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THE NEW RIGHT - FEMINISM AND ANTIFEMINISM - COLD WAR II - SERVICE CUTS - REAGANOMICS

HAPPY DAYS ARE HERE AGAIN

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[Image of a cartoon depicting a group of people walking under a banner saying "HAPPY DAYS ARE HERE AGAIN"]

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INTRODUCTION

With this special double issue, Radical America enters its fifteenth year of publication. As the articles in this edition recognize, we are facing a social and political terrain far different from that which existed in 1967. This journal was a byproduct of a broad progressive upsurge in American politics formed by the civil rights and antiwar movements, an expanding economy, and a resulting period of state liberalism. The very foundations of life in capitalist society were being challenged — from imperialism abroad to racism at home. As the women’s and gay liberation movements developed, that critique extended further to questions of culture, family, and daily life.

RA sought originally to develop the theoretical work of the New Left and other oppositional elements by “affirming the existence of a radical America” — a tradition of social protest and vision that stretched far back in this country’s history. As in the early histories of labor and the suffragists or the campaigns of socialists and populists in the years before World War I, it was a tradition that spoke to the unique conditions Americans experienced in their lives and to the unique and powerful role the country was assuming in the world.

As the New Left went into crisis and collapse, we reevaluated our tasks. We have fumbled toward an understanding of the ways that class, race, and sex interact in American society, and the ways that the quality of individual lives reflects the contradictions of society as a whole. Despite the puncturing of the more naive hopes the magazine shared as part of the New Left, we have tried never to lose our orientation toward an activist movement — toward people struggling to change the conditions of their lives. With the Right now on the offensive, we intend to continue the presentation of such politics, history, and culture, informed by a socialist and feminist worldview, with even more urgency. The struggle
continues; vision and program must not be split apart.

The production of this special issue sprang from our intense collective reaction — at first numbness, then urgency — to the dramatic political shift in this country embodied in the November 1980 elections. As we stated in our last introduction, the elections accentuated a shift that had been developing for some time. What chilled us was the scope of the electoral gains of the conservatives and the frightening prospects — national and international, personal and collective — that their program portends for the coming period. The projections are made all the more disheartening by the lack of a cohesive, unified mass opposition.

We set out then to try to get an understanding of what had happened: not so much an analysis of the election itself as a grasp of what has been happening in American society over the past several years. Recognizing that agreement is lacking on the Left — even in election post-mortems as well as in organizational agendas — we have sought an analytical rather than programmatic approach in our selection of articles. Some of the articles were written or solicited by us, others are reprints which we found helpful. As has been the case for the Left too often in recent history, RA has at times neglected to consider the “big picture,” the overall context in which the popular struggles we write about take place. Intervention is then relegated to defensive or adjutive responses.

In the coming issues of Radical America we want to round out the presentations begun in this edition. We do not pretend that this selection is anywhere near complete in addressing the issues before us now. (Specifically, we note that our “balance” of issues deemphasizes, more than we actually think, the importance of race in this society.) Our attempt to provide information and ways of thinking to help in developing a left strategy is not, however, without a definite political orientation.

The first part of that orientation is a realistic appraisal of the origins and scope of the rise of the Right. As we worked, we attempted to steer clear of an energy-sapping pessimism. We sought to point out contradictions within the conservative program and conflicts among the diverse forces that compose it. We sought also to avoid the naive faith that this period of deep crisis for capitalism would of its own power produce the seeds of radical upheaval. If there is one overriding lesson that emerges from these articles, it is that we have space to operate — that we are not victims of an inexorable historical process or a “juggernaut”, as some commentators would have us believe. Thus, while we can still suspect both the morality and majority of the Moral Majority, we need to assess critically and realistically the options for the rest of us.

As two of our editors stated in an appraisal of the New Right three years ago (Linda Gordon and Allen Hunter, “Sex, Family and the New Right,” Vol. 11:6-12:1, Winter 1977-8), those options must start with a clear assessment of the components of the Right’s program. Historically racist, anti-communist, and xenophobic in its practice, the rejuvenated Right has been propelled in the last few years by a rabid antifeminism and a patriarchal, male-dominated expression in culture and state policy that directly challenges class-conscious politics. Further fueled by a “born again” Christian fundamentalism, this reaction seeks to push a cross-class wedge separating the undeserving from the deserving, and social service from “imperial duty.” As the
first round of federal budget cuts dramatically showed, some people are welcome within this new realignment and others, many others, are not.

In this light, any backing down by the Left on issues of sexual politics, in the struggle for abortion rights, for example, is to ignore the deep-seated expression in foreign policy and military posturing (as well as in domestic legislation) of patriarchal and male domination. It is at the roots of class, racial, and social control.

As we go to press, in these early days of 1981, we are experiencing a period of deep cultural isolation and alienation as socialists and feminists. So effective has been the cultural blanketing that there is isolation not just between us and the presently ascendant Reagans, Haigs, and Moral Majority types, but between us and every swatch of yellow ribbon we pass at work or in the street. The corporate media’s absorption in the events surrounding the return of the hostages and the long siege of Cold War hysteria, coupled with the quadrennial electoral exercise, has reached such hegemonic proportions that we might actually fear contracting “hostage syndrome” ourselves. Thank God for Doonesbury.

This brings us to the role of Radical America and the too-few other journals, papers, and magazines on the side of a politics of humanity and social change. As if the hysterical manipulation of the events in Iran (and the rewriting of the American role in that country) was not enough of an indicator, more recent depictions of the struggle in El Salvador stress even more the limited access to facts and information we will experience in the near future. Support, then, for resources, information, and the continued presentation of an alternative vision is critical.

The media and cultural industries have been able to absorb and redefine challenges to capitalism in the past, and even turn them into commodities. This has been hastened by the movement’s failure to integrate issues of class, sex, and race. Rigid and self-limited counter-institutions resulted. It affected our ability to confront earlier the growing tide of reaction, as well as to expand our work.

Now that the rise of the Right is fact, we need to prioritize our work without liberal compromise. As their timidity in congressional hearings on the Reagan cabinet attests, the liberals are seemingly willing to do the conservatives’ work for them. We don’t need to do the liberals’ work. As an enlightened Barry Goldwater might put it, extremism in the defense of democratic socialism is no vice.

A final note: the process of putting together this issue has been very warming for us — both in the willingness of friends to help and in the encouragement and advice we have gotten. Our urgency in producing this edition has also helped to focus our goals for the coming year. In that respect, we encourage feedback from our readers and friends and also welcome contributions to subsequent issues that will help us expand and develop what is presented here.
THE NEW TERRAIN OF AMERICAN POLITICS

Jim O'Brien

The November 1980 elections were like a bolt of lightning, throwing into sharp relief a political landscape that has changed in ways we but dimly comprehended. The election returns made clear the emergence of a political Right (complete with "moderate" and "New" branches) that is serious about carrying through a drastic power shift in American society.

It is easy (and it may be too comforting) to refute the notion that the Right has become a majority movement. The arguments can readily be summoned: Only 26 percent of eligible voters actually voted for Reagan; Carter's obvious economic failures were the key issue; all the liberal Democratic senators who lost their seats ran ahead of Carter; drastic tax-cutting initiatives lost in six of the seven states where they were on the ballot; opinion surveys show the public has gotten steadily more liberal over the past decade on issues like abortion and affirmative action; and so on. The elections don't mean that the American public has gone berserk. Rather, they mean that a majority of the public is in danger of becoming politically neutralized, while an organized political Right uses the power of the state to facilitate the changes it wants to see in society.

What is at issue is the way in which American society will adjust to the ending of a peculiar period in our history. That was the post–World War II era of economic boom, growing out of the war and depending in part on a preeminent power in world affairs that the US no longer enjoys. Events of the 1970s have made it clear that this era is gone. The past decade
has been an unhappy one for virtually all segments of American society. The postwar affluence that was once taken for granted — especially in the 1960s, when so many new social programs were based on letting excluded groups share in the economic boom — gave way to a decade of "stagflation" and political stalemate. Instead of sharing the wealth, we ended up sharing the misery. It was an unstable situation, and it could last only so long as no group had the power to change it for the sake of minimizing its own losses.

The ideological trappings of the right-wing program ("supply-side economics," "the family," "unleashing the private sector," "productivity," and sometimes "God") are interesting, but they should not be allowed to mask the real logic of the program that is being set forth. The program, basically, is to respond to a shrinking economic pie by grabbing a larger share of it for the people who are already, by any reasonable standards, well off. The program includes the flat-out exploitation of labor, a growing stratification by race and sex, and the dangerous unleashing of militant nationalism in foreign policy.

Needless to say, to identify the right-wing program and sketch out its implications is not the same thing as saying "Let it be, Lord, let it be." Profound historical processes have been at work in American society. They provided the basis for a conservative victory at the polls, and they pose the danger of worse to come. But in the longer run they also furnish opportunities for significant progress as well. The purpose of this article is not to predict the outcome, but to show how high the stakes are.

**BACKGROUND: THE EROSION OF WORKING-CLASS POWER**

Election results tend to reflect the state of power relations in society. An obvious example is the fact that blacks in the South, as of a recent year, made up nearly a fifth of the eligible voters but only 2.3 percent of all elected state and local office holders. Surely the fact that the Equal Rights Amendment got nowhere in the state legislatures after it was discerned to be more than a symbolic gesture is a reflection of the relative power that men and women hold in society. Other examples could be given. In late-1970s America, the most pronounced shift in power that took place was in the area of management-worker relations, and it was in favor of management. The shift produced an impatient self-confidence on the one side and a gnawing demoralization on the other. Both responses were evident at the polls (and away from the polls, in the massive numbers of adult citizens who didn't vote) on election day. It is this shift in power that makes understandable what would otherwise be a mystery: the election of an avowedly right-wing president and a Congress strikingly more conservative than in the recent past.

The best overall indexes of the power shift are unionization and unemployment. Union membership as a percentage of the nonagricultural workforce stood at 26.6 in 1978 compared to 30 percent in 1970; just as significantly, unions in 1979 won only 45 percent of their representational elections, the lowest figure in decades. High unemployment has been both a cause and an effect of workers' lessened power. With peaks of 8.9 percent in May 1975 and 7.8 percent in May and July 1980, compared with a rate that never got above 4.0 percent in the late 1960s, unemployment has been a sword hanging over every worker's head. With or without unions, the ability of workers to find jobs elsewhere gives them leverage in setting the terms under which they will work. That leverage has been severely weakened in the last half-decade.

The full picture of workers' declining power
cannot be conveyed simply by overall statistics. We can best appreciate the dynamics that have been at work if we scrutinize the industries where workers have long enjoyed the highest degree of collective strength. When we look closely at the traditional bastions of American trade unionism, we see that something dramatic has been happening — however much it is obscured by the business-as-usual pronouncements of the AFL-CIO and continued right-wing fulminations against "big labor."

What follows is a rundown of the high-employment industries that have traditionally — at least since the 1930s — been the most strongly unionized. The survey includes both old-line craft unions and the largest of the mass-based industrial unions that exploded onto the scene during the Great Depression. (One thing they have in common is that they are overwhelmingly male.) The survey will not show that management has been waxing fat at the workers’ expense — profits have in fact lagged in most of these industries — but will show that management has been able to use the economic crisis to gain greater control over the pace and conditions of work.

**Automobiles.** Overcapacity in the world auto industry and poor planning by the American companies have cost the "Big Three" a large share of the domestic market. For workers, the crisis has brought not simply mass layoffs like those of 1974-1975 but the prospect of a permanent "downsizing" of the workforce. GM and Ford are putting vast sums into robots that will replace workers, while the Chrysler wage freeze threatens to set a pattern for the larger companies as well.

**Steel.** This is another industry where innovative foreign competitors have caught up with the slumbering American firms in their home market. There is a different twist in steel, however. While the Chrysler Corporation is writhing in fear of bankruptcy, the steel owners seem to have a calmly detached perspective of preparing to desert a sinking ship. They are letting old plants become obsolete, drawing profits while they can, then laying off the workforce en masse and using the profits to buy into other industries. The big companies all have large and growing nonsteel investments. For workers, the implication is that they need the steel industry but the owners do not. As an Armco official put it, "There is no divine law that says we were put on this earth only to make steel."

**Rubber.** Astonishingly, this industry is now about 50 percent nonunion. The big firms have shifted production to nonunion areas of the South and West and have used the threat of plant closures to demand concessions from workers at the older plants. The recent crisis in auto has put rubber workers under the gun even more, since their industry is so dependent on the sale of tires.

**Meat packing.** As in steel, the owners of the old-line industry giants (Swift, Armour, Cudahy, and Wilson) are putting their money into other fields and shutting down plants. In this case the competition is domestic rather than foreign: it comes from two rapidly growing firms, Iowa Beef and Missouri Beef, whose equipment is newer and labor policies harsher. They have been willing to accept long strikes in order to keep control of the work process, and the wages and benefits they pay are estimated as being about two-thirds of those paid by the older companies.

**Construction.** In construction there are a host of small, medium-size, and large companies rather than a few dominant firms. The pressure to keep construction costs down has come largely from the outside: from big businesses organized in the Construction Users Business Roundtable, founded in 1969. The nonunion "merit shop" has spread to the point where
union members are a lower proportion of the construction workforce than they were in the 1930s. Its meaning is inferior benefits (especially pensions), training that is less broad (a newcomer may be trained just to hang doors, for example, rather than learning to be a full-scale carpenter), and much less control over job safety and other working conditions. It may be hard for outsiders to sympathize with the unions, because of their history of discrimination, but the trends in construction have meant a serious erosion of workers' power in that industry.

**Trucking.** For decades this was an industry with fragmented ownership and a strong union. As in construction, pressure has come largely from the outside. More and more big companies have developed their own truck fleets, and the flabby Teamsters leadership has made concession after concession to keep its hand in the remaining tills. The National Master Freight Agreement, the crowning success of Jimmy Hoffa's union presidency, covered a half-million workers in 1970 but now covers only half that number, despite a sharp increase in trucking employment over the same period.\(^6\) Deregulation of the industry, enacted by Congress in 1980, is adding fuel to the fire by giving low-wage companies an edge in competing for intercity contracts.

**Coal mining.** Here is an industry that has flourished. But the shift of production from the traditionally strong unions areas to the West has weakened the collective power of the workers considerably. About half of all coal is now mined by nonunion labor, and even the extraordinary rank-and-file solidarity of the 1977-78 strike was unable to prevent the dismantling of the miners' jealously guarded system of free health care in the old coal fields. Strip mining (which employs few workers) is a standing threat to the power of the miners.

This is not the first time in US history that changes in the economy have sapped the existing forms of trade unionism of their vitality; the grinding-down of craft unionism in the 1920s, as craftsmen gave way to unskilled workers in great factories, comes to mind. And of course, these changes in production provided the opportunity for the great industrial-union upsurge of the 1930s. At present, we find that the chief expansion of working-class employment has been among female workers, chiefly in stereotyped "women's jobs" in the clerical, sales, and service sectors. At present, they are a part of the workforce that has not organized in its own interests to a significant degree. Thus, the fact that the demand for their labor has increased substantially in recent years has not given them an immediate leverage in determining their conditions of work. Whatever may lie a few years down the road, at the present time they do not constitute any sort of counterbalance to the declining power of workers in the old blue-collar citadels of American unionism.

At the same time that the bargaining power of workers has eroded in recent years, there has been an impasse in the arena of national politics. The unions have tried and failed to get reforms in the labor laws; at the same time, employers have failed to win repeal of the Davis-Bacon Act (which helps put a reasonably high floor under construction-industry wages) or to breach the minimum wage by exempting teenagers. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), founded in 1970, was strengthened under President Carter, though it has never gotten the number of inspectors it needs; trade-union pressure has foiled conservative attempts to cripple or destroy it. Even though Presidents Ford and Carter deliberately created recessions with high unemployment in the name of fighting inflation, the process was not allowed to go as far as it might have. Thus
there has been a disparity between the shifting balance of power at the workplace and the equilibrium in management-labor issues in national politics. By the time of the November 1980 elections, the disparity was so great as to hold out the possibility of a political breakthrough by the Right.

Each defeat for one sector of the workforce in the late 1970s made prerogatives still held by other sectors seem "unreasonable." Each defeat gave the losers less confidence in their own strength and in their unions, and gave the winners a sense that their own wavering profits could be bolstered through further attacks on the power of their workers. Both the optimism and the pessimism spilled over into the electoral arena. The right-wing appeal in the November elections was (to employers) let's kick them while they're down and (to workers) things couldn't get much worse, could they?

FURTHER ASPECTS OF THE POLITICAL IMPASSE

Among veterans of the insurgent movements of the 1960s, there has been a tendency to view the past decade as one of severe reaction. On the other hand, conservatives have depicted the 1970s in equally stark and pessimistic terms from their point of view. Neither perception is totally wrong. There has in fact been a political impasse in a number of significant areas, notably those of sexual and racial equality, the environment, and the military. In each of these areas, moreover, we can expect an effort by the Right to use its newly augmented political power to break the deadlock. Before looking at the threat from the Right, though, we need to fix the nature of the 1970s impasse clearly in our minds.

The women's movement has made enormous strides in recent years toward formal legal equality with men. Despite the ERA's legislative defeat, federal courts have in effect been enacting it on their own, through interpretations of the Fifth and Fourteenth amendments. The legality of abortion was established nationwide in 1973, and divorce laws have been steadily liberalized. None of these accomplishments should be minimized. Yet they have not prevented an actual worsening of the living conditions of most women. The crucial element here is the persistence of the stereotyped low-wage "women's jobs into which the vast majority of female wage-earners are channeled. Given this reality, the economic crunch of the past few years has had severe effects on diverse groups of women.

In two-income working-class families, the wife's entry into the wage-labor market has often brought a drastic increase in her workload. A recent study showed that women in these families averaged forty hours of paid work and twenty-nine hours of family care (compared with forty-four and nine for the husbands) each week. For women with children but with no husband present, the common condition was poverty. "In 1967," a federal commission recently found, "a woman heading a family was 3.8 times more likely to be poor
than a man heading one. By 1977, after more than a decade of antidiscrimination efforts she was about 5.7 times more likely to be poor.** For married women who have remained out of the wage-labor force, especially those with children, the prospects of striking out on their own often seem quite bleak. As Barbara Ehrenreich shows, these women are likely to take liberalized divorce laws as a threat rather than as a recourse, since their husbands will suffer much less by leaving them than they would suffer by leaving their husbands.

The most visible benefits of women’s legal victories have gone to professional and managerial families which can enjoy two high salaries. The right-wing attack on the women’s movement has been aided by the fact that most women’s lives are in many ways getting worse at the same time that their legal rights are enhanced. In effect, the suffering is blamed on the drive for equality, rather than the drive for equality being seen as a necessary part of any serious response to the suffering.

In the area of minority rights, the momentum for change was generated in the 1960s, not the seventies. Yet the momentum was significant: it produced an impasse in the seventies rather than a retreat. While no major new civil rights laws have been passed, federal courts and executive departments have used the old ones to push forward on affirmative action and school desegregation. Efforts to block these through congressional action have failed up to now. Still, the way that these gains have been won is a symptom of weakness. The civil rights laws of the 1960s came about through mass political pressure; in the seventies that pressure has existed only as a threat, and it is the forces of racism that have been on the political offensive.

The economic hard times have also circumscribed the gains made by blacks. It is partly a matter of high unemployment: blacks, as the “last hired, first fired,” had unemployment rates that soared above 14 percent in mid-1980 (going above one-third for black teenagers at the same time). Beyond that, the decline of high-paying blue collar jobs in industries like auto and steel at the point when blacks were gaining equal access to them has hurt badly. Similarly, underfunding of urban public schools has often made desegregation a hollow victory. As with women, the most visible beneficiaries of minority gains in the past decade have been people toward the upper end of the income scale, not those lower down. The ratio of black to white family incomes has fallen from 61 percent in 1969 to 57% in 1980.9 The immediate impact of all this has been a political demoralization, almost a neutralization of blacks as a force in national politics. The most cursory reading of black history shows that this condition will not last, but it has certainly been a factor in the political life of the past few years.

