who resist the changes that would ameliorate them. Governments refuse to disarm; corporations refuse to stop producing greenhouse gasses. The human survival movement described in Part 7 represents the widest of human interests, and therefore will be able to do much through persuasion. But at certain points it will almost certainly also require a matching of forces.

## Counter disorder combined with domination

Domination and disorder are often combined. Marx recognized this when he characterized capitalism as combining tyranny in the workplace with anarchy in the market. The powerful often treat the opportunity to dominate the powerless as the goal of rivalry among the powerful – acquiring more subjects or workers to exploit. The powerful also use their domination of the powerless as a means to increase their power vis-à-vis their powerful rivals – acquiring more productive capacity or more soldiers for the competitive struggle. Countering disorder combined with domination requires new common preservations that correct both together, rather than simply shifting the balance from one to the other.

The movement against the nuclear arms race provides a case in which people had to disentangle just such a mingling of disorder and domination. Many people campaigned against nuclear weapons themselves. But the weapons turned out to be symptoms of broader patterns of power. The military establishments themselves were institutions that coordinated the activity of millions of people and made use of their power to influence government and other institutions. Governments exercised authority over large populations, using their control of resources and allegiance to propagate nuclear overkill. At the same time, the nation state system defined each country as sovereign in a way that prevented any higher authority from limiting war making or imposing disarmament. Both highly integrated forms of coordination like armies and nation states and the anarchic disorganization of the world at a supra-national level helped make the problem of nuclear war intractable. The combined result was uncontrolled arms races.

Contemporary political discourse is dominated by the idea that the solution to social problems is either more government or more market. But neither state nor market guarantees adequate solutions to disorder and domination. Both market and state can include elements of disorder – the anarchy of the market and of the sovereign nation state system. Both can include elements of domination – imperialism, authoritarianism, corporate self-aggrandizement. We need, not so much to replace one with the other, as to counter the tendencies toward disorder and domination in both.

Counteracting combined disorder and domination requires a set of interlocking measures.

The dominated have to organize themselves as actors-in-common. This is more difficult when the dominated are enclosed within the boundaries that divide conflicting institutions and obey the authority of those who rule them: They are likely to identify with and follow the leaders of their government or their company in the struggle against other governments or companies. The formation of new common preservations that cross boundaries of conflicting institutions is often a critical part of the process of social change.

Those dominated then must find ways to use their combined power to counter the power of the powerful. This often involves a series of tests in which a matching of forces mobilizes and demonstrates the collective power of the dominated.

The new actors-in-common must then establish means to hold the formerly dominant players and institutions accountable to them on an on-going basis. This is the process of democratization, in which states, enterprises, and other institutions become accountable to those they rule and others they affect.

At the same time, the new actors-in-common need to establish a means of imposing coordination on the conflicting power centers. This requires some kind of coordinating process or authority that jointly regulates them and their interaction and to which they are accountable.

The new actors-in-common must use their power to force rival power centers to submit to that higher coordination. In other words, power from below must require them to submit to authority from above.

This, however, opens the opportunity for the higher coordinating process or body to become a new source of domination in its own right. Therefore those affected by it must use their power to hold it accountable to themselves on an ongoing basis.[651]

These measures may seem paradoxical because they devolve power both downward and upward. But the paradox is only apparent. What is actually happening is that one kind of power, the power of domination, is being reduced at each level, while another kind of power, the power of mutually beneficial coordination, is being increased at each level. Antagonistic self-aggrandizement is being replaced by common preservation.

The establishment of the U.S. Constitution provides one example of this process. Under the weak Articles of Confederation, the newly independent states of North America were competitive and unable act together or jointly regulate their commerce. The proponents of a more centralized government saw a more powerful Federal system as a means to allow coordinated action and regulation. They organized at the grassroots level across state lines to force the states to call a Constitutional Convention and eventually to ratify its product. The result was a reduction in power of the individual states and the devolution of power upward to the Federal government.

Many Americans feared that the expanded power of the Federal government could create the basis for domination by a new monarchy. They therefore insisted on election of officials, procedures for impeachment, reservation of many powers to the states, separation of powers with checks and balances among branches of government, and other means to limit concentration of power and hold the Federal government accountable to those it ruled.

Further, those concerned about Federal power insisted on a Bill of Rights that would protect the freedom of individuals and groups to speak and act on their own behalf. Thus, the creation of a centralized coordinating power strengthened rather than reduced the freedom of those it protected at the base. This protection was considerably expanded

[651] See "Forestalling new disorder and domination" below.

after the Civil War through the application of the Bill of Rights to the states.[652] The Thirteenth Amendment to the US Constitution, abolishing slavery throughout the US, further illustrates how an increase in centralized power can simultaneously represent a great leap forward in human freedom.