To hear Ronald Reagan tell it, the natural environment has been one area of politics where one side has had everything its own way over the past decade. To be sure, environmentalists have won a string of partial legislative victories — the Clean Air, Clean Streams, Endangered Species, Strip Mining, and Alaskan Land acts, auto emission standards, and a host of Environmental Protection Agency rules. Antinuclear activists have had a hand in the nearly complete halt in orders for new nuclear plants since the mid-1970s. Unfortunately, the victories have been enough to limit certain kinds of development but not sweeping enough to provide clear payoffs to the public. It has been possible for the Right to claim that environmentalism means “no growth” or that conservation means personal discomfort. The victories have served to galvanize the opposition, but have not served to expand the con-
stituency of the environmentalists.

There is one arena in which environmental protection has unmistakably been a class issue: the workplace. The bone of contention has been the Occupational Safety and Health Act and its enforcement. And the chief issue has been health, particularly chemical hazards, rather than safety. Accidents, after all, can be easily verified and result in higher insurance rates. But it is extremely hard to win workers’ compensation for diseases like cancer, since they usually do not show up until years after they are engendered; thus, there is little incentive to make changes unless the employer is forced to. OSHA’s successes, not surprisingly, have been in the area of accident-prevention rather than long-term health. Employers have not succeeded in getting rid of OSHA — the urgency of its supporters even forced Reagan to change his position in mid-campaign and promise to keep it — but they have kept it from acting aggressively. In effect, OSHA has been a passive instrument, available to those workers and unions strong and self-confident enough to use it, but not capable of doing much on its own.

Military policy is another area of political stalemate, and another area in which the Right hopes to make a breakthrough. Since the winding-down of US intervention in Indochina in the early 1970s, there has been a strong popular revulsion against direct American military operations. The “Vietnam syndrome,” it is called. Even amid all the furor and frustration over the American hostages in Iran, there was little popular support for military action.

The military buildup that has taken place in the past half-decade has been out of the public eye, in the form of nuclear weaponry. Where the US had four thousand long-range nuclear warheads in 1970, it now has over nine thousand. Moreover, there have been subtle shifts
in US nuclear policy, away from the old concept of "mutual assured destruction" in which each side was deterred from a nuclear attack because its own cities would surely be destroyed in retaliation. American policy under Carter has moved closer to the possibility of a first strike, i.e. a sneak attack on Soviet missiles to cut off the possibility of retaliation. In public it is always couched in terms of preventing a Soviet first strike (though American missiles are more accurate), but the actions taken to guard against this reported risk are the same ones the US would take if it wanted to make its own first strike. It is a precarious situation, one in which a leading presidential candidate (George Bush) was able to talk openly about "winning" a nuclear war in which tens of millions of Americans would die. He is now vice-president and widely respected as a "moderate."

The political impasse of recent years has not been satisfactory to anybody. We have been unhappy together. All the while, however, the terrain on which our political battles are fought has been changing. The nature of the changes has been such that it was the Right, rather than the forces of reform, that was able to generate the self-confidence, the finances, and the public credibility to make electoral gains in 1980. The Right is now prepared to make a serious assault on the terms of the stalemate. The nature of that assault will be discussed next, and then the built-in contradictions that will impede it.

THE THREAT FROM THE RIGHT

The first point to be made about the Right in American politics today is that, for all the differences that will crop up, there is an underlying unity between the "moderate" conservatives (who hold most top positions in the Reagan administration) and the New Right. They have a common program that calls for greater economic and social inequality, with a sizeable minority of the population becoming better off than in the woeful seventies and the great majority becoming worse off. It is hard to put any other interpretation on proposals to cut taxes in a way that will benefit mainly upper-income people, or on proposals to make more and more social services conditional on the ability to pay for them in the marketplace. The "moderate" Right does not join its "New" counterpart in wanting to make a direct attack on the rights of minorities or of women. But their commonly shared program calls for an acceleration of changes in the economy that would drastically worsen the relative positions of these groups. Moreover, as will be seen, the social conservatism of the New Right has the potential to help grease the skids for the economic changes.

A clear analysis of the right-wing threat becomes especially important when we realize that the Republicans will probably not make a frontal assault on the unions. No clear provocation such as a national right-to-work bill, or use of the antitrust laws against unions, is likely. Time and again, right-to-work referenda in industrialized states (most recently, Missouri in 1978) have shown that working-class people will mobilize against any such attack. In contrast, Reagan's success in neutralizing the "labor vote" in 1980, despite strenuous campaigning by the AFL-CIO, shows the advantages of an indirect approach to weakening working-class power. Thus, we are likely to see a rightward shift in the interpretation of federal labor laws rather than a wholesale change in the laws themselves.

It is when we look at the position of women in the society that we can most readily see a reciprocal relationship between the overall attack on working-class power and the social conservatism of the New Right. The ammuni-
women in the workforce. What they can do, to the extent they are taken seriously, is undermine the power of the women who are in the workforce. The implication will be that their work is nonessential. Actually, nothing could be further from the truth, either from the point of view of management or that of the working class. From management's perspective, the stereotyped “women's jobs” in the clerical, sales, and service areas are marked by swelling investments and an expanding demand for labor. From the point of view of working-class living standards, with the decline of workers' power in the traditionally high-paying blue-collar occupations of American men, women's wages will likely account for a rising percentage of family incomes. Any effort to deprecate the importance of women's wage labor as a central part of their lives — and thus to undermine their efforts to improve pay and conditions on the job — is a direct attack on the living standards of working-class families.

And of course, with divorce more common and with more people having children outside of marriage, a growing number of families will be “headed” by women. Here the implication of New Right theories is that these families deserve to be poor; their poverty can be seen as punishment for living outside the traditional nuclear family. In this way of looking at the world, widows deserve pensions, but divorcees and unmarried mothers deserve nothing because any economic problems they may have are their own fault.

Of course, the New Right's rhetoric about women's “special role,” when combined with the planned whittling-down of social services, is a call for an even more intense speedup of women's work than has occurred in the seventies. If the public schools decline, if decent child care is priced entirely out of reach, if neighborhood medical clinics and branch libraries dis-
appear, than the job of bringing up children becomes harder at the same time that the real income of working-class families threatens to decline. The New Right rhetoric also helps prepare the way for the social-service cuts because, after all, social services “belong in the family.”

For employers, an attractive way to reconcile women’s work in the home with the expansion of wage-labor for women is the creation of part-time jobs. This can be done either through staggered hours or through temporary-help agencies. There is nothing wrong with part-time work as such, either for women or for men. The catch is that the flexibility of such work offered instead of the job security, pension plans, vacations, and other benefits of good full-time jobs. The worker becomes a form of variable capital: hired when needed, laid off when not needed, paid only for the time actually worked.

When it comes to issues like abortion, sex education, and homosexuality, the New Right turns from rhetoric to active enforcement of its vision. The attacks on abortion and sex education, taken together, surely add up to an insistence that women should be shut off from alternatives to a child-rearing role. While attacks on homosexuality fasten mainly on stereotypes of gay males, at bottom they are aimed at least as much at lesbians — who, as women, have much less earning power than men (gay or straight) and in that respect are more vulnerable to social pressures. More generally, homophobia is in part an attempt to insist that the traditional nuclear family be considered the only acceptable way for women to live.

Issues of race are also interwoven with the conservative program of greater inequality and a lower standard of living for most of the population. The relationship is more subtle as far as the public debate is concerned — the New Right would not dare to speak of a “special role” for blacks, for example — but less subtle in the kinds of vile racism that are starting to get a hearing on the fringes of the political arena. The whole picture needs to be analyzed carefully.

Politically, there are likely to be three thrusts in the area of race relations. One, the standby of the 1970s, is a continued attack on “forced busing” as a symbol. (Busing itself is acceptable to the great majority of white parents whose children have been bused for desegregation.) A second thrust will be an effort to halt “special privileges” for nonwhites in the form of affirmative action programs. In principle, an overwhelming majority of whites (including most Reagan voters) support affirmative
action, but it is a passive support. The third thrust, and the most insidious, is one that will be couched in terms of helping the poorest of the nonwhites. Most commonly put in terms of a subminimum wage for teenagers, it involves a redefinition of what is an acceptable job in this society. This in turn could have two effects: an undermining of overall working-class wages and working conditions and an intensifying of racist ideology. Race hatred in the 1970s has tended to take the form of claiming that nonwhites are being given special treatment: but if an especially low-wage sector of the workforce is created, and if the people channeled into it are mainly nonwhite, racist attitudes are more likely to be inflamed than appeased. Historically, racist ideology has been strongest in this country when the structural power of blacks has been weakest.

Needless to say, terrorism against nonwhites is not part of the Republican program or that of the New Right. But there is the potential for a harmony of interests that should concern us. Terrorism — whether in the form of open Ku Klux Klan and Nazi organizing, of street-tough violence against blacks in "white" neighborhoods, or of harassment of upwardly mobile blacks in colleges or white-collar offices — weakens the ability of blacks and other nonwhites to fight against the worsening conditions that the conservative program offers them. And to the extent that this program is carried out, it gives them less power in society and saps their ability to force an end to the terrorism.

In some ways, the position of Hispanics in the Southwest is a special case, contrasting with that of Afro-Americans and Puerto Ricans in the declining industrial areas of the Northeast and Midwest. The shift of capital to the Southwest has meant generally low rates of unemployment there. Even so, racism plays its traditional role of dividing workers against one another by creating marginal privileges for whites.

Nationwide, racism — whether subtle or open — plays a strong role in the decline of publicly supported social services. Even though most poor people are white, the most common image of the social-service beneficiary is that of a black welfare family. The case of public education, in particular, shows the way in which racial considerations can play a part in the unraveling of programs that in theory could benefit the entire working class. Urban public schools are being threatened with a variety of converging pressures: demography (fewer voters with school-age children), the "tax revolt," and the competition of religious and other private schools. If a private-school tax credit is passed, making it easier to take children out of the public schools, there is a danger that urban public schools will become more than ever a residue for the poor, especially nonwhites — a potentially self-feeding process as the nonpoor become less and less willing to vote money to support them. We would then have a situation in which most nonwhites would get inferior educations while working-class whites would have a choice between sharing the inferior schools or paying for an education in the marketplace. Down the road is the grisly prospect that big-city public schools could become analogous to county homes, a last resort only for the poor. At every step of the way, white indifference to a high-quality education for blacks would be largely responsible for a process by which education for working-class whites would decline in quality and/or rise steeply in cost.

JUGGERNAUT OR EDSEL?

It is important to see the dangers in the conservative program, and not to be taken by surprise if conditions worsen. But we should also
not exaggerate how far things have gone, as the Communist Party did when it went underground in the early 1950s thinking that fascism was imminent. A careful analysis of the political terrain has to include not only the conditions that favor a conservative breakthrough, but also the problems that the Right will necessarily face.

First of all, to make a point that is obvious to all readers of daily newspapers, there are plenty of conflicts within the Right. There are a great many powerful people who consider the Kemp-Roth tax-cutting plan, for example, to be insane; lots of businessmen with vested interests in various social programs (food stamps for one, Medicaid for another); powerful voices on both sides of such basic economic issues as free trade versus protectionism. Even if popular opposition to the right-wing program were to be much weaker than is likely, we would not be faced with a smoothly functioning, internally harmonious political machine.

Moving on to a more profound dilemma of the Right, we can see that there are ways in which even the bare-bones common program of the “moderate” and New Rights has built-in limitations to the way it can satisfy its natural constituency. The constituency is the large minority of people at the upper end of the income scale (mainly in management, small business, and the professions) who stand to get immediate benefits from the sharpened inequality offered by the Right. These people constitute a much higher proportion of the politically active electorate than of the population as a whole, and if their needs are satisfied then the political apathy around them will give them a powerful voice in maintaining a conservative status quo. In at least three ways, however, the common program of the Right does not offer a satisfactory response to their needs.

Economically, the chief problem is that the Right’s program will benefit certain groups in the short run but is badly fitted to produce an overall prosperity. If working-class people are unable to afford the goods that are being produced (as in the 1920s), then the basis for the continued affluence of those higher up is eroded. A small luxury-goods market might flourish, along with military contractors, but they would hardly be enough to support tens of millions of people in the style to which they hope the Republicans will accustom them.

A second problem has to do with the natural environment. In the months after the election, this seemed to be the one area in which the incoming Reagan administration was going to eschew “moderation,” with the appointment of the New Right ideologue James Watt as secretary of the interior and South Carolina mossback James Edwards as secretary of energy. It seemed that an open season was about to be declared on the once-protected areas of the West and Southwest that were now marked for “development.” Whether that will be the administration’s policy — and whether even by trying Reagan can top Jimmy Carter’s MX-missile scheme for sheer environmental destruction — remains to be seen. If the administration takes that tack, however, it will soon find that large chunks of its own constituency have a real stake in averting environmental pollution. Workplace chemicals may be a class issue, but pollution in the air and water crosses class lines and threatens the quality of life for everyone. It does little good to earn more money if your children are going to die of cancer in their twenties because they were exposed as infants. It does little good to own a fine house near a potential Love Canal.

Finally, the truculent foreign policy put forward by the Right poses dangers that also transcend class lines. For all the subtle Cold War policies of the Carter administration — not so
subtle during the past year — there was something healthy about the way it talked about accepting a new pluralism in world affairs, accepting the reality that the US can’t simply get its way. In the rhetoric of the Right there is a refusal to come to grips with this irreversible state of affairs. Everything is compressed into the framework of the American-Soviet Cold War, and the danger of nuclear war is put in perspective by saying that national interests are “more important” than peace. With the myriad chances for an accidental triggering of a nuclear war, a confrontationist foreign policy poses the gravest dangers for the American (as well as Soviet and European) people. The burden of conventional wars falls most heavily on the working class — Vietnam is a classic example of this — but nuclear bombs have no respect for the traditional privileges of wealth. Governmental officials may survive in their underground bunkers, but a high proportion of their erstwhile political supporters will not survive. Economic difficulties may tempt conservatives in power to turn to jingoism and neo-McCarthyism to retain their power, but people who are inclined to support them should be well aware that in that direction lies destruction on an unprecedented scale.

Ultimately, of course, the best hopes for a brighter, more egalitarian and safer future do not lie with the misgivings of the well-to-do, but in the resurgence of a strong working-class movement. At the present time this may seem like a mumbled incantation, on an intellectual level with “making American great again” or “balancing the budget.” It will help, however, if we see the present crisis of American trade unionism as part of a historical process. The economy is changing, just as it changed earlier in the century when native-born skilled craftsmen were displaced by immigrant mass-production workers. Today the forces of international competition and of automation are undermining the economic and political power of the traditionally strong blue-collar unions. This does not mean there is no longer a large working class with distinct interests of its own; all it means is that traditional relationships within that class are in a state of flux. In particular, nonwhites are a higher proportion than ever before and the role of female wage-earners is more crucial than at any time in our history. As a new movement takes shape, it will have to be as different from present-day trade unionism as the mass-based industrial unionism of the 1930s was different from the old skilled-craft structure of the American Federation of Labor. Although the immediate political battles will be
defensive ones, a larger view of the context has to be kept in mind. In the long run the best that can be hoped for is not simply a return to the centrism of recent mainstream Democratic and Republican administrations. The society is changing, and the same changes that provide the Right with an incentive for severe reaction also provide the opportunity for giant steps forward.

NOTES

This article has benefited from extensive conversations and correspondence that I have had with friends since the elections. Aside from other members of the Radical America editorial group, who have given the article a lot of their time and thought, I am especially grateful to Paul Buhle, Jeremy Brecher, and Richard Kronish for their insights. I found the Socialist Review article cited below to be an especially fine source on working-class living conditions in the 1970s. If we had not run out of space in this issue, we would have reprinted a speech by Karen Nussbaum, director of the clerical-worker organizing group Working Women; personally I found it very helpful in showing the way that new directions in corporate investment have made female workers more central in the economy.

4. Kim Moody, "Labor and the Challenge of the Eighties," Changes, 2 (June 1980), 12-19, p. 12. This article is a fine overview.
9. I am grateful to Lew Ferliger of Dollars & Sense magazine for these figures.
10. These are Defense Department figures given me by Randall Forsberg of the Institute for Defense and Disarmament Studies, Boston.
11. Louis Harris survey quoted by Robert Jordan in the Boston Globe, December 1, 1980. Fifty-six percent said it was "fully satisfactory," another 23 percent "somewhat satisfactory."
12. Ibid.

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MANNING MARABLE is a leader of the National Black Independent Political Party and a Black political economist at Cornell University’s Africana Studies Center. His column “From the Grassroots” appears in over 125 newspapers in the U.S., U.K., and Africa.

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Human services are under attack. Fiscal conservatives consider them "luxuries we can no longer afford." Candidate Reagan loved to read examples from his notecards about outrageously wasteful social programs: paper-pushing bureaucrats throwing money at social problems and undermining the work ethic. The New Right is appalled by the destruction of family life brought about by meddling "social interventionists." And, underlying the public statements, is the unstated but implied argument that the recipients are black anyway, out for a free ride at the expense of white working people.

During the past five years such assaults have brought an end to the twenty-year expansion of social-welfare programs. (See Chart I) At the local level, schools, welfare, and other services have been under siege since the urban fiscal crisis hit major cities at mid-decade. We all know about Proposition Thirteen. With the rightward turn in Washington, we face the specter of even more severe cutbacks in basic social programs, as the crisis in world capitalism forces a realignment of economic priorities.

Yet no strong, ringing defense of educational and social welfare programs has emerged from the Left, from labor unions or from any sector of a broad liberal coalition. Instead, teachers have fought for their schools, child-care workers for their funding, and social workers for the survival of their particular programs. Some of this fragmented reaction results from the nature of the cuts — hiring freezes here, canceled cost-of-living increases there — which have not yet been experienced as a concerted, interconnected attack. But, more
impartantly, the lack of unified response reflects a widely held and deep ambivalence about the benefits of the liberal state.

THE NATURE OF OUR AMBIVALENCE

There are many sources of the deep skepticism about the proper role of the state. The old populist hostility to big government runs deep and provides a receptive audience for conservative rhetoric. Liberals have defended state intervention, as long as they were in charge, but have usually argued publicly that it would only be temporary. Welfare programs would only be provided until we could "cure" poverty, juvenile delinquency, or other marginal problems. Even as the liberal state was being built it was still presented to the public as necessary only to correct social problems due to the special needs of particular populations — urban poor until they became middle-class, blacks until they could rise out of the ghetto, immigrants until they could learn the language, fatherless children until they could become good workers.

Radicals have seen through this fantasy and exposed the liberal state as a permanently necessary tool of an increasingly complex capitalist system.\(^1\) Left analysis has shown how the capitalist state provides human services as a significant form of social control. Welfare benefits, for example, are set at levels that keep wages down. Poor people on various forms of relief are kept at subsistence level so that they will be miserable and either look for work or serve as the negative examples needed to keep people working at poorly rewarded, demeaning jobs. Education serves to socialize children to be good workers, not to think and act critically. The demographics of poverty, along with control of the delivery system by white professionals, serves to enforce racist stereotypes on many levels. In short, the Left’s critique of the liberal welfare state has been even more damning than that of the Right.

However, the left analysis has also understood that most human service programs have been the result of struggles by the working class and minorities.\(^2\) Although provided meagerly and punitively, public welfare, education, and health programs have served to help people survive under capitalism. Indeed, they became part of the working class’s “social wage” — if employers didn’t pay wages that covered the costs of education, old age, and illness, they would be absorbed as a social cost by the state. In this way, a left analysis has supported popular efforts to demand more public services. When the discrepancy between analysis and practice was noted, it was blamed on one of the famous “contradictions of capitalism” and, until recently, little attempt was made to explore the tensions further.\(^1\)

Human-service workers on the left have sometimes offered another reason for providing public services. In the 1930s radical social workers began to argue that services were needed to do more than clean up the victims of capitalism or to spread the costs of providing a social wage.\(^4\) Social workers like Bertha Reynolds began to understand that there are many human conditions which require special supports in any society — old age, mental illness and retardation, alcoholism. She, and others since, have argued that a major goal of socialism is to provide a society where people can be cared for with dignity. This leads to the understanding that some human services, despite their social-control functions, are not only desirable but are a measure of the quality of any society.\(^5\)

These differing perspectives can leave us immobilized in the face of conservative attacks on the liberal state. We agree with many of the criticisms of public programs but we also see
them as essential. In the face of broad-brush attacks on human services, we have to defend the right of people to satisfy their basic human needs, as well as the integrity of workers trying to respond to those needs, without making a liberal defense of the whole social-welfare and educational system in this country. To do this we need a more specific analysis of what’s wrong with social programs and where they need to be defended.