The Bill of Rights not only restricted the power of the Federal government. It also guaranteed the right of the people to organize themselves and act on their own behalf. It thus allowed them to maintain an on-going capacity to counter the emergence of new dominations and disorders. However imperfect the resulting system, its formation illustrates the process by which disorder combined with domination can be overcome.

The same apparently paradoxical shift of power upward and downward can be seen in the formation of the European Union. The powers of individual nations were curtailed by the formation of progressively stronger central powers. The result was the suppression of war and many destructive forms of economic conflict.

At the same time, individual human rights and the rights of social groups were protected throughout the EU. The principle of "subsidiarity" meant, at least in theory, that decisions would be taken by those most directly affected, and that power would be exercised at higher levels only when higher level coordination was needed to realize common goals.

While nation states lost some of their power in this system, lower level groups such as regions and ethnic groups might increase theirs. The result was again a devolution of power both downward and upward.

The system included means, such as elections, the EU parliament, and courts, designed to hold higher levels of the system accountable. A failure to limit the power of corporations and the EU executive has meant, however, that a "democracy deficit" remains an ongoing problem.

Another example is provided by the way industrial unions strove to empower workers while imposing order on major U.S. industries. From the late 19th century till the emergence of managed capitalism during and after World War II, workers were confronted by huge and domineering corporations engaged in desperate competition for survival, growth, and dominance. Whatever concessions particular corporations might have chosen to make to labor, they were forced instead by the competitive process to drive their labor costs to the lowest possible level.

Industrial unions, starting with the United Mine Workers in the late 19th century, responded by organizing workers across each industry, regardless of their occupation or particular employer. They used the power of the strike to establish leverage over

[652] The Thirteenth Amendment to the US Constitution, abolishing slavery throughout the US, provides a powerful illustration of how an increase in centralized power can simultaneously represent a great leap forward in human freedom.

individual employers. Then they used that power to force employers to establish industry-wide bargaining processes to impose uniform standards.

These processes might take the form of tacit "pattern bargaining." Or they might involve the formation of employer associations – ironically, often at labor's insistence – through which all employers in an industry engaged in joint collective bargaining with their entire combined workforce. Labor's goal –to a considerable extent achieved – was to remove labor costs as a factor in competition, allowing wages to rise without putting one or another company at a competitive disadvantage. The result was that workers' power and well-being were augmented at the bottom through their organization vis-à-vis their own employers, but also industry wide through industry-wide collective bargaining. How much this system would actually advance workers' interests turned out to depend in considerable part on how much workers could control their own representatives within the process.

Workers' strategy to win the right to organize in the U.S. in the 1930s provides another example of combined upward and downward devolution of power. Workers used direct action and local alliances to impose labor rights employer by employer. At the same time they demanded national legislation that would protect labor rights for all. The result was the National Labor Relations Act (Wagner Act – widely known as "Labor's Magna Carta"). It created a new central authority, the National Labor Relations Board, which could and did force employers to bargain collectively with their employees and to desist from interfering with their rights.

The effect of that centralization of power was to greatly strengthen the power of rank-and-file workers vis-à-vis their own employer and their industries as a whole. Critics pointed out, however, that the NLRB was also potentially an instrument for limiting workers' power -- a role that it has increasingly played over the decades.

The general solution to the combination of disorder and domination is to counteract them with coordination that minimizes domination.

Today we find ourselves confronting a combination of domination and disorder that threatens the survival and well-being of our entire species. We confront vast concentrations of power in such forms as global corporations and nation states. At the same time we suffer from horrendous disorder in the form of unregulated markets, international conflict, and environmentally devastating side effects of uncontrolled human activity. We face out-of-control power actors battling each other to dominate the world's people and resources. A human survival movement will have to counter both disorder and domination -- both by increasing global coordination and by making it subject to democratic accountability from below. The two go hand in hand.

## Forestalling new disorder and domination

New common preservations always risk producing new disorders and dominations. As William Blake wrote,

"The iron hand crushd the Tyrants head
And became a Tyrant in his stead."[653]

A movement that starts by seeking equalization of power may end up pursuing domination or unintentionally causing disorder. Consider the way the French revolution eventuated in an emperor, an empire, and the Napoleonic wars. Apparently libratory movements like the American and Russian revolutions likewise issued in aggression, war, and empire. In a less dramatic way, the civil rights and anti-war movements become embroiled in conflicts with other movements that undermined the ability of each to realize its goals. Indeed, improved coordination within a group can lead to intensified conflict with the world outside.