**SOURCES OF VULNERABILITY**

Many major social programs and their recipients are especially vulnerable at this time for three reasons. First, nationwide population changes seem to support arguments for reduced services. Second, the ways in which programs have been designed and administered during the past twenty years have rendered them open to criticism, even by people who accept their goals. Third, the shifting population receiving services makes it possible for many people to feel that they themselves receive no benefits — that the major social programs are nothing more than a drain on their pocketbooks.

**Demographic Changes**

Two major shifts in population supply a common-sense support to cuts in public spending. First, the dramatic decline in school-age children allows many to see school cuts as feasible — especially since the decline is greatest among the white middle class. These people find themselves paying more for public schools with shrinking enrollments, a decreasing proportion of their own children, and more nonwhites. With the strength of racism added to the logic that declining enrollments should mean declining costs, it is not surprising that the public schools are under attack, both directly and through demands for subsidies of private education. When teachers argue that inflation acts to cut costs already and that as many, or more, teachers may be needed to deal effectively with the changing student population, that can easily be dismissed as self-serving.

In a different direction, but with similar results, shifts in the elderly population also can be seen as supporting program cuts. The proportion of the population which is old is increasing and people are living longer. These facts propelled an increase in services and expenditures for the elderly during the 1970s but now they seem to demand cuts. “Realistic” assessments — with realism rapidly becoming a catchword for surrender — appear often in the popular and scholarly press.

While these arguments are manipulated to serve the most negative ends, it is not surprising that the facts of population change lend some credibility to arguments for service cuts or changes in the types of programs delivered.

**Liberal Practice**

The ways in which many social programs have been designed and administered helps to create a popular sense — shared often by the Left — that education, health, and welfare programs are hopeless bureaucratic boondoggles which cannot be defended.

The roots of this commonplace observation lie in the ideological confusion of the liberal welfare state. Liberal professionals have developed public programs in attempts to respond to the worst manifestations of capitalism — unemployment, lack of economic and social supports for the non-wage-earning; dependent individual; racial discrimination. But the professional ideology could not admit that these problems were fundamental and systematic features of this society (much less that some of them may afflict all societies), so program goals were never allowed to address basic causes.
Similarly, since the liberal ideology assumed that all public policy was the result of pluralist "compromise" among competing groups, the agitation for social benefits by workers and minorities was never viewed as the wrenching of a social wage from capitalism. Rather, it was accepted as a natural process of competing demands for resources. Therefore, liberals were able to overload programs with disparate goals in an attempt to create a healthy "balance" of interests. (The Model Cities program is the most extreme example of this. Militant demands for community control were incorporated, but only as part of a package that included special power for local politicians and professional planners.)

There are many concrete ways in which liberal professionals defeated their own programs by refusing to acknowledge the real problems they were addressing and by trying to balance off a range of interests in each social program. As a result, the public, including workers and clients, has been consistently misled in regard to the purposes, possibilities, and problems of the programs.

The most important way liberal practice contributed to the vulnerability of public programs was by overpromising. Educators instituted new math, open classrooms, or other innovations with fanfare and promises for "an end to traditional educational dilemmas." Community Mental Health programs were expected to cure mental illness in the community. The quintessential liberal document was the 1962 HEW Advisory Committee report which called for Social Security amendments to fund social services, arguing, "Having the power, we have the duty" — thereby expressing an arrogance embraced fully by many liberal professionals and accepted as a necessary political strategy by others.

Overpromising has many drawbacks. As already noted it sets worthy programs up to fail, with impossible standards like ending poverty or youth unemployment. It led to victim blaming: "We could have succeeded if poor people were not so pathological" or, in the '70s version, "if workers weren't so stupid." Most importantly, however, overpromising created an atmosphere where clients, workers, the general public, and even left critics of social programs began to think that there were cures for most problems which afflict people.

In the short run, of course, the "promise them anything" approach allowed liberals to talk about and "respond" to social problems without admitting to their more fundamental causes. In the long run, the approach left many people — including the consumers of services — skeptical of any efforts to alleviate health,
educational, and social problems.

At the same time as liberal professionals introduced new programs with great fanfare, they also led the attack on their own programs. Educators exposed failing performance and asked for money for new programs. Welfare officials presented lists to legislators of how bad their programs were — high error rates, increasing child abuse, worker turnover — and then requested more funds so that next year things would get better. It is not surprising that the public finally came to believe that programs were terrible, and began to resent “throwing money away” on them.

Of course, upper-level professionals and managers seldom blamed themselves for these failings. Traditionally they have blamed clients, patients, or students for their lack of motivation, or families for their failure to support social intervention. During the 1970s this shifted so that most often we found workers blamed for system failures — because of their stupidity, lack of training, lack of motivation, lack of management skills. Directors of large social agencies or school departments (increasingly products of business schools rather than up-from-the-ranks bureaucrats) presented themselves as the only ones who cared about clients, as the ones who wanted to provide better services by cutting “deadwood” from the staff.

Another way in which the welfare state ran amok, and liberal professionals avoided facing the seriousness of capitalism’s problems, was the proliferation of categorical programs. Each group which organized and pressured, or for whom professional advocates emerged, might finally get a new (inadequate) program but old ones were never phased out or revamped. Population by population the expenditures grew — the elderly here, special education there, minority youth next year — until, indeed, the “bureaucratic nightmares” decried by the Right were created and legitimate accountability was lost.

Or, there was the trail of never-completed reforms. Community schools, community mental health centers, job training programs all were started, never completed, and then left half-finished to allow administrators to escape the responsibility of either admitting their failure or coping with the costs of full implementation. Deinstitutionalization of state hospitals offers the best example here. Many states now have institutions filled to one-quarter or less capacity, with a hodge-podge of more or less successful “community” programs serving their old populations. But when community programs are criticized, administrators stress how their priorities are first to empty the state hospitals and then improve the community programs. Yet attacks on the quality of the remaining state hospital system bring the response that the hospitals are being emptied so money cannot be spent improving them. Once more, it’s no wonder that the New Right finds support for its claim that only the family can provide quality care.

Developments in the human-service workforce during the 1970s have also served to discredit social programs. Budget cuts, burn-out, and professional pressure have reduced the numbers of truly “community-based” workers. Therefore, the public (as well as clients) has fewer opportunities to discover the existence of dedicated, hard-working, risk-taking service workers. It is easier now to argue that everybody works in plushy offices pushing papers around all day. (Teachers, of course, have always been criticized for their summer vacations.)

Paradoxically, the influx into human-service work of people from a wider class base — which has occurred over the past twenty years
— has served to undermine the credibility of service workers with the upper classes, the media, and legislators. Most service providers are viewed as just unionized workers now—not dedicated “grey ladies” — who fight only for fat, feather-bedded jobs. Furthermore, the complex funding and fiscal-accountability requirements which have been instituted over the past fifteen years have made the human service encounter more routinized. There are more bureaucratic forms and regulations and somehow human service workers, not the administrators who invent them, get blamed.

Finally, the massive increase in the purchase of private services with public money has increased the number of service workers who are vulnerable to cuts. In many states more than 80 percent of the federal social service money goes to pay private agencies for delivering services to the poor and elderly — day-care services, homemaker services, halfway houses, and so forth. The workers in these programs are not eligible to join public sector unions, even if their agency is 100 percent funded by public money. They have little defense if cutbacks occur. The “flexibility of program planning” with which liberals justified the use of private programs, becomes another cruel joke played on workers and clients.

All of these practices have created a system which is easy to criticize and hard to defend. Any attempt to protect jobs or clients within this system must begin by arguing that it is the structure of these programs and the way workers have been forced to perform that has created the difficulties, not any inherent lack of need or widespread worker incompetence.

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Chart I
PUBLIC SOCIAL-WELFARE EXPENDITURES AS A PERCENTAGE OF GROSS NATIONAL PRODUCT

From Social Security Bulletin, Vol. 43, No. 5 (May) p. 5.
Decline of a Universalist Strategy

A brief look at the major public programs (See Chart II) shows that most people receiving benefits are old people, children, handicapped people, or women. Most, except for recipients of Social Security and Unemployment benefits or students in public education, are receiving money, medical aid, or social services because they are poor. On the face of it, these facts would seem to suggest a widespread support for the beneficiaries of public support. After all, except for women, they are mainly the groups who have historically been viewed as deserving charity from “moral” people.

However, three mechanisms have been used by conservatives to argue that these seemingly needy people are not so deserving after all:

First, the needy groups are “exposed” as disproportionately nonwhite (even if they are old, disabled, or hungry). Racism can then be used to discredit their “worthiness” and thereby justify their increased suffering. Or . . .

Women who have “left the family” are blamed for the conditions of the needy — if women stayed home with their husbands then they could take care of grandparents, disabled relatives and the children wouldn’t need welfare. Therefore, by forcing families to retake their responsibilities for the needy we strengthen the family and keep women home (or make them again guilty, not proud, of working outside the home). By cutting welfare benefits we lessen women’s options to leave their husbands. Finally . . .

In some areas (not Social Security, though) it has been possible to argue that actual benefits to recipients do not have to be cut. Instead, workers’ salaries and benefits — i.e., administrative costs — can be cut, under the argument that they are just “poverty pimps” who live off the poor.

The result of such strategies is a popular distancing from the plight of the recipients of social programs. This distancing has also been supported by the 1970s approach of targeting services to the most needy groups — the disabled, the urban poor, minority youth. Public services are explicitly not defended as universal — as benefiting everyone. Instead, they have been defended as benefiting only selected groups. At the same time this may have seemed like the only way to get programs through. And many of the populations served were truly the “most needy.” However, in times of economic crunch we can see the impact of an abandonment of a universalist strategy. Most health and social programs seem to be for “others.” In a time of inflation, recession, and a declining standard of living, people may understandably feel willing to abandon or cut back public commitments, under the guise of “hard choices.”
### CHART II
SOCIAL WELFARE EXPENDITURES AND MAJOR TYPES OF RECIPIENTS
— UNDER FEDERAL, STATE AND LOCAL PUBLIC PROGRAMS
(In Millions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROGRAM</th>
<th>1950 Expenditures</th>
<th>1960 Expenditures</th>
<th>1970 Expenditures</th>
<th>1978 Expenditures</th>
<th>Major Types of Recipients*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>$23,508.4</td>
<td>$52,293.4</td>
<td>$145,855.7</td>
<td>$394,462.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOCIAL INSURANCE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Security, Medicare,</td>
<td>$4,946.6</td>
<td>$19,306.7</td>
<td>$54,691.2</td>
<td>$175,101.1</td>
<td>primarily — elderly and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment, Public Service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>disabled (some adults and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retirement, Workmen’s Comp, etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>survivors)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUBLIC AID</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFOC, WIN, SSI, Medicaid, Title XX,</td>
<td>$2,496.2</td>
<td>$4,101.1</td>
<td>$16,487.8</td>
<td>$59,620.2</td>
<td>primarily — children,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Stamps, some CETA, etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>elderly and disabled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>(also parents of children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>and and other adult poor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEALTH &amp; MEDICAL</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital &amp; Medical</td>
<td>$2,063.5</td>
<td>$4,463.8</td>
<td>$9,906.8</td>
<td>$23,003.7</td>
<td>widespread across popula-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Civilian &amp; Defense), Maternal &amp;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>tion, some focus on the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Health, Public Health, Medical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research, etc.</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VETERANS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pensions, Health &amp; Medical, Education</td>
<td>$6,865.7</td>
<td>5,479.2</td>
<td>9,078.0</td>
<td>$19,742.4</td>
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<td>Medical, Life Insurance, etc.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>for elderly and disabled</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>EDUCATION</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary &amp; Secondary,</td>
<td>$6,674.1</td>
<td>$17,626.2</td>
<td>$70,533.9</td>
<td>$101,187.9</td>
<td>primarily children and</td>
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<tr>
<td>Higher Ed., Vocational &amp; Adult Ed.,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>young people, other adults</td>
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<tr>
<td>etc.</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>28%</td>
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<tr>
<td>HOUSING</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>public (60%) and other supports</td>
<td>$14.6</td>
<td>$176.8</td>
<td>$2,554.0</td>
<td>$5,244.6</td>
<td>primarily poor families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1/m%</td>
<td>1/m%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>OTHER</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational Rehabilitation, Child</td>
<td>$447.7</td>
<td>$1,139.4</td>
<td>$6,721.5</td>
<td>$10,582.5</td>
<td>primarily children and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition, Child Welfare, OEO &amp;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>disabled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action, Juvenile Justice, etc.</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
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*Estimates made by author, not in original source

Youth, minorities, female-headed families, and old people become an underclass which "cannot expect generous benefits" in hard times for everyone.

MUSTERING A DEFENSE

It will not be easy to develop strategies for defending what is worth saving in human-service programs. Our major approach may be to focus on the legitimate claims of people in need and to try to rebuild a collective "moral" consensus that they should be cared for. We can, then, intervene in the fight over existing programs by calling for more direct, less bureaucratically hamstrung, public services.

Ironically, the more services the Right attempts to cut, the more likely our chances to build a broad coalition around these issues. Cuts in Social Security, the public schools, and unemployment benefits will affect greater numbers than less central cuts. But even there it may be shown how attacks on the elderly (who receive more than 50 percent of social welfare benefits) will put increased burdens on middle- and working-class families who already have been forced to support two wage earners just to meet core family needs. Similarly, the decline of public education may put a real burden on families whose inflation-ridden incomes cannot support private education.

In short, the strongest defense against cuts may be a concerted, collective effort to demonstrate to people that there is a meaningful social wage to be fought for, and even expanded. By doing this, we can even hope to establish an increased public sense that a good society requires good services and that our problems now stem from the failure of the liberal state to provide them.

Footnotes


ANN WITHERN is an editor of Radical America and is involved in research and activity around issues affecting human service workers and clients. This article is modified from a talk given at a conference on "Human Services in a Good Society: Visions from the Left," held in New York in December 1980, and to be held in Boston in April 1981. The full version will be published in Catalyst: A Socialist Journal of the Social Services sometime in 1981.
George Grosz and John Heartfield. Dada-merika.
ECONOMIC CRISIS
AND CONSERVATIVE
ECONOMIC POLICIES

US Capitalism in the 1980s

Jim Campen

When Ronald Reagan asked the viewers of his televised debate with Jimmy Carter to consider whether they were better off than they had been four years earlier, he skillfully underlined the single issue most important in bringing about 1980’s Republican victories: the sorry state of the US economy. For how many of us could truthfully answer that things had improved since the last Presidential election? With double-digit inflation, record-high interest rates, costly and periodically scarce energy, the official (under-) estimate of unemployment showing almost 8 million people out of work, major industries like auto and steel in decline, and major companies like Chrysler on the brink of bankruptcy, no one really had to be convinced that the US economy is in serious trouble. And in our two-party system, hard times generally result in electoral defeat for the party in office.

When President Reagan and the first Republican-controlled Senate since the early Eisenhower years assumed power at the beginning of 1981, however, they also had to assume responsibility for wrestling with the economy’s extraordinary problems. What are their options? Is there any reason to expect (hope? fear?) that their management will be as effective as their criticisms? Is their any reason to believe that their basic approach to economic policy will differ significantly from that of the Carter administration? When it comes time for the 1984 elections, is it possible that we will be in the midst of a new period of growth, prosperity, and relatively stable prices? Or will it be the Republicans’ turn to be embarrassed by voter comparisons with the good old days of 1980? In short, what lies ahead for the economy?
Answering these questions requires looking at the current US economic situation in its historical and international setting. The historical development of US capitalism, especially in the post-World War II period, is the most useful starting point for understanding the dilemmas now faced by the makers of US economic policy. Analysis of the changing balance of political forces associated with the deepening economic problems of the last decade suggests that the new administration’s approach to the economy will differ from that of its predecessor more than is usually the case. It is not likely, however, that its new conservative economic policies will provide even a temporary solution for US capitalism’s economic problems.

Indeed, the following analysis indicates that the wrongheadedness and internal contradictions of Reagan’s economic policies may well contribute to a further worsening of the current economic crisis. How the crisis will unfold and may eventually be resolved remain open questions, the answers to which will depend heavily on the political struggles of the coming years; this article concludes with some speculations about the nature and significance of those struggles.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMICS OF THE 1970s

The following sections will review the political economic developments of the 1970s. I begin with a rough quantitative summary of how major economic groups were affected by the economy’s dismal performance. Then I discuss the role of economic crises in capitalist development and how the deepening crisis of the 1970s grew out of the long post-World War II period of profitable capital accumulation. I conclude with a discussion of how the coming of economic stagnation has helped break up the previ-ously dominant liberal political coalition and bring a period of political statemate.

Who Got What During the 1970s?

The process of capitalist development is always an uneven one. During the 1970s there was great variation in economic fortunes among different industries (e.g., oil vs. auto), among workers in different occupations (e.g., computer programmers vs. English teachers), and among regions of the country (e.g., Texas vs. Ohio). It is important to remember that averages and totals may often conceal more than they reveal. Nevertheless, it is often useful to have the rough general picture of overall trends that only summary statistics can provide. This section offers such an overview by briefly reviewing changes in the economic fortunes of working people and of businesses. To avoid relying too much on data from any single year, comparisons are made between what happened during the period from 1975 to 1980 and what happened during the corresponding period one decade earlier.

For working people, the economic problems of the 1970s are indicated by two key statistics: real wages fell and the unemployment rate rose.1 Measured in constant 1967 dollars to adjust for the impact of inflation, the average pretax weekly wage in the private nonfarm sector of the economy rose 16.9 percent from 1955-60 to 1965-70. By contrast, real wages measured in the same way declined from an average of $102.56 in the 1965-70 period to an average of $91.46 between 1975 and 1980, a drop of 11.8 percent. In fact, after two years of steep decline at the end of this final period, real wages in 1980 were down 12.8 percent from the all-time peak they reached in 1973, and were lower than in any year since 1962.2 Meanwhile, the average rate of unemployment rose from 4.0 percent from the 1965-70 period to 7.0 per-
cent for 1975-80. The impact of a high jobless rate reaches far beyond the more than 1 million people who are out of work for each percentage point in the unemployment rate; the threat of unemployment hangs over those who do manage to keep their jobs, reducing both their sense of economic security and their power to bargain effectively over working conditions and levels of pay.

Meanwhile, the decade has been an at least equally grim one for corporations and the capitalists who own and control them. No one should make the mistake of believing that working people have been doing so poorly because businesses have been doing well.

The best single measure of how the capitalist economy is doing, from the point of view of the capitalists, is what is happening to profits. Between 1975 and 1980, real corporate profits measured in constant 1972 dollars averaged $104.3 billion per year; during the corresponding period one decade earlier, the average annual level of real profits was $100.9 billion. That is, the total amount of profits in the US economy, after adjusting for inflation, rose by only 3.4 percent during the ten-year period. Because the economy's total output of goods and services as measured by gross national product (GNP), increased by 35 percent between the two periods, and the number of non-farm wage and salary employees rose by 26 percent,* both the share of profits in GNP and profits per worker declined considerably over the course of the decade.¹

Perhaps the most closely watched and frequently cited indicator of capitalism's economic health is the average price of stocks on Wall Street. These stocks represent ownership shares in the biggest US corporations; owners of the stock have claims on present and future profits of the corporations. Once again, comparing averages for the 1965-70 and 1975-80 periods reveals a record of poor performance. The average level of the Dow Jones Industrial Average of thirty leading stocks was essentially unchanged, rising only from 866.7 in the first period to 871.3 during the corresponding period ten years later. Thus there was very little change in the total market value of the largest US corporations, even though the price level was more than 80 percent higher during the second period. In other words, the real value of corporate stocks, as measured by the Dow Jones Industrial Average, fell by more than 40 percent over the course of the decade.²

This quick look at what has been happening to corporate profits and stock prices provides no more than a rough-and-ready first approximation to answering the complex question of how well capitalism has been doing from the perspective of capitalists, but the general conclusion seems inescapable that it has not been a good period for businesses.

Our separate looks at how the 1970s affected the economic fortunes of working people and of capitalists suggests that while both groups were hit hard, compared to how they did in the 1960s, capitalists were hit relatively harder.³ And this tentative conclusion is strengthened, rather than weakened, when we broaden the scope of our analysis to take into account the impact of government spending, taxation, and regulation.

Conservative rhetoric notwithstanding, the 1970s was not a decade of explosive growth of government budgets in relation to the private economy. Total taxes by all levels of government — federal, state, and local — increased from an average of 29.3 percent of gross national product (GNP) in 1965-70 to an average of 31.4 percent of GNP in the 1975-80 per-

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*This resulted from the baby-boom generation's reaching working age and from the increased labor-force participation of women. (5)
iod. (Because governments spent more than they raised in taxes — they made up the resulting deficits by borrowing — public spending as a share of GNP rose a bit more, from 29.8 to 32.7 percent. 3)

There was only one major change in the relative importance of the various categories of government spending. Military spending on goods and services fell from 8.0 percent of GNP in 1965-70 to 4.6 percent of GNP in 1975-80 (a decline from 45.5 to 26.2 percent of all federal spending). At the same time, federal government cash payments to individuals (social security and other benefits for retirement and disability, unemployment compensation, food stamps, AFDC, and so forth — technically referred to as "transfer payments to persons") rose from 5.1 to 8.6 percent of GNP (an increase from 28.7 to 48.1 percent of all federal spending). 9 This massive change has clearly been in the interests of working people. 10

Finally, there has been a major increase in the amount of government regulation. By the end of the 1970s the federal government was intensively involved in the regulation of three major areas where it had been doing much less ten years earlier: environmental protection, occupational health and safety, and equal employment opportunity. While these activities may have been much less extensive and effective than many people would have liked, they did serve to improve the economic conditions of working-class people relative to those of capitalists. The significance of this impact is suggested by the vehemence of the current business campaign to deregulate in these areas.

In short, the 1970s were hard times for working-class people, but they were not as hard as they might otherwise have been because of gains made in the areas of government social spending and social regulation. These gains, however, made things even worse for capitalists, and thus made the crisis of the capitalist economic system more severe than it otherwise would have been. As we shall see, one of the primary features of the next few years will be the attempts of capitalists to reverse this development.

Capitalism and Crises

Although populist rhetoric sometimes suggests that working-class people are hurting because the position of capitalists has been improving, the evidence reviewed above seems to show that while working class people are hurting — especially relative to the expectations developed during the prosperity of the 1960s — the economic position of capitalists has been deteriorating even more. And this is as we should expect, if we understand the 1970s as a period of deepening crisis for US and world capitalism. Because profit making and capital accumulation are capitalism's raison d'être, the central characteristic of a capitalist economic crisis is a serious and sustained decline in profits. To describe this as a crisis is to say something much stronger than simply that the decade was characterized by economic hard times, however. For Marxists, a crisis is a period when the economic difficulties arising from a slowing down of capital accumulation lead to social and political problems so serious and pervasive that they threaten the continued functioning of the capitalist system itself.

Throughout its history, the development of capitalism has been marked by periodic crises, the resolutions of which have involved major changes in basic social and political arrangements. The US experienced one such crisis — known in the immediately following decades as the "Great Depression" — during the final years of the nineteenth century. More recently, the Great Crash of 1929 was followed by more than fifteen years of depression and world war.
Marxists offer two important insights into the recurrence of periodic crises in capitalist economies. First, the primary sources of economic crises are to be found in the preceding periods of rapid economic growth; crises are inherent within the capital-accumulation process itself, rather than springing from unfortunate "mistakes" in economic policy or from "shocks" to the economic system from outside. Second, periodic crises are functional for the capitalist system. They play an essential, restorative role in helping catalyze new sets of economic, social, and political relationships that facilitate the renewed accumulation of capital. In John Gurley's words, "Economic crises in capitalist societies come and go. In fact, their coming and going is the major way capitalism keeps itself going." Thus, while crises present difficulties so serious that they cannot be solved simply by adopting better economic policy (as orthodox economists would have us believe), they do not necessarily involve difficulties so severe that the "final breakdown" of the capitalist system is at hand (as some leftists with an apocalyptic bent sometimes contend).

Capitalist economic growth, or the process of capital accumulation, takes place as a result of investments made by individual capitalist enterprises. Profits are central to this process. Past profits furnish the funds necessary for current investments, which are undertaken only when there is an expectation that they will generate further profits. Thus, economic growth will be rapid when, and only when, there are abundant opportunities for profitable investment.

However, the process of successful capitalist accumulation is a contradictory one which undermines the very circumstances that make it possible. For example, profitability is enhanced by the existence of a large pool of unemployed workers — the "reserve army" — which serves to keep wages down, to strengthen discipline over the labor process, and to weaken working-class power in the political arena. But a period of sustained economic growth will lead to increased employment, thereby diminishing the pool of unemployed workers — depleting the reserve army — and removing the circumstances which provided a relatively cheap and docile workforce. In this and other ways, even a sustained period of economic growth cannot persist forever; the success of the capital accumulation process inexorably leads to its slowing.

But just as periods of prosperity contain the seeds of crisis, so too do the forces at work during a crisis tend to undermine its continuation, making possible the establishment of the foundations for another round of profitable capital accumulation. Again, the logic of this process may be suggested by the example of the reserve army of the unemployed: a slowdown of growth and continuation of crisis will, by increasing unemployment, restore the size of the reserve army, thereby weakening workers not only in their bargaining with employers over pay and working conditions, but also in the political realm.

The way that crises play their restorative role in actual historical circumstances is never quick or smooth. The last time around, it required nearly two decades of depression, fascism, world war, and cold-war political repression finally to bring about the restructuring necessary for another round of sustained capitalist expansion. Indeed, if the economy's problems were capable of a relatively quick and painless solution we would not have a crisis, which by definition requires major institutional restructuring for its resolution. Because restructuring involves substantial losses for those corporations and individual capitalists who have vested interests in the prevailing arrangements — and because dominant ideologies support existing
institutional structures rather than permit widespread understanding of their weaknesses — the resistance to restructuring is always very great. Liberal economics guru Lester Thurow recently observed that "No society has ever solved the problem of slow economic rot without either being wrecked into new ways by a depression or having them imposed after losing a war." 

The Deepening Crisis of the 1970s

The current crisis emerged out of the long period of economic growth and relative prosperity that began when wartime spending lifted the economy from a decade of depression in the early 1940s. The long postwar expansion was made possible by an unusual set of historical circumstances. These circumstances included the debt deflation and business shakeout of the Great Depression; the physical destruction, technological advances, and pent-up purchasing power resulting from World War II; and the cheap supplies of energy and ample opportunities for profitable international trade and investment ensured by America's unquestioned international dominance after the war.

The rapid economic growth made possible by these circumstances was facilitated by two major institutional changes from the pre-1930s organization of US capitalism. There was an implicit agreement between big business and big labor that organized workers would be able to share in the material fruits of growth in return for their acceptance of the fundamental aspects of the political and economic system. And the big government which emerged from World War II not only stayed big (in 1929 federal spending was only 2.8 percent of GNP; after World War II it never dropped below 13.9 percent.) It also adopted an economic policy based on government spending to maintain demand for business output, to promote the growth and profitability of major corporations, and to provide jobs and social services. These changed institutional arrangements came about only after virulent and sustained resistance from much of the capitalist class. (Indeed, labor was acceptable as a junior partner in prosperity only after a period of vicious political repression that purged the labor movement of most of its left-wing leaders and activists.)

Operating in the environment provided by this favorable set of historical circumstances and institutional arrangements, the United States enjoyed unprecedented economic growth during the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1970s, however, this long wave of economic expansion and relative prosperity was succeeded by a decade of stagnation and deepening crisis. The very success of the process of capital accumulation had undermined its own momentum. Arrangements and practices that had provided solutions to earlier problems eventually themselves became obstacles to continued profitable investment. The ending of the long period of prosperity had many dimensions; we shall take note of several of these under four headings.

International. Both corporate investment abroad and US international economic policy in the postwar period led to the strengthening of the economies of Western Europe and Japan as customers for US products, hosts for US foreign investment, and allies against the Soviet Union. Eventually, however, the increasingly strong economies of these countries became more of a problem than a solution, as West Germany and Japan in particular began to edge out the US in international markets.

Meanwhile, the impact of US imperialism in the Third World gave rise to national liberation movements that imposed increasing "costs of empire," culminating in the massive political unrest and economic disruption generated by
the Vietnam War. Finally, plentiful supplies of cheap imported oil, while initially very conducive to profitable domestic investments by US capitalists, created a pattern of economic development so reliant on cheap petroleum that the economy became highly vulnerable to the dramatic price increases imposed by the oil-exporting countries in the face of declining US international power in the 1970s.17

Labor participation in prosperity. While the steady increases in real wages of the 1950s and 1960s were generally effective in forestalling any fundamental structural changes, they also created expectations that became very disrup-
tive when the growth of output per worker began to slow down. More important, high levels of employment — the unemployment rate fell below 4 percent for four consecutive years at the end of the 1960s — made workers much more expensive to hire and difficult to control as the reserve army became much smaller and less visible. In addition, the struggles of organized labor and its allies for improved and enlarged government social programs cut into profits both directly (because these programs were financed in part by taxes on capitalists) and indirectly (as the bargaining position of working people was further strengthened by their reduced dependence on labor income for their survival).  

**Suburbanization and automobilization.** As people began to live, work, shop and, especially, move between the millions of new buildings constructed outside of central cities during the postwar period, massive opportunities for profitable investments were created, particularly in the construction, auto, and oil industries. In addition to the dependence on imported oil noted above, the success of this pattern of economic development created powerful vested interests, particularly in the auto and oil industries, whose own prosperity depends on continuing these patterns long after they have ceased to make economic sense for the economy as a whole, and whose economic success has given them enough political power to veto national pursuit of other patterns of investment and development.  

**Keynesian economic policy.** By using budgetary and monetary policies to maintain relatively high levels of total demand for business output and to keep economic downturns from getting too severe, the government made the period of expansion stronger and steadier than it otherwise would have been. But the continuation of this policy eventually had two serious, interrelated consequences that played a role in undermining the expansion. On the one hand, a massive buildup of individual, business, and government debt increased the vulnerability of the financial structure, making further lending and borrowing (an essential source of investment funds) increasingly problematic and risky. On the other hand, the perceived government commitment to avoid prolonged periods of high unemployment has played a very important role in bringing about the accelerating inflation of the 1970s. When workers and employers are convinced that the government will ensure that businesses have customers for their products so that production and employment can remain at high levels, recessions lose their power to bring about downward pressures on the prices and wages that businesses and workers demand and receive.  

In these and other ways, the very arrangements, circumstances, institutions, and practices that promoted the long period of expansion in the postwar period had, by the 1970s, played themselves out. The result was slower economic growth and — since rapid growth was a central ingredient in making life in a capitalist economy socially and politically acceptable to working people — a general spreading of economic and social problems.

Antonio Gramsci wrote in his *Prison Notebooks* that a "crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appears." We have described how the old economic expansion has expired. There is no need to dwell here on the whole variety of morbid symptoms of contemporary US society; but it is important to try to understand why the new cannot be born. This requires an examination of the development of political forces and coalitions during the 1970s which have combined with the deteriorating
economic situation to prevent any effective resolution of the crisis.

From Keynesian Coalition to Political Stalemate

A central element of the resolution of the crisis of the 1930s and 1940s was the formation of the loose but effective working agreement between big labor and big capital. This partnership formed the nucleus of a broader coalition of groups including city dwellers, farmers, minorities, the poor, public employees, and beneficiaries of government expenditure programs, as well as organized labor, big business, and leaders of both political parties. Because of the macroeconomic policy associated with this grouping of political forces, it has been termed the “Keynesian coalition”\(^\text{12}\) because its policies were most forcefully advanced by the Democratic Party, which dominated both houses of Congress between the early years of Eisenhower’s presidency and the end of Carter’s, it is often called “liberal.” We shall use both of these terms, even though each of them is too narrow to suggest the encompassing nature of the coalition of political forces that subscribed to its basic tenet.

The essential foundation of the coalition was that relatively rapid economic growth could allow working people to receive steadily growing real incomes — in the form both of the private wage received directly from employers and of the “social wage” consisting of government social services and transfers — at the same time that steady growth of capitalist profits made possible the continued accumulation of capital. As long as prosperity made it possible to provide more for working people’s needs, and to ameliorate the problems created by capitalist expansion, without taking anything away from corporations, the coalition served to prevent major political conflicts over basic issues of economic organization or direction.

But the growth that the coalition helped to make possible also served, as sustained capitalist expansion always does, to strengthen the relative power of working people. And working people’s gains lowered the share of profits in total income, thereby playing an important role in reducing opportunities for profitable investment. By the early 1970s, the period of rapid economic growth had come to an end.

With the end of the economic boom, the Keynesian coalition was no longer viable. Without growth, the only way for capitalists to receive ever-increasing profits was for working people to get less. Conversely, the only way for working people to continue to enjoy rising real incomes was for capitalists to get less. Thus the basis for the Keynesian coalition was gone, and struggles to obtain larger shares of the pie came increasingly to overshadow efforts to increase the size of the pie available for distribution. The disintegration of the Keynesian coalition resulted in political stalemate through the end of the 1970s, rather than in the formation of any other political coalition capable of effectively formulating and imposing a coherent set of economic policies.

Working people and other noncapitalist groups had reached a position of considerable political power during the course of the long postwar expansion and they held on to it tenaciously. Throughout the 1970s the political power of organized labor and its allies remained sufficient to block all major legislative initiatives aimed at restoring the basis for another round of profitable capital accumulation by rolling back labor’s earlier gains. Capitalists’ relative political power clearly grew over the last half of the decade, but they were divided among themselves about what needed to be done. And in any case capitalists are not strong enough to rule without political allies,
including substantial numbers of working-class people, partly because of the need to win congressional and presidential elections.

Capitalist political power was more than ample to block the continuing efforts to achieve genuine tax and welfare reform and national health insurance. But divided among themselves and without the allies to form an effective domestic political coalition, corporate capitalists were unable to pursue their common interests effectively. They could not mount an effective new imperialist offensive to ease domestic economic pressures by increasing the profitability of their overseas investments and reducing the costs of petroleum and other improved raw materials. Nor were they able ruthlessly to carry out a policy of “rationalization” that could involve abandoning old industries and the cities that house them (the heavy industry of the frostbelt) in order to mobilize and concentrate resources in expanding industries and regions (the high-technology and energy industries of the sunbelt). Most noticeably, they were unable to formulate and have enacted any coherent national energy policy. There were initiatives in each of these directions, to be sure, but the balance of forces was such that almost nothing significant was accomplished in the realm of national policy during the latter half of the 1970s. Judging by the output of congressional legislation, it was a period when no one gained very much, but when no major group lost anything very substantial either.

The relatively equal distribution of political power that produced the political paralysis and stalemate of the final years of the 1970s had other consequences as well. The most important of these was an acceleration of inflation as a result of the intense distributional conflict between workers, capitalists, and beneficiaries of government programs. In the absence of sufficient economic growth and in the presence of a rapidly mounting bill for imported oil, when every group sought more — and no group was strong enough to impose its will on the others — the inevitable result was an upward spiral of prices, wages, and government spending. Inflation was the system’s best available response to the excessive demands on the economy’s capacity to deliver the goods. It provided the lubrication needed to keep things going as well as they did. Government policy makers chose to furnish the expanded money supply that kept the inflation going in order to avoid even less attractive alternatives such as a massive economic downturn.

The position of the Carter administration in the late 1970s was untenable. Its limited liberalism and its ties to traditional Democratic constituencies kept it from operating unreservedly in the interests of corporate capital. But its responsibility for managing the economy in a period of worsening crisis forced it to adopt increasingly nonliberal economic policies. Its
pursuit of a tight-fisted approach to spending for social programs, and its timid, prolonged, typically inept, but ultimately “successful” effort to push the economy into recession as the only available anti-inflationary alternative undermined its working-class support. Liberal policies are only viable in a period of expansion; they are bound to fail once expansion transforms itself into stagnation. For those few liberals with a dialectical understanding of the historical developments that have done them in, it must be cold comfort to know that it was the very success of the liberal coalition during the 1960s that was largely responsible for liberalism’s current political eclipse.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMICS OF THE 1980s

The political stalemate of the 1970s reached its height (nadir?) in the final years of the decade as Jimmy Carter and the 96th Congress seemed unable to accomplish anything at all in the face of ever-mounting economic problems. The growing national frustration at this combination of worsening conditions and governmental inaction was the principle reason for the Democrats’ resounding defeat in November. There can be little doubt that Ronald Reagan, the newly Republican Senate, and the increasingly conservative House of Representatives have an electoral “mandate” to “solve” the country’s economic woes. But has the shattered Keynesian coalition now given way to a new coalition able to agree on an economic program and strong enough to get its way politically over a sustained period of time? And does any such economic program have the capacity to resolve the economic crisis? The remaining sections of this article argue that the answers to both of the questions are negative, and discuss some of the economic and political implications of the likely failure of conservative economics.

Reagan’s Short-Term Options

A number of agreed-upon measures are certain to be included in any set of economic proposals that the Republicans will make:

— an upward redistribution of income, toward corporations and rich individuals. Conservatives argue that the economy needs more saving and investment, and that therefore more money must be channeled to those who can afford to do it, rather than left in the hands of working people who have little option but to consume almost all of their income. All tax, spending, and regulatory measures will be designed with this redistribution in mind.

—a smaller public sector, resulting from major cuts in both taxation and government spending. Although Republicans are strongly at odds about just where, when, how, and how much to cut taxes and expenditures, they seem agreed on the desirability of doing a lot of it. And they agree that an attack on the working conditions and pay levels of government workers is needed to increase the productivity and lower the cost of the public sector.

—a major reduction and reorientation of government regulation, transforming government regulatory activity that has favored consumers, workers, minorities, the environment, and sexual equality into a gentle overseeing by people who have a strong probusiness orientation.

— support for the Federal Reserve in its conservative policy of slowing the growth of the money supply.

— dramatically increased military spending as one component of a foreign policy aimed at strengthening the overseas profit-making ability of US corporations as they buy raw materials, produce goods, and sell products around the world.
These elements are all supported by the astonishingly successful revival of old-fashioned conservative ideology and its two basic claims: first, that a market system operates, “as though guided by an invisible hand,” to make self-interested profit-seeking behavior promote the general social and economic welfare; and second, that virtually all governmental actions that interfere with the operation of the market system, no matter how well-intentioned, are bound to make things worse rather than better, to hurt rather than help those that they are designed to aid.24

In spite of this broad programmatic and ideological agreement, however, the Republicans have one crucially important area of continuing disagreement: whether their attack on stagflation is best pursued by slowing the economy down or by speeding it up. On the one hand, the traditional conservatives among the economic advisors, including such notables as Milton Friedman, Arthur Burns, Herbert Stein, Alan Greenspan, and Martin Feldstein, believe that a sustained period of recession is needed in order to strengthen capitalists relative to workers and to bring the rate of inflation down. They cite a historical record which shows that since the Korean War recessions, and only recessions, have been able to produce these effects — in spite of all the other less painful methods that have been tried, and even though the amount of inflation relief provided by a given-size recession has decreased.25

On the other hand, a recently emerged group of supply-side economists — sometimes referred to as “New Right” or “neo-populist” economists — argue that dramatic tax cuts on personal income and business profits could boost saving, investment, and economic growth, while simultaneously reducing both inflation and unemployment. The leading barkers for this medicine have been Jack Kemp, Arthur Laffer, Norman Ture, Paul Craig Roberts, and Jude Wanniski. In their most optimistic formulations, the supply-siders claim that their formula will reduce taxes without any loss in government revenue (because the increased incentives will bring forth such a torrent of increased economic activity) and will reduce inflation without increasing unemployment (because a huge increase in the supply of goods to the marketplace will force their prices down at the same time they will require more workers to produce them).

The two factions were able to maintain a certain unity during the election campaign, but the dilemma highlighted by their disagreement is a real one that cannot be resolved by compromise. As this is written in late January, there is no indication that the struggle has been resolved within Reagan’s circle of top aides. Supply-sider David Stockman heads the Office of Management and Budget, but more traditional Donald Regan left his position as head of Merrill Lynch, Wall Street’s largest brokerage and financial services firm, to become Secretary of the Treasury. The third member of the economic policy-making “troika,” Chairman Murray Weidenbaum of the Council of Economic Advisors, is primarily known as a leading advocate of reduced government regulation of business and is not clearly in either camp. The term of Federal Reserve Board Chairman Paul Volcker, a traditional conservative who was forced on Jimmy Carter in 1979 by the “financial community,” continues through the early Reagan years.