The general solution is to anticipate and forestall disorder and domination by incorporating the means of countering them on an on-going basis. This was the objective of the "self-limiting revolution" proposed by Adam Michnik and other activists in the Polish KOR and Solidarity movements. Such forestalling can use the same methods as solving problems that already exist, but do so proactively. Incorporating such "pre-correction" in the solutions to social problems is made possible by the capacity to make thought experiments on hypothetical situations.

Where new common preservations lead to disorder through a lack or failure of coordination, the key to countering it is the construction of new coordinations between the emergent concerted actor and those with whom it interacts.

New common preservations must not establish boundaries so rigid that they block the further development of new coordinations with other individual and collective actors. Instead, each new coordination must lay the basis for a further de-centering process that establishes further coordinations to overcome emerging gaps. This involves an open dialogue that seeks wider common interests and improved patterns for their realization.

New common preservations can likewise lead to new dominations. The differentiation of roles within a group can lead to domination by leaders. To take a relatively benign example, labor movements that proffered workers self-liberation have produced bureaucratized, leadership-dominated institutions that can prevent workers from acting in concert in pursuit of either their own or broader social interests. Less benign is the way in which revolution and Communism issued in a system of social domination and Stalinist tyranny. Such developments can be forestalled by limiting the authority of leaders on the one hand and retaining the capacity of the rank and file to coordinate their own activity on the other.

[653] William Blake, "The Grey Monk" in William Blake, *Poems* (1863).

Some solutions only generate the original problem over again in a new form. When a leader has become a tyrant, replacing the tyrant with a new leader while leaving everything else the same is a formula for a new tyranny. Curing inflation by inducing a recession will not keep future business cycles from producing fresh rounds of inflation and recession down the road.

To forestall new dominations and disorders requires rules and practices that permit people to re-coordinate their action and reconfigure social roles. It requires not so much a once-and-for-all correction of existing problems as an ability to make on-going corrections -- less a system that realizes perfect freedom and order than a continuing process of countering deviations from them. That takes feedback loops that allow ever-renewed change in compensations. Such forestalling is needed both in concerted actors seeking to change the world and in the new common preservations they introduce.

In considering possible solutions to problems, it is therefore important to seek approaches that are likely to forestall the emergence of new problems or make them easier to address when they do arise. Establishing periodic elections, rather than simply installing a new leader, was a brilliant way to tyranny. And introducing "built-in stabilizers," such as government budget surpluses that reduce demand in times of boom and budget deficits and unemployment compensation programs that increase demand in periods of recession, can counter the tendency toward cycles of boom and bust on an on-going basis.

Whatever new patterns of coordination are established, they must not foreclose the possibility of actors subsequently creating still other patterns. People must retain access to the means of acting and coordinating action. In practice, this means that people must remain organized at the grassroots and that communication and surveillance must remain diffused and accessible. It requires concerted actors whose members are able to initiate new forms of coordination both with other members and with those outside the current patterns of coordination.

That capacity is most likely to be retained to the extent that organizations take the form of networks of relatively autonomous parts. In such networks people retain the capacity – the ability and legitimate right -- to coordinate their own activity. At the same time, they retain the capacity to initiate further coordination on a wider scale.

NAFFE's "structured network" provides an example of a pattern designed to facilitate coordination without permanent centralized authority. It promoted the formation of action groups that served as its principal centers of initiative and coordination. As Tim's and my study of NAFFE argued,

> "The network form allows a coordinated social movement composed of relatively autonomous groupings. It eschews a sharp distinction between organizers and the rank and file. It is difficult to monopolize the flow of communication within networks or to block its flow across organizational boundaries. Networks are resistant to leadership domination; their leaders are largely dependent on

> persuasion, rather than on control of scarce organizational resources or some form of muscle. When authority is delegated, it quickly expires, and is only renewed in the presence of active trust."[654]

The World Social Forum similarly creates a "space" in which on-going re-coordination is facilitated. This allows both new coordinations among those already linked and the extension of the coordination process to new groups. Each Forum has attracted and welcomed a variety of new constituencies from around the globe, some of them previously hostile to the WSF or some of its participants.

Such decentralized action must at the same time provide vigorous pursuit of collective interests and the understandings that support it. If decentralized action is ineffective as a means to pursue collective interests, it is likely to be replaced by more centralized forms.

Because role differentiation will always secrete asymmetrical access to power, there will always be a need for means to reconfigure such differentiations and redistribute the powers and benefits that accompany them. This involves the on-going de-stratification of social roles, by such means as redesign of jobs and the application of the "subsidiarity principle" to decentralize political decision-making.[655] It also involves the on-going "unbundling" and redistribution of property rights by means such as land reform and common ownership with leases and other time-limited assignment of limited use rights.

Where authority to speak and act on behalf of the group is delegated, those granted authority need to remain accountable to those their actions affect. Means to hold them accountable include the traditional structures of democracy, such as elections, recall, open information, and the like. It also includes such emerging additions to democratic practice as mandated impact statements, affinity groups, and participatory budgeting. Indeed, the means of democratic participation and accountability are only in their infancy, and need far greater development. Because new ways of circumventing such accountability will also continue to evolve, accountability cannot replace but can only supplement the on-going capacity of people to re-coordinate their activity themselves. As the American Revolutionary slogan put it, "Constant vigilance is the price of freedom."

While some degree of institutionalization is inevitable, institutional rules must include means for putting institutional rules into abeyance and returning to a state in which change or eliminate existing patterns of coordination and differentiation. Amendment clauses in constitutions and sunset clauses in legislation illustrate "meta-rules" providing for de-institutionalization.

Such a strategy of on-going correction is not the only possible strategy. It is also possible, for example, to envision and try to realize an ideal society in which all inequalities have been eliminated, all power resides in society as a whole, all social

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[654] NAFFE, *Making Networks Work*. [Check that quote is same in final report.]
[655] For job structures see Jeremy Brecher, "Socialism is What You Make It" in *Socialist Visions*. For subsidiarity see *Globalization from Below*.

processes are socially planned and controlled, and all people spontaneously pursue the common good.

While the idea of such a society may have a role to play as a regulative ideal, it presents serious problems as a concrete objective. Coordination will always involve conflicts between individual and collective needs and aspirations. Role differentiation will always secrete distinct interests. The interaction of different social practices will always generate processes that are not controlled by human intention. Individuals will always be tempted to form new patterns of action and coordination that benefit them but may disrupt or burden others. The futile attempt to realize such an ideal – in society or in social movements themselves – has often lead to destructive forms of repression and conflict.

That is no justification for passivity or despair. The fact that unintended consequences, out-of-control social processes, inequalities, and conflicts of interest cannot be completely eliminated is no argument against trying to reduce them to a minimum – and keep them at a minimum. It is no argument against trying to eliminate what might be called "surplus alienation," alienation that is greater than necessary. And more to the point, it is no argument against trying to reduce those alienations that threaten the existence and well-being of our environment, our species, and ourselves.

People rightly fear that the effort to introduce new common preservations will lead to new tyrannies and disorders. The incorporation of self-correcting patterns that forestall such results is crucial for the success of new common preservations – and for encouraging people to believe in the possibility of their success. Proposals for new common preservations – such as the proposals for a human survival movement in Part 7 – are likely to win sufficient support only if they include means to ensure that they don't lead to new disorders and dominations as bad or worse than those they attempt to cure.

## Conclusion to Interim report: Heuristics for common preservation

Common preservation often seems impossible. People are too selfish, too divided, too dominated, too hopeless. Yet we know that new common preservations have emerged repeatedly in human history. How?

As each of us lives our life, we use a set of established patterns. But sometimes a problem arises that we are unable to solve either as individuals or through established social patterns. The problem may be insolvable because those affected by it can't or don't coordinate their action effectively. Or it may be insolvable because some powerful individual or group blocks its solution. In either case, we can't realize our ends without new patterns of action.

Faced with such a problem, we may resort to denial or despair. But we may also look for new solutions. We can use trial and error, varying our patterns and testing the results. Or we can construct mental representations of our situation and our existing patterns of action and conduct thought experiments intended to find new solutions. Those solutions can then be tested in practice.

New common preservations originate in a recognition that certain problems can't be solved by prevailing patterns of thought and action. But that must be followed by a recognition that other people are affected by similar problems. Such recognition may be expressed in tacit cooperation with others developed through trial and error. It may involve sharing representations and jointly conducting thought experiments on them. In many cases it involves both.

We are able to construct new common preservations because we are equilibrators: We are open systems; guided by feedback loops; able to counteract deviations from our ends; relatively unrestrained by instinct; able to use language for thinking and communication; and able to coordinate our action through mutual assimilation and accommodation.

These biological and human capacities taken together make possible the emergence of new social patterns that are not biologically wired-in – including new common preservations.