The Republicans’ inability to put together a coherent and credible economic policy reflects the absence of any new phalanx of political forces capable of replacing the Keynesian coalition. The degree of unity required to win elections is much less than that required to implement an effective economic program. The problem here
has both political and economic dimensions. The conservatives need a program that can resolve both the political stalemate and the economic crisis. Neither the traditional conservative program of recession nor the supply-side program of massive tax cuts is capable of fulfilling both of these requirements.

The obvious starting point for a new political coalition is the common interests of big capital, little capital, and upper-income professionals in redistributing income upward and keeping anti-business government economic involvement to a minimum — that is, the replacement of the big capital-big labor alliance of the postwar period with an alliance more along classical capital-versus-labor lines. Such a grouping represents too small a share of the total population, however. The general goal of retaining legitimacy for the state and for the capitalist system as a whole, and the more limited purpose of winning elections, both dictate that any longterm governing coalition include a sizable portion of the working class.

In the election, the Republicans won the support of many working-class people with two appeals: they promised more jobs and lower inflation to those frustrated with the economic failures of the Carter years, and they appealed to that large and well-organized minority, cutting across class lines, that has been politicized around militant nationalism and the "social issues" — gun control, abortion, busing, gay rights, bans on school prayer, and the ERA. To keep working-class people in a governing coalition, however, requires adopting policies from which they will benefit. But the traditional conservative program of weakening labor's power and inflation's momentum by throwing millions out of work appears guaranteed to alienate the working-class supporters who the Republicans appealed to in November on pocketbook issues. An attempt to rally support by vigorously pushing legislation on the "social issues" while appealing at the same time to jingoistic and militaristic impulses might not succeed — the "Moral Majority" and its New Right allies are, after all, a distinct minority — or might succeed at the expense of using up the political capital and energy needed for pursuit of the economic program itself. (The editorial position of both Business Week and the Wall Street Journal is that the Republicans must not be diverted from concentrating their political resources on their economic program; the social issues, they argue, "are important to certain groups but are not involved in the fundamental problems of inflation and economic growth."

The supply-siders recognize the importance of not alienating working-class support by putting the economy through the recessionary wringer. They maintain that they will be able to hold onto and increase this support because the tax cuts they favor would get the economy moving again, bring down inflation while putting millions of people into jobs, and bring down taxes without butchering any social-spending programs. If they were right about the economic consequences of their proposed program, the political problem would be solved. But what they are proposing won't work. Traditional conservative economists are in the front row of the chorus denouncing the supply-side panacea as highly inflationary snake oil.  

Crisis Retained: The Limits and Dangers of the Short-Term Options

Those on both sides of the recession/tax cut strategy dilemma are quick to point out the problems with the other approach. And their critiques, unlike their positive policy proposals, are generally on target. Whichever horn of the dilemma the Republicans grasp, there will be severe limits on how much the new administra-
tion can accomplish, and serious dangers if it pushes too hard. And while muddling along without adopting either alternative would reduce some of the immediate dangers, it offers no greater prospect for resolving the economic crisis.

The distributional gains of working people relative to capitalists during the past two decades have made redistribution back toward capital a high priority for any new Republican economic program. The proposals for direct redistribution, selective deregulation, expenditure cutting and, probably, recession will be strongly resisted and may not come about easily, but the altered balance of political and economic power makes such redistribution during the next few years appear all but inevitable. That is the good news from the capitalist point of view. The bad news is that this redistribution will not be able to resolve the deepening economic crisis; simply reducing labor's income and power will not be enough to create the circumstances needed for another sustained period of profitable capital accumulation.

Furthermore, too vigorous a pursuit of an antilabor redistributive program harbors serious dangers for the capitalist economy itself. Even if we assume away, for the sake of argument, the social and political turmoil that such a program could bring about, and even if we ignore the serious problems of managing an economy and society where most people have experienced serious economic losses as a result of conscious government policy, there are reasons why the program might turn out to be a disaster for the capitalists. One danger arises from the fact that workers' incomes are not only a cost of production for capitalists (so that profits tend to be higher when wages are lower) but they are also the major source of purchasing power for the consumers to whom the capitalists must sell their products (so that profits tend to be higher when wages are higher). This contradictory role of wages is well illustrated by the following, perhaps apocryphal, story: When Henry Ford showed Walter Reuther a new auto assembly line and inquired, "Tell me, Walter, how are you going to get these machines to go out on strike?," Reuther retorted, "You tell me, Henry, how are you going to get these machines to buy your automobiles?" Capitalists need customers, and in this sense taking income away from the bulk of the working class seems a recipe for making things worse rather than better.

The traditional conservative strategy of recession has an even more dramatic danger: financial collapse. The postwar expansion continued as long as it did only through an enormous buildup of debt; individuals and companies have borrowed so heavily to undertake consumption, home purchases, and investments that they are dependent on continuing rising future incomes (or ever-increasing future borrowing) to pay off their debts. A serious and prolonged recession would, as workers lost jobs and companies lost customers, drive substantial numbers of companies and individuals into bankruptcy. This, in turn, would imperil other individuals, companies, and even banks, none of whom can pay their own bills unless they collect the money owed them. Once the process got started, a rapid chain reaction of bankruptcies could spread through the whole economy with disastrous results. The prospect of such a financial collapse led the Federal Reserve to relax its restrictive monetary policies when "credit crunches" developed in 1966, 1970, and 1980.

This is well-recognized by the advocates of supply-side economics. In fact, the popularity of this relatively new doctrine perhaps springs from a desire to clutch at straws when confronted with the political and economic problems that attend the conservatives' traditional
economic strategy. For the prescription of massive tax cuts as a solution to the nation’s current economic woes is a fantasy, unable to withstand serious economic analysis. Adopting such an economic program would no doubt produce some of the alleged results, but these effects would be small in size and slow in coming. In the meantime, the added purchasing power and expanded government deficit created by the tax cuts would add greatly to total demand, exerting strong upward pressure on prices and setting off an explosive upsurge in the inflation rate.

Inflation is already seen as public enemy number one. It is unpopular not only with working people but also with businesses, whose ability to plan for the future and to compete internationally is undermined by high and unpredictable rates of inflation. Thus, an upsurge of inflation would lead to great political turmoil with unpredictable consequences; many economists believe that it would force the Republican administration to adopt wage and price controls.

Redistribution by itself is not enough, and neither the traditional conservatives nor the supply-siders offer a program of institutional transformation that could allow another profitable round of capital accumulation. The institutional changes that they do propose are essentially negative, reversals of the expanded roles in the economy that the government has come to play during the twentieth century. These proposals are based on the ideological premise that the market does well when left alone and that all attempts to regulate it will make things worse rather than better. While conservatives are correct in charging that the government is now a source of problems for the economy, their ahistorical perspective blinds them to the fact that this government involvement came about because earlier crises could not have been resolved without it.

At the beginning of the twentieth century government regulation was invoked to prevent the destructive excesses of intercapitalist competition and to control some of business’s most extreme anticonsumer and antiworker activities. In the aftermath of the Great Depression and World War II, government budgets provided a much larger share of total spending in the economy and the federal government committed itself consciously to regulate the level of total demand in order to manage the business cycle and keep employment, production, and profits at high levels. As always, the contradictory nature of the capitalist system ensured that these measures would provide only temporary solutions. Thus it was that big government and its commitment to avoiding massive unemployment and widespread bankruptcies came to play a role in undermining continued expansion by adding to inflationary pressures and strengthening the position of working people relative to capitalists.

But the fact that the government’s economic impacts have interfered with profitable accumulation in the 1970s does not mean that simply scaling back the operation of the gov-
ernment will make things better. Those who prescribe in effect going back to the arrangements of the 1920s, when the private sector operated without the interference of big government’s high taxation, social regulation, or macroeconomic manipulation, would do well to remember that what the economy of the 1920s produced, after all, was the economy of the 1930s.

Beyond the Current Crisis: The Necessary Transformation

Although looking backward to the 1920s, or even to the nineteenth century, for images of how the economy ought to work or for readymade solutions to the current economic crisis is misguided and bound to fail, a look at the history of US capitalism may furnish improved understanding, both of the changes needed now and of the process by which these changes might come about. Just as the resolutions of each of the last two major economic crises of US capitalism involved significant increases in the government’s role in the economy, any resolution of the current crisis will necessarily involve a further growth in governmental involvement. The real issue here is not whether government will play an expanded role but, instead, what form that role will take and in whose interests the more fully planned and regulated economy will operate. (We will return to these questions below.)

The current stage of capitalist development is characterized by increasing centralization and concentration of capital; by increasing interdependence among economic units; by a growing dependence on massive investments in education, energy, and transportation; by pervasive and increasingly serious threats to the natural and social environment from profit-oriented private decision making; and by intensifying competition from government-coordi-
severe shortages.

Thus, wage and price controls by themselves are untenable for long in a capitalist society. Either shortages or imbalances will compel their being revoked (as with the Nixon wage and price controls of the early 1970s), or else they must be supplemented with a set of controls over investment and production so that decisions about these matters are not made solely in response to (the controlled) prices. If and when the need for a permanent incomes policy becomes compelling to policy makers, then simultaneous adoption of a permanent system of planning and physical controls, including government involvement in the allocation of credit — that is, in determining who will have access to the borrowed funds necessary to undertake large investment projects — will also be required. ²⁹

There are capitalists who recognize these realities and urge a conscious program of greater government coordination, planning, and control of the economy’s future direction. An outstanding example of this approach is Business Week, whose special issue on “The Reindustrialization of America” calls for “a new social contract between business, labor, government and minorities...a complete rethinking of economic policy-making, and sweeping changes in basic institutions.” ³⁰ Elements of the Carter administration were sympathetic to this approach.

But all of the elements of the conservative alliance that emerged victorious from the November elections seem unified in their belief that the private economy needs less, not more, governmental involvement. Reagan and his advisors seem determined to work toward getting the government “off the backs and out of the pocketbooks” of the American people, and especially American businesses. Investment planning, credit allocation, incomes policies — all are anathema.

Although the precise shape of Republican economic policy remains uncertain, this consensus among conservative politicians and economists seems to ensure that the next few years will take the economy away from, rather than toward, the type of fundamental restructuring necessary to resolve the current economic crisis. The likely result is that inflation, unemployment, slow growth, and other economic problems will intensify rather than diminish.

In this way, the current economic and political situation is strikingly similar to that of the 1930s. Although there is now general agreement that the appropriate policy response to the Depression would have involved stimulation of the private economy by means of massive deficit spending by the federal government, the consensus of respected authorities at the time was just the opposite: taxes must be increased and spending reduced in order to bring the federal budget into balance. Franklin Roosevelt won the presidency campaigning on just such a program. Even after some US economists
Similarly, our earlier analysis suggests that a substantial worsening of the present grim economic circumstances may be required to establish the political and economic environment that will allow the necessary structural transformation of the economy. The 1970s may yet come to look like the good old days.

**Getting There: Struggles and Transition in the 1980s**

So far, the advanced capitalist countries have always managed eventually to make structural transformations sufficient to recover from their earlier periodic crises and to embark upon new periods of capital accumulation. This suggests — although it certainly does not prove — that US capitalism will eventually move through and beyond the current crisis. What seems most uncertain now is not whether such a transformation will take place, but rather what the nature of the restructuring will be and in what way and how fast it will come about.

The next few years may or may not see the stagflation of the current economic crisis give way to a more severe period of economic collapse, comparable in severity to, although necessarily different in form from, that of the 1930s. *Business Week’s* hope that the current economic crisis could be surmounted through “a new social contract between business, labor, government, and minorities” seems increasingly unlikely to be realized in the short run. As the capitalist interests who have come to power in Washington push for redistribution and recession, there is little basis for labor’s participation in any such accord. The grim prognosis recently offered by Felix Rohatyn, the Wall Street investment banker who has overseen New York City’s financial crisis as head of the Municipal Assistance Corporation, may be more realistic. He foresees that the failure of liberal policies in the recent past will be at least
matched by the failure of conservative policies in the early 1980s and that the inevitable result will be a genuine "emergency." Only when the US is confronted with the existence of such an emergency does Rohatyn believe that the necessary program of restructuring and increased government economic involvement will have a serious chance of being implemented. 32

Whether or not crisis becomes "emergency," the early 1980s promise not only to bring continued hard times for working people, but also to provide a transition toward a new set of political and economic arrangements.

Although our earlier analysis indicates that government will come to play a much bigger role in the economy, the form and nature of its increased involvement are by no means predetermined. A broad range of alternative political and economic arrangements is possible. They are all compatible with renewed prosperity, but they have dramatically different implications for the nature and direction of the accumulation process, for the quality of working, political, and social life, and for the distribution of the burdens and benefits among social and economic groups.

Three quite different visions of the nature of increased government involvement in a restructured capitalism describe this range. Liberals, who fail to recognize the existence of fundamentally opposed class interests in modern capitalism, would like all major economic groups to agree to a "social contract" that protects profits but that provides for all major groups to share equitably, both in the sacrifices necessary to restore profitable economic growth and in the subsequent benefits of that growth. Conservatives, with a better understanding of the basic capital-labor conflict, would use the state systematically to intervene on the side of business and against the interests of working people, providing a relatively large amount of freedom to the former and imposing a relatively high degree of control on the latter. Socialists, who also recognize that there will be a fundamental divergence of interest between capitalists and workers as long as capitalism continues, would prefer a restructuring that provides the maximum feasible amount of popular, democratic control over governmental and corporate decision making and that results in as equal as possible sharing of the fruits of production.

The political and economic struggles of the coming years, therefore, should be understood not only in terms of their short-run implications, but also in terms of their impact on the eventual restructuring of US capitalism. Efforts at redistribution, deregulation, budget cutting, and recession may offer no real prospect of resolving the economic crisis. But by weakening the accumulated power of working people and by redefining the economic role of the government, they may serve to improve capitalist prospects for prevailing in future battles over restructuring. A move toward an expanded government role in the economy is no part of, and indeed is incompatible with, their short-term program. But their vigorous and successful pursuit of this program could improve conservative prospects for eventually achieving the sort of authoritarian, business-oriented US capitalism that they would most like to see emerge from the period of transition.

On the other hand, however, their short-term program (whatever it turns out to be) is very likely to worsen the overall state of the economy at the same time that it redistributes away from working people. This may serve to discredit conservatives, thereby weakening their position in future struggles over restructuring — and creating openings for more egalitarian and participatory proposals and suggestions.
The growing political and economic strength of working people that was one of the major factors in bringing about the current crisis is still, in spite of recent setbacks, very substantial. A conservative, or even a probusiness, outcome is far from assured. Working people and their allies should not undervalue their own strength, forget their past victories, or underestimate the potential significance of the whole range of struggles to be undertaken in the currently bleak political environment.

Footnotes

1. Focusing on what's happened to real wages and unemployment necessarily provides a superficial view of the impact of the economic hard times of the 1970s on people's lives. For one good discussion that provides much more detail on the personal and social impacts of these economic developments on different categories of working people, see Elliott Currie, Robert Dunn, and David Fogarty, "The New Immiseration: Stagflation, Inequality, and the Working Class," Socialist Review No. 54, (Nov.-Dec. 1980), pp. 7-31.


3. ERP, p. 265.

4. ERP, pp. 325, 236, 234, 273. Measuring and interpreting profits is a notoriously tricky and controversial endeavor; there are many alternative ways of measuring the level and rate of profit. The data here are for "corporate profits with inventory valuation and capital consumption allowances"; they are adjusted for inflation using the implicit price deflator for nonresidential fixed investment. For more extensive discussions of the measurement of profits and of recent trends in the US economy, see Thomas E. Weisskopf, "Marxian Crisis Theory and the Rate of Profit in the Postwar U.S. Economy," Cambridge Journal of Economics, Dec. 1979, pp. 341-378.

5. ERP, pp. 265, 259, 263-64. Between 1970 and 1980, the proportion of the total population that was in either the civilian labor force or the armed forces expanded from 41.9 to 47.9 percent. One part of the explanation for this is that the labor-force participation rate (those working or actively looking for work as a percentage of the total civilian noninstitutionalized population sixteen years of age or older) rose from 60.4 to 63.8 percent. (This was entirely the result of increased labor force participation by women, up from 43.3 to 51.6 percent; the participation rate for men fell.) A larger part of the explanation is the changing age structure of the population — the noninstitutionalized sixteen-and-over component rose from 68.4 to 74.6 percent of the total.

6. ERP, p. 335. The price index used here is the implicit price deflator for gross national product, whose average level rose by 80.9 percent between the two periods (ERP, p. 236). Standard & Poor's composite index of 500 stocks, a less well-known but more broadly representative measure of stock-market performance than the Dow Jones Industrial Average, did somewhat better, rising 10.8 percent between the two periods (ERP, p. 335); this implies a somewhat smaller, but still very substantial, fall in the real value of corporate stocks than that given in the text.

7. One group did succeed in getting much more out of the US economy during the 1970s: the petroleum exporting countries. The decade saw a huge increase in the total amount that the US paid each year for imported oil. In 1970, US expenditures on imports of petroleum and petroleum products were $2.9 billion, or 0.3 percent of GNP; by 1980, the total had risen to about $80 billion, or 3.0 percent of GNP. (ERP, p. 346; the total 1980 is based on reported data for the first three quarters of the year.) This tenfold increase in the portion of GNP devoted to oil imports means that that much less is available to workers, capitalists, or anyone else in the US.

8. ERP, pp. 318-19, 233. Federal spending rose from 17.5 to 17.9 percent of GNP between the two periods. Because federal "grants-in-aid" to state and local governments become part of state and local governments spending, they are not counted in this article as part of federal spending, even though they do show up in the federal budget; these grants-in-aid rose from 2.0 to 3.3 percent of GNP between the two periods. Other state and local spending rose from 9.8 to 10.2 percent of GNP.


10. While the federal government has increased the extent to which it has "delivered the goods" in terms of social-
welfare expenditures, it has done so in a highly impersonal and bureaucratic way. As Stuart Hall ("Moving Right," Socialist Review, Jan.-Feb. 1981, pp. 113-37) and Sheldon Wolin ("Reagan Country," New York Review of Books, Dec. 18, 1980, pp. 9-12) have emphasized, there has been a growing disjunction between the performance of the welfare state in providing material social welfare and the lack of popular democratic participation in, to say nothing of control over, governmental policies and operations. As a result, it is entirely understandable that government became increasingly unpopular at the same time that it was carrying through a massive increase in expenditures on social welfare programs.

Determining whether changes in the structure of taxation over the last decade have improved the relative position of either capital or labor is much more difficult. My own initial review of the available evidence provides no basis for thinking that there has been a significant change.

11. While the struggle in favor of enhanced environmental protection has been carried on by a coalition of forces from all classes, those who oppose it seem uniformly upset by its negative impact on the profits and freedom of action of business.


14. While most Marxists would agree with this general formulation, there is considerable disagreement about just which aspects of the capitalist development process are most important in turning periods of prosperity into periods of stagnation. Does additional investment, for example, become unprofitable because too much capital gets accumulated per worker, because capitalists run out of customers to buy their products, or because workers become too powerful? See the literature cited two footnotes earlier, especially Weisskopf, "Marxian Crisis Theory," for discussion of alternative positions.


22. See David A. Gold, "The Rise and Decline of the Keynesian Coalition," Kapitalistate No. 6 (Fall 1977), pp. 129-161.


24. The most popular recent statement of this position, Free to Choose, by conservative economics guru Milton Friedman and his wife Rose (Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1979) followed its ten-week run as a public television series with a still-continuing year-long stay on the New York Times Best Seller List.


31. An analysis along these lines is presented in more detail in Heilbroner, "Inflationary Capitalism."


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**DON'T BE SURPRISED**

*Radical America* has held the line for over three years. Unfortunately, due to recent increases in postal rates and the continuing rise of printing costs, we've had to reluctantly raise our subscription rates and the price of single issues. Beginning with Vol. 15, No. 3 (May-June 1981), the following rates will go into effect:

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it's easy if you try
no hell below us
above us only sky
imagine all the people
living for today...

imagine there's no countries
it isn't hard to do
nothing to kill or die for
and no religion too
imagine all the people
living life in peace...

imagine no possessions
i wonder if you can
no need for greed or hunger a brotherhood of man
imagine all the people
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STUART EWEN, the author of Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of Consumer Culture, teaches at Hunter College in New York City.
THE CONTINUING BURDEN OF RACE

A Review

Manning Marable

It is possible to conceive of any social fact as a natural phenomenon without implying that it is an inseparable function of social organization. Probably intolerance is as old as human society, but race prejudice has developed only recently in Western society... The problem of racial exploitation, then, will most probably be settled as part of the world proletarian struggle for democracy; every advance of the masses will be an actual or potential advance for colored people.

Oliver Cromwell Cox
Caste, Class and Race
New York, 1970

Once every other year or so a controversial study on race relations, Afro-American history, or black culture appears. During the Montgomery Bus Boycott in the early stages of the Civil Rights Movement, Kenneth Stampp's The Peculiar Institution was published. The book reviewed the history of black people in slavery and concluded that black men "are simply white men with black skins," nothing more or less. In the 1960s historian Stanley M.

This essay is a chapter in Manning Marable's new book, From the Grassroots: Social and Political Essays Toward Afro-American Liberation, South End Press, 1980. It is available as a paperback for $5.50 from South End Press, Box 68, Astor Station, Boston, Mass. 02123.
Elkins's *Slavery* attracted critical acclaim for its "Sambo thesis," the idea that through a series of cultural "shocks" Afro-Americans had completely lost their identity and ability to actively resist oppression. Several years ago two economic historians, Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman, won academic honors for *Time on the Cross*, a historical study which argued that blacks actually weren't too badly off in bondage, and that their white masters cared deeply about their family stability and general welfare. In each of these instances, black historians and researchers ultimately responded to these works by white scholars in a critical fashion, forcing them to rethink many of their peculiar opinions and mistaken assumptions about black life, thought, and culture.

Since the publication of E. Franklin Frazier's *Black Bourgeoisie*, however, no significant work of sociology has received such a controversial reception as that of University of Chicago professor William J. Wilson. Raising simultaneously a chorus of praises and scorn, his book, *The Declining Significance of Race*, became one of the decade's noteworthy political issues. Black sociologists, historians, and economists disputed its methodology, contested its theories, and rejected its conclusions. Panels at black academic workshops and conferences discussed the book's implications for governmental policy making related to blacks. On the other side of the color line, *The Declining Significance of Race* usually received generous and even enthusiastic accolades as a survey of black America. Like Elkins, Fogel, and Engerman, Wilson achieved the questionable distinction of having alienated an entire generation of black intellectuals. Not one of his opponents could accuse him openly of racism, however; Wilson was black, politically liberal, and had a reputation as a fair and even creative scholar. Rather than retreating before the black academic assault, Wilson simply chose to hold his ground.

*The Declining Significance of Race* has been reviewed countless times, and has been the recipient of considerable sympathetic support from left and liberal intellectuals who disagreed with the book's thesis and conclusion. In one important review, noted sociologist Pierre L. van den Berghe called Wilson's study an "important" work which was "the butt of political invective" and "ideological abuse." In his opinion, the book was "highly unpopular [because] it clashes head on with the interest of the black middle class which has a vested interest in the perpetuation of a racial definition of the situation. Wilson's position...is characterized by black 'radicals' as conservative, when, in fact, its implications are far more radical than the self-serving line defended by the black profiteers of apartheid and 'affirmative action.'" Van den Berghe concludes that the author much "be commended for his intellectual courage and integrity." Black intellectuals of similar persuasion have accused their colleagues of "Mau-Mau" tactics and phony "blacker-than-thou" posturing against the book. Wilson must be given a democratic right to express his opinions and the findings of his research, they insist. The *cause celebre* must be granted the very freedoms which other black intellectuals, in an earlier period of US history, had been grievously denied.

Any critique of this book must involve two issues, not wholly unrelated. The first is a consideration of the book itself, and its merits as a piece of research and sociology. Second, we must also examine the significance of the political debate surrounding the book. This critique takes the position that the idea of "race's declining significance" has great ideological appeal to numerous vested interests within the existing white elites in government, business,
and academic institutions. The question of continued white racism versus the lack of adequate capitalist economic mobility for blacks is in reality the heart of the entire controversy.

A CRITIQUE OF DECLINING SIGNIFICANCE

Wilson begins his work by considering the general development and character of the black experience within US economic and social institutions. Briefly, he argues that there have been three basic phases of black social development. The first and historically the longest period was that of the antebellum South, the world of the masters and slaves. Drawing heavily upon the recent historical studies of Marxist Eugene D. Genovese, Wilson accepts the theory that “by the end of the eighteenth century, the southern slaveholders had clearly established their hegemony” over both races’ economic, cultural, and social relations.” (p. 10) Despite feeble attempts at resistance, blacks developed a “close symbiotic relationship” with white racists which did not “threaten the norms of racial inequality.” (p. 35) “The slaves’ reliance on their masters for protection established a pattern of group dependency that was to persist several decades after slavery ended.” (p. 36) Wilson accepts that passive model for black antebellum existence, whereby the slave is isolated from having the decisive role in creating his own cultural norms, values, and politics.

The second phase of black social development includes the antebellum period in the North, and the entire Jim Crow years from 1865 until 1945 throughout the country. Wilson resorts to an economic determinist position to explain the creation of a split labor market and the continuation of white racism within all social relations. The “white working-class,” rather than the owners of capital, was responsible for the “elaborate system of Jim Crow segregation that was reinforced by an ideology of biological racism.” (p. 61) According to Wilson, the emergence of industrial capitalism gave birth to a white proletariat, which was able to transform its “labor power into increasing political power.” Modern white racism resulted partially from the inability of black workers to make the successful transition to capitalist affluence during the epoch of Jim Crow. Wilson writes that “there is, in fact, little empirical support for the Marxist’s contention that the capitalist class attempted to isolate the black labor force by imposing a system of racial stratification both in and outside of industries.” (p. 83)

COLORED PEOPLE OF BOSTON, ONE & ALL,
You are hereby respectfully CAUTIONED and advised, to avoid conversing with the Watchmen and Police Officers of Boston,
For since the recent ORDER OF THE MAYOR & ALDERMEN, they are empowered to act so.

KIDNAPPERS AND Slave Catchers,
And they have already been actually employed in KIDNAPPING, CATCHING, AND KEEPING SLAVES. Therefore, if you value your LIBERTY, and the Welfare of the Fugitives among you, shoot them in every possible manner, as so many BOUNTIES on the track of the most unfortunate of your race.

Keep a Sharp Look Out for KIDNAPPERS, and have TOP EYE open.
APRIL 24, 1861
Modern Times
The third phase of black development occurred after World War II, in the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. The major characteristics of this period are a collapse of white racism in economic relations, the concentration of electoral political power in metropolitan areas by black middle-class politicians, and the creation of a growing class division between upper and lower income groups within the black population as a whole. In Wilson's opinion, corporations have been primarily responsible for the "elimination of race in labor-management strife." Black youth are being recruited in steadily increasing numbers into corporate positions. The "movement of blacks from the rural South to industrial centers" was the beginning of greater economic opportunity and achievement for the budding black middle class. The only group that has not been able to progress economically has been the "black lower class." (pp. 99-100) He concludes that "given the structural changes in the American economy and the recent political changes that prohibit racial discrimination, the life chances of individual blacks seem indeed to be based far more on their present economic class position than on their status as (blacks)." (p. 111)

The immediate projection for black social development that Wilson proposes is one which minimizes race at the expense of economic categories. The expansion of the capitalist economic system has benefited first, the white working class during the period 1865-1945, and subsequently the black middle classes. The task for the future, Wilson implies, is to find a "capitalist solution" to the problems of the black lower economic groups. This would involve going "beyond the limits of ethnic and racial discrimination by directly confronting the pervasive and destructive features of class subordination." (p. 154) The means for achieving lower-class development would be a combination of government intervention and an expansion of incentives for private enterprise to provide jobs for the poor. Wilson essentially says that the black middle class has solved most, if not all, of its socioeconomic problems through upward mobility within capitalism; the same struggle must be waged for black lower income groups along similar lines of economic development. Race "declines in significance" and economic questions take the central place in our analysis of the black community.

The most glaring weakness of the book is its conceptual failure in approaching Afro-American history. Through each phase of black social development, Wilson accepts the view of blacks-as-objects of oppression rather than as active participants in their own history. Like other sociologists of the Chicago school, notably Robert Park, Wilson cannot conceive of an autonomous black culture with its own sense of aesthetics, religion, political ideas, and economic inclinations. His description of the antebellum period is essentially a top-down approach which negates the reciprocity of values and interests between masters and slaves. During the Reconstruction and strict-segregation era, the white working class was not uniformly racist; there were frequent instances of black-white alliances within politics and labor. Wilson's book is devoid of any appreciation for the permanent social movement of black people against all aspects of white oppression, and the line of continuity between Frederick Douglass and Martin Delany, W.E.B. DuBois and Marcus Garvey, Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. Any sociological study that claims to examine the evolution of blackness without also exploring black social-protest thought and activism cannot really speak accurately to our history.

Wilson's chief contribution to the discussion about black-white relations is his extensive use
of economic data. Throughout the book, Wilson attacks the "class interpretation" of "classical Marxism," yet places all of his major discussion about the evolution of the black community as a function of the immediate class changes within the capitalist economy. But what is "class" according to Wilson? After some hesitation, he explains that class "means any group of people who have more or less similar goods, services, or skills to offer for income...and who therefore receive similar financial remuneration in the market place." In other words, Wilson's theoretical basis for class is a function of income level.

There are many problems with this kind of approach to describing black social development. It ignores the role of consciousness and cultural phenomena within income groups.
which can, in turn, produce a “radical chic” within elements of the capitalist class and an antiunion “Archie Bunker” within sectors of the white working class. When income levels are not adjusted to the rate of inflation, which Wilson does not do, a false perception of rapid economic growth appears within the data on blacks in the US since 1945. Although the percentage of black women’s incomes compared to white women’s has risen from 49 percent in 1953 to 98 percent in 1974, this is not an indication of a “relaxation of racial tensions” in the private sector; what has occurred instead is a structural change of many black women from working as household domesticics and in agriculture to clerical and industrial working class positions of employment. This produces a statistical rise in income, but in terms of the entire political economy, black women still remain at the very bottom. The statistical rise in all black incomes after the Great Depression does not occur because “the center of racial conflict has shifted from the industrial sector,” but because blacks moved from rural, self-sufficient but “cash-poor” economic status into industries and lower- to middle-level jobs in the public sector. The result is that blacks as a group are still behind whites; no amount of statistical doubletalk will obscure this fundamental fact.

For Marxists, class does not directly connote income, but rather the position of a group relative to the means of production; the class status is defined by whether a group sells its labor power for a wage in order to live, or owns the productive process. Class is also influenced by other important factors, such as race. Using these criteria instead of Wilson’s, one concludes that the oppression of blacks has intensified in recent history. The great black middle class which Wilson repeatedly refers to is at best a small “elite.” Compared to whites, black businessmen control a steadily shrinking economic market for their products. In ideological terms, black workers and executives alike identify their interests along racial lines, and usually act accordingly, since the historical development of race relations has been predicated upon both the group’s lower position within the economic structure and the permanent ideological and cultural barrier of race between themselves and whites as a group.

If Wilson had approached the problem of racism as a partial byproduct of capitalist development within cultural and political relations, then he would be forced to admit that there can be no “decline in the significance of race” until the basic ownership of the economic system is made more democratic. Socialism is no guarantee that racial relations would become egalitarian, but it would provide the basic economic security and democratic reallocation of public services which are essential for a decent, humane way of life. Under these material conditions, race might simply become an element of human diversity and aesthetic value, rather than a continuing burden of economic bondage.

THE POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

Unlike other controversial scholarly works, The Declining Significance of Race does not merit the passionate defenses and assaults it has generated within social-science circles. Considered solely on its fundamentals, its scholarship, and its originality, it is neither clearly left nor right, anti-black separatist or pro-integrationist. It is quite simply mediocre. The debate about Wilson has less to do with the book itself than it does with the tenor of the times, the current state of Black America, and the role of social analysis and research within any historical period.

In Part III of this book I have described the
reaction of whites of all income groups, cultural backgrounds, and political loyalties against black society has become increasingly worse. In politics, the reaction is characterized by the law suits of Alan Bakke and Brian Weber against the principle of affirmative action; the passage of Proposition Thirteen in California and subsequent taxpayer "revolts" which, in turn, lead to a reduction of black employment within the public sector; the rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan and racial violence in the South.

Many of these problems were to be expected. After every social movement of historic importance there has been a subsequent period of cultural retrenchment and economic conservatism by the ruling elites. What is unusual about the most recent reaction is that it has generated an intellectual movement against the perceived "privileges" of minority groups which were achieved in the 1960s. The principal thrust of this movement has been the efforts of politically conservative social scientists and humanists to undermine affirmative action based on the criteria of race. For example, the Committee on Academic Non-Discrimination and Integrity was formed to oppose the ideal of "group rights" over the "meritocratic" ideal of "individual freedom." Historians Daniel Boorstin and Oscar Handlin, sociologist Nathan Glazer, economist Milton Friedman, and political ideologue Sidney Hook joined over five hundred other intellectuals in the committee. The group argues bluntly, in the words of Glazer, that "affirmative action" is an attempt to "undermine the very foundations of our society." In its media campaign against special treatment for blacks, the committee has described all racial quotas as "unjust, discriminatory and evil." According to George Roche, racial quotas merely advance "the minority member [who] doesn't have what it takes. Even
the minority member who earns his competence will surely be undermined as a result.”

Theoretically, intellectuals have published books which do not specifically attack the use of affirmative action for blacks as a group, but nevertheless postulate the thesis that race per se is no longer as viable a category for sociological research and policy making as it once was. These studies presuppose that the ideological and economic origins of racism have been sharply reduced and that other social categories have replaced race as the critical determinant in US social reality.

One school of thought argues that caste, rather than race, is the feature which distinguishes black-white relations. Professor John U. Ogbu, a Nigerian social anthropologist, takes this approach in his study *Minority Education and Caste: The American System in Cross-Cultural Perspective*. Ogbu examines the reasons given for lower academic performance of black students, and rejects the reasons usually given by black educators: that white institutions structurally deny the validity of the black cultural experience, and that ghetto schools are usually deficient in physical and financial resources compared to white schools. “Caste, rather than race,” Ogbu claims, sets a common tradition for an inferior education. The victim of white institutional racism thus becomes the creator of his own oppression. “Black students neither make sufficient efforts in their studies,” he concludes, “nor match their aspirations with accomplishments.”

Other recent schools of sociological thought approach the question of black oppression somewhat differently. Professor Robin M. Williams, Jr., writes that most ethnic and racial confrontations in U.S. society are ultimately resolved without violence. A concomitant proposition of his book, *Mutual Accommodation: Ethnic Conflict and Cooperation*, is that racial prejudice among whites has sharply dropped. His empirical data argues for the achievement of “social maturity” at the expense of special treatment or compensatory provisions for minority groups. Professor H. Edward Ransford carries this notion of black progress in the 1970s in his work, *Race and Class in American Society: Black, Chicano and Anglo*. Blacks suffer not from social distance or inequality, but from a lack of competitive status vis-a-vis the white middle class. Ransford insists that racial barriers and stratification no longer describe the black experience, given the relative rise of educational and economic opportunity for blacks. Any reaction by whites against blacks today is not “racism,” he suggests, but the social stress resulting from threats to their educational, economic, cultural, and political posture. In short, racism is again not the basic problem, for either blacks or whites.

When *The Declining Significance of Race* appeared, therefore, it presented nothing new — that is, its social analysis which minimized the role of racism within the composition of black economic and cultural life was not original. Others in the field of sociology had said as much in other ways, and will assuredly continue to do so. What was surprising to black academicians was, first, its lack of scholarly subtlety, the clear and unequivocal break from race that is proposed. Let us consider what would have occurred had Wilson selected the title, “The Increasing Significance of Class.”

The manuscript would have been published, but few people outside of the field of sociology would have noticed. The fierce criticism from black researchers, social scientists, and activists would have been virtually nonexistent. Wilson set the entire tone for the debate by choosing “race” as the central focus for discussion. In doing so, he sold many more copies of the book, he won the fierce loyalty of conservative
and liberal educators and their black allies, and he earned the wrath of black intellectuals and social activists.

More important were the social implications of Wilson's study for public policies affecting blacks. White intellectuals were looking for a theoretical framework to justify their assault against affirmative action, and The Declining Significance of Race provided them with new academic ammunition. Wilson clearly states (p. 110) that "affirmative action programs are not designed to deal with the problem of the disproportionate concentration of blacks in the low-wage labor market." Racism as a problem "in the economic order [has] declined," while "there has been a gradual shift of racial conflict from the economic to the sociopolitical order." (p. 111) Wilson observes that "the more educated blacks continue to experience a faster rate of job advancement than their white counterparts." Thus, "at this point there is every reason to believe that talented and educated blacks ... will continue to enjoy the advantages and privileges of their class status." (p. 153) Wilson evidently believes that any additional expansion of special programs, such as those created by the Association of American Medical Colleges to increase black enrollment at white institutions, merely obscure and perpetuate the greater problem of class oppression for lower income groups. "In the final analysis," he concludes, "the challenge of economic dislocation in modern industrial society calls for public policy programs to attack inequality on a broad class front," going beyond the "limits" of "racial discrimination."

In its popular context, Wilson was understood as saying: 1) that racial prejudice and discrimination were no longer major problems within the capitalist economic system; 2) that affirmative action programs for blacks were no longer necessary, and were in fact destructive to the black group's own best interest; and 3) that economic development along liberal, welfare-capitalist lines could alleviate any residual dilemmas with which blacks were afflicted. Race had "declined in significance" for public policy making. In the future, federal bureaucrats at the Department of Health, Education and Welfare could concentrate their corrective efforts toward "poorly trained and educationally limited blacks of the inner city," rather than toward blacks as a group. In effect, this approach minimizes the continuing burden of racism as the major feature in all black people's lives, regardless of their economic status, cultural achievement, and educational mobility. Wilson's thesis serves to perpetuate racism by transferring the historic guilt of whites as a group toward another criterion, namely the lack of adequate economic mobility for some blacks.

W.E.B. DuBois once observed that "all literature is," in the last analysis, "propaganda." Sociological studies do not exist in an empirical void, but either concur with or deny the existing socioeconomic reality. All academic work, directly or indirectly, perpetuates existing social dogma or raises questions about it. Theoretical work draws its basis from existing cultural and social norms, but attempts to project solutions to existing human problems. By any measure, The Declining Significance of Race prepares the way for a white reaction against black folks as a group and blackness in general. It is "propaganda," in DuBois's sense, of the white ruling elites in economics, culture, and politics. On these grounds alone it deserves our critical examination and a decent hearing. Beyond that, it has earned nothing else.

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THE LONG STRUGGLE FOR REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Linda Gordon

Considering how central abortion is to the attempt to build a new right-wing majority in the US, the Left has been remarkably weak in its defense of that right. Many leftists as well as liberals have been, if not exactly neutral, then confused and/or divided over abortion.

There is, unfortunately, less confusion on the Right. Abortion is now the leading symbol and political rallying point of the “pro-family” forces. For that reason alone it would be useful for the Left to gain a better understanding of the issue and to be able to respond more cohesively. Abortion is important, however, not only because the new wave of conservatism has made it so. It is important in itself as a vital precondition for continued struggle for women’s equality and for a Left constituted on the basis of that equality.

The right of women to reproductive self-control is not, as it sometimes appears, understandable as a single issue. Viewed as an abstract, ahistorical ethical question abortion is in itself complicated. No reasonable person ought to deny the validity of ethical concerns about fetal life, women’s life and health, and the difficulties of making decisions about reproduction since women bear the brunt of the responsibility but men also play a biological role. The issue can only be clarified on the basis of a historical analysis which shows that the abortion issue is at the center of a cluster of issues that are absolutely central to the construction of a viable socialist vision: issues of free sexuality, the “family” and other forms of human dependency, and gender.

Even feminists have demonstrated difficulty in responding clearly to the attack on abortion, largely because of the tendency to treat abortion as a single-issue reform. It is the lack
of a historical dimension that leaves us most vulnerable to rhetoric about the destruction of fetuses and the arrogance about human life, that draws us into participation in a debate whose very terms and forms are wrong and loaded against us. The struggle for reproductive rights has a modern history of over 150 years, and even the feminist part of that struggle has gone through significant transformations. We will be on stronger ground if we defend our proabortion position concretely, in terms of people’s needs, particularly women’s, in our specific society today, rather than in abstract universals.