Here is a review of how these capacities are used to produce new common preservations:

Feedback loops allow us to discover gaps between our intent and the result of our action. By trial and error we are able to test new actions and discover their results. And with the use of language, we can conduct such trials virtually, "in our heads." We can also imagine a wide range of alternatives to test virtually and in reality.

As open systems with semi-permeable boundaries, we are able to interact with other people. We can form concerted actors that themselves are open systems with cybernetic feedback loops, able to act together to compensate for deviations from our goals.

For us humans, the atrophy of instinct and the use of language to share information and thinking greatly increase our capacity to do so.

The capacity to assimilate the intentions and actions of others, and to accommodate to them, makes it possible for us to coordinate our actions. Both trial and error learning and thinking shared through language make it possible to develop new, improved coordinations – ones that increase the benefits from action.

This equilibration process applies not only to means, but to ends. As we learn to solve our problems in new ways, new goals become important for meeting our needs and some old ones become less important, superfluous, or counterproductive.

The potential benefits from improved coordination give people a motive for utilizing their capacities. However, if coordination benefits only some, not all, participants, those who do not benefit will have no reason to participate. New common preservations normally emerge in order to realize the benefits of coordinated action in ways that benefit all participants.

People may meet obstacles to their efforts at problem-solving equilibration. Powerful individuals and institutions may block necessary changes out of their own self-interest. Some people may be reluctant to make problem-solving changes because they fear what they might lose in the process.

Yet such obstacles have often been overcome. Even the most powerful are dependent on the collaboration and acquiescence of others for their power; the apparently powerless can counter the power of the powerful by withdrawing the collaboration and acquiescence on which they depend. People can develop new ways of acting that solve problems and overcome disequilibrium while preserving their deepest interests or meeting their needs in another way.

Coordination of different people's action produces power that goes beyond that of individuals. So does differentiation of action into different social roles.

But such power may produce problems – including many of the problems to which social movements respond. The prevailing patterns of social coordination and differentiation may produce disorder. This results from allowing side effects and interaction effects that are not subject to control by those they affect. Solving the resulting problems requires construction of new patterns of coordination for concerted action to achieve common objectives.

Conversely, the prevailing patterns of coordination and differentiation may produce domination. This results from the unequal distribution of control over coordination and its benefits. Solving the resulting problems requires changing or dissolving existing patterns of coordination through which domination is exercised.

Because power originates in social coordination, the exercise of power depends on the support of those whose action is coordinated and on the acquiescence of those who could disrupt it. The most powerful domination can be ended if those on whom it depends withdraw their acquiescence and support. This is the secret that underlies the power of social movements to make social change.

In the equilibration process, people develop new capacities and new goals. Those in turn can become the basis for new problems and further transformations.

The power of social movements itself can be the source of new dominations and disorders. A coordinated group can differentiate into powerful leaders and a disempowered rank and file. It can become the vehicle for dominating others outside the group. Or the actions of different groups may cancel each other out or produce side effects and interaction effects that lead to vicious circles of self and mutual destruction. What begins as common preservation can end as tyranny or chaos.

Fortunately, such results can be forestalled by building the means of further equilibration into the way we solve our problems. To forestall the restoration of domination, social movements need to incorporate the principle of on-going re-coordination to ensure that the control and benefits of concerted action are equally accessible to all. To forestall new forms of disorder, social movements need to extend the practice of re-coordination to side effects and interaction effects that result from their growing power, and to seek coordination with those outside the initial group of actors-in-common.

In sum, common preservation can be considered an equilibration in which people solve a problem and overcome an imbalance through new patterns of coordinated action that compensate for the gap between their ends and their established means or among their established ends.

Today, competing power centers struggle to increase their own power vis-à-vis each other and those they dominate. The result is mutual destruction that threatens the well-being and even the survival of our species and its members – us. But as living beings and even more as human beings we have the capability to change the patterns that guide our actions. Indeed, human and other living beings have always had to change in order to survive.

The common threat we face creates a common interest. Individuals and groups can now provide a secure future for ourselves and our descendents only by providing a secure future for each other – and for our species as a whole. Self-preservation now requires common preservation.

As the record of past extinctions of species and of human groups shows, successful adaptation is not inevitable. Whether we transform our ways of living in order to preserve our future life does not depend on anyone but ourselves.

You and I are engaging with others in our own mutual destruction. Even if we want, we can't as individuals stop doing so. That requires new patterns of common preservation.

We can respond to our self-inflicted doom with denial or despair. Or we can try common preservation.