Thus I offer here a historical perspective which should illuminate the contemporary abortion controversy. I want to use the historical narrative to answer several related questions: (1) why reproductive rights arose as a political issue when it did; (2) why reproductive rights have continued to be so controversial; (3) why the attitude of the Left toward women’s reproductive rights has been so ambivalent; (4) what the relationship of abortion to other forms of reproductive control has been; and (5) why there have been changes, and are still conflicts, in feminist thinking about reproductive rights.

THE FIRST REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS CAMPAIGNS

Many forms of what we today call birth control were widely used in ancient societies: abortions, douches, withdrawal, condoms, and devices to cover the cervix. The social regulation of the use of these techniques varied in different times and places according to the context of economic and political relations. For example, birth control was generally practiced and was uncontroversial in preagricultural societies where limited food sources and the need for mobility made it economically disadvantageous to have many children. In contrast conditions in peasant societies made large families an asset. The high infant mortality rate necessitated many pregnancies; thus birth contrq was suppressed. Its use continued in an underground manner, however, and was probably exceptional, not routine. As a result of suppression, the quality of birth-control technology declined, and women came to rely more on dangerous abortion-causing drugs than on the effective home-made spermicides which had been plentiful in the pre-Christian era.

A GENUINE MOTHER.

We affirm in the most absolute manner that words can be used that mother love is located exactly where this backhead projects most. To be a true, natural mother is to have this faculty highly developed. Young men, fix this picture in your minds.
It is important to note here that when a modern birth control movement arose in the nineteenth century US, it was not because of any new technological developments in contraception. From the earliest prehistoric evidence until the 1870s there were no significant technological advances in birth control whatever.

What did change dramatically in the early nineteenth century US were two social factors: the birth rate and the situation of women. These factors created a large-scale political demand for birth control.

In the early nineteenth century urbanization and industrialization began to create living conditions in which large families were no longer economical. The birth rate in the US has been falling steadily since 1810. Since the late eighteenth century there had been evidence of rebellion among women, and by the 1820s thousands of women had become active in many social reform movements — temperance, health education, antiprostitution, religious revivalism, and abolitionism. While none of these movements was explicitly feminist until the end of the 1830s, they were all drawing women into public, highly visible activity in defiance of the convention that they ought to remain passive and domestic.

Women’s expression of support for reproductive control was motivated from the start by a combined concern for family size and for women’s self-control. At the beginning of the century, in a society with a strong element of prudery, it was hard to find evidence of the use of contraception, and at first puzzled observers thought that there was a physiological cause for the decline in fertility! But by the 1840s the demand for birth control had outstripped the availability of contraceptive techniques, and new evidence appeared: a rise in abortions. Furthermore, the average abortion client was no longer a single girl “in trouble,” but was more likely to be a married woman who already had children.

The first explicit birth-control demand by the women’s rights movement also appeared in the 1840s: a call for Voluntary Motherhood. The phrase had neither antimotherhood nor antifamily implications; Voluntary Motherhood advocates argued that willing mothers would be better mothers. In their line of argument motherhood had broader connotations than it has for us today. A century ago both feminists and nonfeminists assumed (at least I have found no exception) that women were naturally those who should not only give birth to children, but should also do the primary childraising and even perform the nurturing functions for
the whole society: maintaining friendship networks, cultural institutions, and rituals, creating beautiful environments, and caring for husbands, relatives, and other women. Their feminism manipulated the cult of domesticity, translating it into what was called "social housekeeping," spreading the virtues of an idealized home throughout the society. Thus, in the nineteenth century the overall demand for women's rights was frequently couched in terms of greater respect for motherhood and the family.

Voluntary Motherhood was a campaign focused exclusively on women. It was distinct from two other, separate, streams in the history of contraception. One was neo-Malthusianism, or population control, a plan to ameliorate social problems by greatly reducing the size of populations. This ideology said nothing about women's rights; a satisfactory solution to overcrowding in a country might be to sterilize half the women and let the other half have all the children they wanted. Neo-Malthusianism came late to the US because underpopulation, not overpopulation, was the dominant fear here until World War II.

The other stream, eugenics, was an effort to apply population control differentially and thus reduce the size of certain unwanted human "types." At first, eugenic thought was primarily directed at the elimination of idiocy, criminality, and drunkenness, on the assumption that such undesirable qualities are hereditary. After the Civil War, however, with social stratification deepening, eugenics took on quite a different orientation. The upper-class WASP elite of the industrial North became acutely aware of its own small-family pattern, in contrast to the continuing large-family preferences of immigrants and the rural poor. As early as the 1860s the fear of so-called "race suicide" emerged. In that phrase, race was used ambiguously to equate the "human race" with the WASPs. Fears of the loss of political (and social and economic) dominance to an expanding population of "inferiors" stimulated a plan for reestablishing social stability through differential breeding: the superior should have more children, the inferior fewer. (In the twentieth century blacks and the welfare poor have replaced immigrants and sharecroppers as the primary targets of eugenic policies.

THE FEMINIST REJECTION OF CONTRACEPTION

Thus by the end of the century there were three separate reproduction-control movements — Voluntary Motherhood, population control, and eugenics. All three were to some extent responses to the fact that birth control was being widely used. And all three to some extent required better reproductive-control techniques. Yet on another, crucial, issue there was a sharp difference among them: the eugenists and population controllers supported the legalization of contraception, but the Voluntary Motherhood advocates opposed it. For birth control they proposed abstinence — either periodic, based on a rhythm method, or long-term, allowing for intercourse only when a conception was desired. Their position was the more noteworthy since they were the ones most blamed for the rise in birth-control use. Anti-feminists in the mid-nineteenth century, just as today, charged feminism with destroying motherhood and the family and encouraging sexual licentiousness. They were, and are, partly right: despite their denials, the feminists, by raising women's self-respect and aspirations, did lend implicit support to birth-control use.

The antifeminist backlash was able to use its rhetoric to win several important victories. First, a physicians' campaign to outlaw abortion got most states to pass laws against it
(abortion in the first few months of pregnancy had previously been legal); second, in the mid-nineteenth century the Catholic Church also banned abortion for the first time, having previously accepted it in the early months; third, in 1873, the Comstock law made it a federal crime to send obscene material through the mail, and listed birth control as an obscene subject. Most opponents of birth control at this time did not distinguish contraception from abortion, and called it murder and immorality. Nevertheless, the repression did not work. Then as now, birth control use continued to rise and the birth rate to fall.

It bears repeating that this struggle took place with no new technological inventions at all. The only nineteenth-century contribution to birth control technology, the vulcanization of rubber, which permitted the manufacture of better condoms and diaphragms, had no impact in this country until this century. What, then, were the causes of the decline in the birth rate, the rise of pro-birth-control movements, and the backlash against birth control?

In the late nineteenth century a debate raged about this very causal question, with one side blaming feminism, arguing that women, stirred up by licentious propaganda, were rejecting their duties to society and seeking selfish gratification, and the other side blaming the industrial economy, asserting that children were no longer either respectful to or economically profitable for their parents. In fact, these two explanations are both correct, and were fundamentally the same. Feminism itself was a response to that industrial economy which had robbed women of their traditional productive labor and turned them — at least those of the prosperous classes, who were most likely to become feminists — into unpaid, disrespected
housekeepers. Feminism was also an ideological response to the liberal individualism that was once the revolutionary credo of the bourgeoisie and later became the justifying ideology of capitalism. The convergence between feminism and a new kind of economic organization can further be seen in the fact that decisions about birth control and family size were generally not controversial within families. Husbands and wives shared new class aspirations which included new views of the place of women as well as of family size. In the late nineteenth century it was clear that the birth-rate drop started first among the new professional, managerial, and upwardly mobile strata who cared most about educating their children well — often an expensive process. From here the small family tendency moved both upward into the capitalist class and downward into the working class, just as feminist ideas moved both up and down from their middle-class origins. The biggest differential in family size was not class, defined in a static way, but urbanization. By and large, migrants — both immigrants and southern blacks — slowly relinquished their large-family preferences, settled for fewer children, and adopted positive attitudes toward birth control.

THE CONTRADICTIONS OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY FEMINISM

Why then did nineteenth-century feminists cling so hard to such a backward position as their condemnation of contraception? (And they were very tenacious: as late as the 1920s older feminists were lined up against Margaret Sanger and other birth-control pioneers.) One reason is that they wanted Voluntary Motherhood not as a single-issue reform, but as part of a broad movement for the empowerment of women, and some possible reforms within the spectrum of women's needs contradicted each other, creating a double bind for the feminists. A second reason lies in a great intellectual and cultural ambivalence within feminism: it represented both the highest development of liberal individualism and a critique of it. Let me discuss these briefly.

The Voluntary Motherhood advocates were part of a general women's rights movement: they were also working for suffrage, property rights, and better job opportunities, and some of the more daring worked for divorce rights. Their notions of what women needed, of justice and human dignity, were inevitably influenced by their concrete historical experience of what women's lives were like. For example, in the 1870s few women, and almost no married women, working-class or middle-class, worked outside their homes for wages. (In 1890, the first year for which we have reliable figures, only 5% of married women and 18% of all women worked for wages; the figures were considerably less in 1870.) Nor did the feminists anticipate a massive change in the societal norm that women spend all their time in their homes as housewives and mothers. The argument to reduce family size so as to enable women to leave their homes would not have made sense to them. On the contrary, they had good reason to argue that women needed to win rights and respect within their current wageless, domestic situation. In addition, women did very little socializing with men. They spent most of their working and leisure time in the exclusive company of other women. We might call this era extremely "homosexual." Women normally had their most intense emotional bonds with other women. Our twentieth-century distinction between emotional and sexual attraction may not have been appropriate to the nineteenth-century
understanding of women’s relationships; there
appeared to be neither an urgent dread of
lesbianism nor a pressure toward intensity
about heterosexual relationships. These aspects
of women’s lives certainly affected their
reproductive and sexual attitudes.

Like all feminists, nineteenth-century
feminists had a commitment to raise the status
of all women (and these middle-class feminists
even tried, however imperfectly, to grasp the
greater problem of poor women) and to see
women as whole people with many needs. This
meant that they had to face a number of contra-
dictions. First, they realized that while women
needed freedom from excessive childbearing
they also needed the status and self-respect that
motherhood brought. Motherhood then was
usually the only challenging, dignified, and
rewarding work that women could get (and still
is, for the majority of women). Second, they
understood that in addition to freedom from
pregnancy, women also needed freedom from
male sexual tyranny, especially in a society
which had almost completely suppressed
accurate information about female sexuality
and replaced it with information and attitudes
so false as virtually to guarantee that women
would not enjoy sex. Abstinence as a form of
birth control may well have been the solution
that made most sense in their particular histor-
cal circumstance. Abstinence helped women
strengthen their ability to say no to their
husbands’ sexual demands, for example, while
contraception and abortion would have
weakened it. Nineteenth-century feminists have
often been considered prudish, and indeed they
were reluctant, for example, to name the sexual
parts of the body; but they were not reluctant to
speak of marital rape, which traditionalists
found even more shocking. A few feminists
even began discussing the possibility of forms
of sexual contact other than intercourse as a
means of nonprocreative sex, thus initiating a
challenge to phallic sexual norms that was
continued a century later. In other words, some
of them had figured out that it wasn’t sex they
disliked so much as the kind of sexual activity
they had experienced.

The Voluntary Motherhood advocates faced
a second set of contradictions in their ambiv-
alent attitude toward individualism. The
essence of their feminism was their anger at the
suppression of the capabilities and aspirations
of women as individuals. They envisaged a
public sphere of adults equal in rights, though
unequal in native abilities, with each individual
guaranteed maximum opportunity for self-
development. But at the same time they were
firmly committed to the family. They did not
challenge gender, or even “sex roles.” They did
not challenge heterosexual marriage based on a
firm sexual division of labor (man the chief
breadwinner, woman the mother in the
expanded sense described above), even though
this family form condemned women to
remaining primarily out of the public sphere.
Many of them could see the problems with this
arrangement, but all of them felt sure that the
family was an absolutely essential institution
for the maintenance of civilization. At times
some of their rhetoric suggests that they
glanced the possibility of the further individ-
ualization and atomization of people that the
wage-labor system could bring, and feared it.
Indeed, many feminists of this era criticized
liberal individualism itself. Some suggested that
the very concept of the individual in modern
society had been formulated in a male-suprem-
acisit way. Some also criticized the liberal view
of inevitable tension between individual and
society, and the liberal-constitutional manner
of adjudicating such conflict. Their fear of that
individualism reverberates in many socialists
and feminists today: a world in which self-
improvement, competition, and isolation dominate human energies is not appealing. Indeed, what civilization meant to nineteenth-century feminists was the tempering of the individual struggle for survival by instilling greater social values and aspirations within individuals. This process, they believed, was supported by women’s nurturing role in the division of labor. And yet their very movement was increasing the number of women who joined that atomized world of the labor market and as a result were forced to neglect socially nurturing work. Nor could the feminists produce a real model for an alternative individualism — no radicals have yet been able to do so. In this context their historic compromise must be seen sympathetically: they argued that more respect for women should be used to reinforce motherhood, to give it more freedom, respect, and self-respect. Hence, their reluctance to accept a form of birth control that might allow a rejection of motherhood entirely.

THE SOCIALIST-FEMINIST SUPPORT FOR BIRTH CONTROL

Feminists changed their mind about contraception in the early twentieth century. Again, no new techniques affected them; rather, after they changed their mind they took the initiative in finding the technology they needed. Two leaders, Emma Goldman and Margaret Sanger, separately travelled to Europe where rubber diaphragms were being prescribed in labor-party and trade-union-funded health clinics, and personally imported these devices into the US. In the US, as in Europe, these new pro-birth-control feminists were mainly in and around the Socialist Party. It is logical, I think, that socialist-feminists were the first to take a procontraception position. Since they were concerned with the working class, they understood the consequences and the hardships of the increased employment of women; since they were attempting to build a working-class movement, they saw the weakness of a movement in which women were politically immobilized by sexism and the exclusive responsibility for large families; since they rejected religion, and viewed the traditional morality as a form of social control beneficial to the capitalist class, they saw some liberating possibilities in a freer sexual life.

All along, feminists had been responding to family changes and trying to direct and even initiate family change. The trajectory of change that formed the primary experience of most nineteenth-century feminists was a decline of patriarchy that produced greater independence for grown children without enhancing very much the autonomy of women (with one exception — educated single women). In that context it was reasonable for women to cling to their work as mothers as the basis for their social status and desired political power. By the

Volunteers selling copies of the Birth Control Review, Margaret Sanger's pioneering publication which first appeared in 1917.
early twentieth century the further development of industrial capitalism had begun to allow a vision of greater independence for women. Not only prosperous women but also working-class women in the World War I era were experiencing the effects of public education, mass employment of women, and the complete transformation of virtually the entire male population into a wage-labor force, with extensive commodity production replacing most household production.

These changes had both negative and positive consequences for women. Negatively, the separation of home from production, in a capitalist culture, demeaned the social status of motherhood. Positively, the devaluing of domestic work allowed a vision of a public role for women, in work and in politics, that for the first time in the history of feminism made women want equality. (Early feminists did not dream of full equality between the sexes.) And equality for women requires reproductive self-control.

When socialist feminists first adopted pro-birth-control positions in the early twentieth century, nonfeminist socialists had divided reactions. The majority of the US Socialist Party, for example, believed that at best birth control was a dangerous distraction from the class struggle. Some responded even more negatively, out of a traditional anti-neo-Malthusian appraisal that the major purpose of reproductive control was to reduce the numbers and hence the strength of the working class. Some socialists, however, supported the birth control movement, if weakly, because they believed it could reduce women's domestic burdens and free them for greater political activity in support of their class interests.

RACISM AND BIRTH CONTROL

In contrast, black radicals in the US in the 1910s tended to support birth control far more unanimously. They saw it as a tool for the self-determination of black Americans. In the 1920s and afterward, however, birth control was increasingly absorbed into programs aimed not at self-determination but at social control by the elites. Eugenics became a dominant motif in the effort to legalize contraception and sterilization, and even birth controllers from the socialist-feminist tradition, such as Margaret Sanger, made accommodations with the eugenists. These policies cost the birth controllers most of their black support (and many of their white radical supporters fell away as well). Sanger and other spokespeople used racist rhetoric, urging reduction of the birth rates of the "undesirables"; private birth-control clinics in the 1910s and 1920s experimented with evaluating the eugenic worth of their clients and advising them on the desirability of their reproductive intentions. The first publicly funded birth-control clinics appeared in the South in the 1930s, sold to southern state public health services on the grounds that they would lower the black birth rate. Throughout the country during the Depression, birth control was touted as a means of lowering welfare costs. Eugenists also supported sterilization as a means of population control. It was probably in the 1930s that the first widespread use of involuntary and coercive sterilization occurred, although the evidence did not reach the white-dominated press until the 1970s. (A 1979 study showed that 70% of hospitals in the United States were failing to comply with sterilization guidelines laid down by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare.)
Thus the cry of genocide that began to be raised against reproductive-control campaigns in the 1930s, and continues, is not wrong; it is only too simple. It arises from at least three sources. First, the tensions between white feminism and black liberation movements that arose in the struggle over the Fourteenth Amendment underlie this problem, and have virtually blotted out the contribution of black feminists not only now but historically as well. So convoluted are these tensions that today antiabortionists have manipulated the fear of genocide in a racist way — suggesting, for example, that black and working-class women do not need or want reproductive self-determination, that they are satisfied with their status, that aspirations for independence and prestige exist only among privileged white women.6

Second, beyond this general distrust lay actual racism in the white-dominated women’s movement, which was clearly manifest in the birth-control movement as much by socialists as by liberal feminists. Its pattern resembled that in the white-dominated, male-dominated labor movement. Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s appeal for giving the vote to educated women in preference to ignorant men is of a piece with trade-union denunciation of blacks as scabs even as they excluded them from their unions.

Third, and most pertinent here, however, is the dominance of the relatively conservative population-control and eugenics programs over the feminist birth-control program. Planned Parenthood’s small-family ideology and its international emphasis on sterilization rather than safe and controllable contraception have far overshadowed its feminist program for women’s self-determination. Most Americans do not distinguish between birth control as a program of individual rights and population control as social policy. Moreover, many scholars perpetuate this ideological confusion and fail to make this essential analytic distinction. The tendency to fetishize reproductive-control technology, as if the diaphragm or the pill were the news rather than the social relations that promote their use, further legitimizes this analytic mush.

**ABORTION BECOMES THE ISSUE**

The distinctions among different kinds of reproduction control started to reappear in the 1960s with the emergence of abortion as the key reproductive-control issue.

In the early twentieth century, most feminists did not support abortion. There were several reasons for this: their own conviction that sex still belonged primarily in marriage, where contraceptive use was more likely to be systematic and where an unplanned child was not usually the total disaster it might be for an unmarried woman; and the fact that most poor women still had no access to decent medical care. The contemporary drive for abortion rights was a response to several factors which developed gradually in the period 1920-1960. First, there was a great increase in teenage sexual activity without contraceptive use — in other words, it was not technology that increased sexual activity but the behavior that increased the demand. Second, there was a great increase both in the number of woman-headed families and in families absolutely dependent on two incomes, thus making it no longer possible for mothers to stay home with an unplanned baby; this increased the demand for abortion among married women for whom contraception had failed. The third and perhaps most surprising factor behind the movement for abortion rights was the relative underdevelopment of contraception. Far from being an area of great progress, the field of contraception still lags well behind our need for
it. Women must still do almost all the contraception, and are forced to choose between unwieldy, dangerous, or irreversible methods.

The changes in the dominant feminist positions about birth control should now be clearer. For feminists, reproductive control is a part of an overall calculus of how to improve women's situation. The birth-control campaign of the late 1960s and 1970s was not a single-issue reform campaign like that of the population controllers and eugenists who had dominated from the 1920s through the 1950s. Feminists always have to balance the gains and losses from struggles for contraception and abortion against the other problems women face such as unequal employment opportunity, unequal wealth, unequal education, and unequal domestic responsibilities. Thus, a position appropriate to one historical era was not appropriate in another when the balance of women's needs and possibilities had changed.

Contemporary feminist positions about birth control are still ambivalent, however. Within the reproductive-rights rubric, groups have primarily emphasized single issues: abortion, sterilization abuse, and gynecological self-help. Few groups that support abortion have tried to address the general problems of sex and motherhood. The questions of the proper place of sex and motherhood in women's lives are being asked now mainly by the New Right, because of the "crisis" in the family. This alleged crisis is not new; indeed, such a crisis was the very foundation of feminism two hundred years ago, the crack in the social structure that made feminist critique and action possible. It is hardly a criticism of contemporary feminism that it has not been able to produce a definitive program for liberated sex and parenthood. These failings are based on real structural problems; these problems are part of what propels the women's movement,
just as they propel the right-wing antifeminist movement. And the continuation of these structural problems and the contradictions they create for women guarantee the continuation of some sort of feminism.

The danger is, however, that feminism on the defensive will try to adapt to a beleaguered situation by participating in its own weakening. The temptation to devote all one’s energies to defense and to single-issue coalitions (clearly a good deal of this is necessary) is one such weakening. The twin temptations, to exaggerate how isolated we are, and to underestimate how removed our feminist communities are from the “moral majority,” are both weakening. Perhaps the greatest danger to us all comes from the temptation on the part of the nonfeminist Left to try to escape the stigma of “anti-family” which the New Right stamps on all feminist demands.7

Indeed, one of the achievements of the antiabortionists has been to make abortion a symbol. That is, they make it stand for more than a single addition to the legal repertoire of birth-control possibilities. Abortion opponents claim that abortion is part of a moral logic or mentality, sometimes called the contraceptive mentality. The logic leads inexorably from birth control to abortion to euthanasia: that is, it leads away from any protection of the human right to life. The more conservative the critics of abortion, the more they are likely to also identify another logic, about sex and family, and to argue that abortion leads to certain
libertine choices in these areas as well, choices that reject stability and traditional religious and secular law.

In many respects these antiabortionists are right. Liberal supporters of abortion who try to isolate it from implications about sex, the family, and a humanist view of the possibilities of planning reproduction are not at all convincing. They may themselves believe that the issue is separable from larger political and moral judgments. (The population-control establishment, for example, uses the phrase “contraceptive mentality” and would like to instill it in people throughout the world while denying its connections to particular class, gender, family, and sexual perspectives.) They are unable to fool most people into such compartmentalization, however.

Our best defense of the right to abortion is to welcome and accept these charges that we have a different moral and sexual logic. The right to abortion, and our defense of it, is a product of a long chain of historical progress, particularly in sexual equality, sexual freedom, and individualism. These three changes have been produced largely by the capitalist system itself, and it is that system which continues to propel that change — drawing women into the paid labor force, legitimating sexual exhibitionism and casualness, eroding the cement for many of the bonds that unite people. The role of feminism in this process has been less influential. The primary influence of feminism has been in modifying these changes so as to improve women’s position (in the labor force, in sexual relationships, etc.), and in criticizing the selfish, individualistic extremes of these developments.

But in the contemporary movement feminism still retains some of the ambivalence about individualism that it had a century ago. The most recent wave of feminism has brought a challenge to gender itself, and has proposed an attitude of open-mindedness to the question of the nature of femininity or masculinity. The rejection of gender is an ultimate commitment to the right of individuals to develop freely. But unfortunately, especially because of the weakness of the socialist component of contemporary feminism, the most publicly visible heroines of this individualism also suggest its problems. For example, consider the widespread image of the “liberated woman,” complete in herself with briefcase, career, sex partners, and silk blouse, but absolutely without nurturing responsibilities. Somehow — and I can’t say how — socialist and other radical feminists need to try to project a contrasting image of what a “liberated woman” might be like. (The fact that this concept of a liberated woman is false and ahistorical in itself, that women cannot be liberated individually and without revolutionary change, is beside the point, because the contemporary media will continue to manufacture such images.)

This different image must somehow combine individual autonomy with deep, lasting, and interdependent commitments to others. Only with such commitments is individualism viable and/or desirable. This view should not be interpreted as a call for a return to the ideology of sex, love, and family with revisions to the concept of family that would permit nonlegal marriage and homosexuality. We should by now have learned enough about the inexplicable varieties of people’s sexual interests, the difficulties of living with others, and the large area of unpredictability in what makes for good childrearing, to know that we simply cannot prescribe very well how people should live.

If we could communicate all this, our abortion position would become clearer, even to our opponents. After all, it is likely that what
many abortion opponents are afraid of is a kind of uncontrolled individualization that we too would abhor. I am not suggesting that we try to propagandize right-to-lifers with our utopian vision. Most of them are real conservatives, involved in a deeply antidemocratic, anti-civil-libertarian, violent, and sexist philosophy. But there is the basis in this country for formulating a progressive response to our current crisis. The Left’s inability to articulate and unify around a progressive response, at least to the sex-and-family part of the current crisis, has left many nonconservatives swayed by the humanitarian rhetoric of the anti-abortion movement.

The current rhetorical hegemony of the antiabortionists is such that we cannot always choose our own slogans. When asked about abortion, we can hardly count on the space to describe our entire philosophy and feminist vision. But if we are able in other work to project our confidence that a free but not atomized society is possible, even the short slogans we use about abortion — like women’s right to her life, or voluntary motherhood, or even “choice” if we are stuck with it — will have broader connotations.

Footnotes

1. I have told this story more fully in my book, Woman’s Body, Woman’s Right: A Social History of Birth Control in America (Viking and Penguin, 1977). In the interpretation offered in this paper, I am indebted to ideas garnered in my discussions with many feminist scholars, and particularly the work of Ellen DuBois and Allen Hunter.

2. See Gordon, Woman’s Body, Woman’s Right, chapter 3. For corroboration in a more recent historical study, see James Mohr’s Abortion in America (Oxford University Press, 1978), chapters 2 and 3.

3. This view of feminism was offered by the nineteenth-century suffragists themselves; it can be found argued well in several general surveys of the women’s rights movement, including Aileen Krador’s Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement.

4. Today many feminists use the term “patriarchy” as a general synonym for male supremacy; in that sense it would be questionable to assert that patriarchy had declined. I use the term “patriarchy,” however, in a specific historical sense: referring to a system of family production in which the male head of the family (hence patriarchy, meaning rule of the father) controls the wealth and labor power of all family members. In a patriarchal system, for example, unmarried and childless men lacked the power of fathers since they often lacked labor-power; by comparison it would be hard to argue that today unmarried or childless men were weaker than fathers. The development of industrial production (incidentally, in its “socialist” as well as capitalist varieties) tended to weaken patriarchy by providing opportunities for economic and social independence for children and women. Thus, notice that patriarchy is a system of generational as well as gender relations.


6. For example, Elizabeth Moore, in In These Times, Feb. 28, 1979.


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ABORTION
Which Side Are You On?

Ellen Willis

This year's big postelection cliche is that the Democrats were crushed because they had "no ideas." This is true; it's also beside the point. Liberals never have ideas; their function is to moderate the ideas of radicals and present themselves as a palatable alternative to those wild-eyed ideologues out there. Ironically, the liberal establishment has done its best to help discredit and isolate the radical Left — yet without the specter of revolution as an argument for reform, liberals are helpless to fend off attack from the right. Since they scorn ideology, they can't cope with the Right's ideological offensive. On the contrary, because their instinct is to compromise, they tend to move to the right themselves. Their only weapons against the Right's passionate commitment to its social vision are good will and moderation. It's no contest. Faced with a militant, determined conservatism, organized liberalism has taken less than a decade to collapse virtually without a fight.

Only a radical opposition with a credible alternative vision can hope to challenge the Right, mobilize the liberal Left, and compete for the hearts and minds of the sluggish middle. Unfortunately, there is at present no substantial radical opposition and no immediate prospect of one. For the most part the socialists, pacifists, antinukers, and "progressives" of various stripes who regard themselves as left of the Democratic Party are nearly as shallow, confused, and poorly equipped to deal with the Right as the liberals.

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Despite disagreements and differing emphases within its ranks, the Right has a coherent agenda. Its answer to our social problems is to strengthen established authority — to unleash big business, keep the underclasses in their place, support the patriarchal family and organized religion. It has managed to persuade large numbers of people that the remedy for their anxieties about a deteriorating economy, the rebellion (and growth) of minorities, and changes in sexual roles and mores is repression. While economic reaction is an integral part of the conservative program, its cutting edge has been the “pro-family” crusade, especially the antiabortion movement. The attack on feminism and sexual freedom has not only rallied people — and money — in support of the Right’s overall program; it has also contributed to people’s fatalistic acceptance of the argument that the economic crisis is their fault, that they’ve demanded too much and been too self-indulgent.

Profamily propaganda plays on deeply ingrained feelings of guilt and powerlessness to which few of us are immune. It reinforces the messages we received in early childhood — that our sexual desires are bad, that freedom is immoral, that we’re incompetent to run our own lives, that we need both protection and punishment from Big Daddy. To men it offers a trade-off — submit to the power of the state, church, and corporation, but be the boss at home. Because these messages go straight for the unconscious they poison the social atmosphere; even people who know better become defensive, ambivalent, and afraid to fight back.

The only way the Left can win is to counter the Right’s authoritarian message with a democratic one. While the Right appeals to people’s terror of insecurity, we can appeal to the equally profound longing for freedom. But that means confronting the cultural issues head on. People who don’t believe they have the right to manage their own intimate lives are not going to fight for economic self-determination, nor will they listen to a Left that ignores the issues of family relations so central to their lives. Yet except for radical and socialist feminists, the Left has failed to take a strong, clear stand on sexual politics, and this failure has seriously impaired its ability to organize on the economic, racial, and environmental fronts.

Most leftists equate progressivism with commitment to economic equality, and resist recognizing the need for a social analysis that integrates economic and cultural radicalism. Among those who share this fundamental bias, the spectrum of opinion on feminism and sex ranges from mildly liberal to frankly conservative. On one end are leftists who admit the existence of economic discrimination against women, and maybe even make noises about the Hyde Amendment (because it targets the poor), but are otherwise more or less oblivious to sexual issues. To their right are DSOC-type socialists who think cultural issues are controversial, therefore best ignored; after all, you don’t want to alienate conservative religious ethnic or the (male) working class. Even more disturbing is the growing contingent of leftists that is in effect a fifth column for the right. More and more we hear “radicals” argue that indeed we must strengthen the family, that feminists and homosexuals are narcissistic, that the demand for sexual freedom is a symptom of bourgeois individualism, that the Left should be for discipline and sacrifice. With such enemies, the Moral Majority hardly needs allies.

Given the Left’s refusal to make sexual radicalism part of its self-definition, it’s not surprising that a small group of leftists — mainly Catholic pacifists and “radical” Christ-
ians — is campaigning against abortion. But unlike other conservatives, the antiabortionists want to have it both ways — far from being antifeminist, they claim, theirs is the truly feminist position.

On the face of it this seems a particularly outrageous attempt to square the circle. But it reflects the impact of the cultural backlash on the women’s movement itself. These days many women who call themselves feminists are really promoting female chauvinism: instead of questioning traditional definitions of masculinity and femininity, they glorify the feminine, and their view of women’s nature is often hard to distinguish from the most unregenerate Victorian’s. As a result feminists must now contend with “sisters” making blatantly conservative arguments in the name of women’s rights.

“Feminist” antiabortionists argue not only that abortion exploits women because it allows men to “escape the consequences” of their sexuality, but that artificial contraception is sexist because it imposes male technology on the female body. This view implies that women are properly defined by their childbearing function, that women should not try to separate sex from procreation, that sex is something men selfishly impose on women, that it’s better to bear unwanted children than to give up pregnancy as a means of guilt-tripping men into doing right by us. Again, with feminist opposition like this, Phyllis Schlafly can rest easy.

Left-wing antiabortionists have had considerable success in persuading other leftists that it’s possible to be “prolife” and progressive at the same time. That Cesar Chavez, Dick Gregory, and Dan Berrigan are right-to-lifers has in no way hurt their reputations on the Left; on the contrary, their names have helped legitimate opposition to abortion and given leftists an excuse to waffle on the issue. What too many well-meaning “progressives” refuse to understand is that abortion is not just another issue on which people of good will can agree to disagree. To oppose legal abortion is to define women as childbearers rather than autonomous human beings, and to endorse a sexually repressive morality enforced by the state. Often at a particular historical moment an issue emerges that illuminates the nature of the larger struggle. It is the sort of issue that precludes neutrality, that despite its ambiguities and complexities (and there always are some) poses that most basic of political questions — which side are you on? In the late sixties that issue was Vietnam; today, I believe, it’s abortion rights. And the Left has yet to show which side it’s on.

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Late last summer something happened that alarmed me almost as much as the election results were to, three months later in November. The local Health Systems Agency held public hearings on continued funding for a youth center, which provided, among other services, contraceptive counselling and abortion referrals. I had gotten wind of an antichoice mobilization to stop the funding through a Catholic acquaintance, and had spent the three evenings before the hearing calling up all the feminists in my address book, plus the local women's centers, NOW chapters, and prochoice groups. I was prepared for a fight; I was not prepared to be outnumbered twenty or so to one by hundreds of chanting, jeering right-to-lifers. It was the kind of situation where — after you realize you've lost — you begin to concentrate on how you're going to get through the parking lot safely.

This experience left me with two obvious enough questions: Where were "we"? And who were "they"? And I should add here that "they" were not the programmed, polyester-uniformed troops that some feminists like to think of as the other side. Except for an age distribution skewed slightly older than that of the feminists I could pick out in the crowd, they looked pretty much like us, and might have been neighbors in this generally middle-class suburban county in Long Island. But they had managed to get themselves out to the hearings, and we hadn't. Perhaps an outsider would not find this so surprising: Long Island is, after all, well-known as the home of Right-to-Life presidential candidate Ellen McCormack and the birthplace of the antichoice movement. But it has also been the home of a strong grassroots feminist movement which grew up quite independently of the more intellectual
and politically charged feminist community of New York City. So there was no reason to anticipate, at that confrontation in the summer of 1980, that the only visible movement on the scene would be the antifeminist one.

Conventional — and sociological — wisdom has an explanation for this kind of turnaround: Every movement inevitably runs out of steam, becomes co-opted, and/or generates a countervailing backlash, so that sooner or later everything comes back to normal and the world looks the way it was when Talcott Parsons first discovered it. It is true that by many obvious measures the feminist movement has peaked; and it is also true that a largely female and ideologically antifeminist movement has been growing. But the expansion does not lie in pop-sociological equilibrium theories. I think there are some underlying reasons why one movement has declined and the other has grown, and I do not think that things will ever again go back to “normal.”

Naturally I know more about what is happening with us than with them, though I do not have any Olympian perspectives on “the women’s movement” to offer. I know what I have seen close up: People come together, drift away, regroup, lose track, and so forth, in ways that reflect the changing pressures of their lives — children, jobs, illness, relationships with friends and lovers. Perhaps it is fair to say that at some level, history is a generalization of biography. If so, what has happened to the women’s movement in the last decade is very much the story of a particular generation of women — women who tend to be past their twenties now, and (as is often pointed out) are mostly white and possessed of some claims or aspirations to “the middle class.”

In 1972 there were literally scores of consciousness-raising groups here on Long Island. Unlike in the cities or university towns, relatively few members of the emerging local women’s movement had been involved in the antiwar or civil rights movements. Here, feminist energy sprang from the kind of conditions Betty Friedan had documented in the early 1960s — the futility and, above all, the isolation of suburban women’s lives. CR groups provided instant community, personal affirmation, and an intensity of experience unknown in nonfeminist women’s groups like the PTA’s, volunteer fire department’s ladies’ auxiliaries, and library-based discussion series. Within a remarkably short period of time, thousands of women became self-professed feminists, and a smaller number became activists — generating more CR groups, developing projects, women’s centers, and issue-oriented campaigns. Some of the activists of that time were students (often “returning” students in their late twenties or older); most were probably counted in the 1970 census as “housewives,” often with preschoolers at home. Kathy Tapogna, for example, had a toddler and a new baby at home when she helped found the Women’s Center of Islip and Suffolk County’s first feminist newspaper, Women’s Time.

Today, the newspaper no longer exists and the women’s center confines itself to offering occasional “how-to” courses rather than fomenting feminist revolution. Here — unlike, say, Berkeley, Chicago, or Minneapolis — no deep political fissures contributed to the winding down of feminist energy. The antifeminist variety of Marxist-Leninism that was so destructive in the coastal and midwest cities was never more than a rumor in the suburbs and most smaller cities. When lines were drawn, as they occasionally were, between socialist-feminists, lesbian-feminists, liberal feminists, and so forth, they tended to be blurry and shifting. The only truly rancorous episodes I can recall were widely (and I think accurately) attributed
to personality clashes. So when I talked to Kathy Tapogna recently about the state of the movement, we did not get into a lengthy political retrospective. "Do you want to know what happened to everyone?" she said. "They're working."

Kathy herself, for example, now works part-time in addition to caring for a third baby; her former coeditor at Women's Time now runs a successful typesetting business; someone else has gone to law school; another is trying to finish her degree in nursing; and so on. Which helps explain the response I got so often during my August 1980 prochoice phone blitz: "I'd love to, but I'm just too busy."

A similar story could be told of the women's movement in other parts of the country: Yesterday's activists again and again have been drawn into their own jobs, careers, or the overload combination of full-time jobs plus child-raising responsibilities. The outcome, of course, has been very different for different women, and I would distinguish between two main categories of former feminist cadres: those who are, loosely speaking, "making it," i.e., either have professional careers or good prospects of having them; and those who are, for all practical purposes, treading water. Those in the first category are somewhat more likely to be married or the equivalent; those in the second category are, on the whole, more likely to be single mothers and/or lesbians. For example, a woman whom I will call Marcia falls into the first category. An ardent activist in the early seventies, she was able to complete her dissertation while her husband, a securely employed professional, supported her and their two children. Economic independence within her marriage was an important motivation, and her CR group encouraged her. But after finding a job, the pressures of an academic career — first to be reappointed, then to get tenure — effectively cut her off from the movement which had encouraged her professional ambitions in the first place. "I try to put a radical and feminist perspective in my courses, but that's all I can do at this point," she says.

Virginia (again, not her real name) is in the treading-water category. When I first met her she was the mainstay of the women's center at a local college and, at twenty-nine, absorbing feminism faster than the tiny women's studies program could dish it out. In short order, she left an oppressive marriage, came out as a lesbian, set up housekeeping with a group of other women and their children, and lived through a bitter custody battle and a bout of mononucleosis — all while serving as a pivotal figure in the feminist community. When I last saw her, though, she told me she'd been trying to support herself and two children by "temping" and was too overwhelmed by survival problems to be involved in anything on a regular basis. Ditto for a friend who was a founder of the now-defunct Chicago Women's Liberation Union and is now raising a young child on her own, a former socialist-feminist organizer in Milwaukee who is struggling to support her teenaged children, a former West Coast activist who is trying to reconstruct her life after years of intermittent employment led to bankruptcy...

Cases like these are often misdiagnosed as "burn-out," the implication being that movements consume people in a blaze of fanatical activity and then plop them back into normal life (another variant of the equilibrium theory.) In fact, most of the former activists I know are nostalgic about their "movement" days, even though many went through painful gay vs. straight or "left" vs. feminist clashes.

The simple fact is that they have usually ended up being wage-earners as well as parents and homemakers; and like most women, they
do not earn enough money to buy themselves a great deal of free time. Only seven percent of employed women make more than $15,000 a year (compared to 40 percent of men), and even $15,000 will not pay for a housekeeper, sleep-away summer camps, and other prerogatives of the more leisureed class. The result is that the amount of volunteer energy available to the women’s liberation movement has been steadily declining over the last decade. There may be more feminists than there have ever been before, but there is less and less feminist energy.

But we are already beginning to get into conditions which affect all women: not just a few thousand feminist cadre, but those who now count themselves as antifeminists as well. First, the grim constants of women’s economic situation. Women are still concentrated, as a sex, in low-wage occupations which, partly because they have been unattractive to unions, are highly vulnerable to inflation. Women still earn, on the average, only 59% of what men do on an hour-by-hour basis. And all the economic indicators are inexorably worse for Black and Hispanic women, elderly women of all races, and women who are “heads of households,” or lacking male financial support. Even the more privileged do not escape the economic stigma of their sex: the average college-educated woman, working full time, earns less than the average male high-school dropout.

In fact, the only change in women’s economic situation that has occurred since the resurgence of feminism in the late sixties is for the worse. Since more women are heads of households (the number of divorced women heading households tripled between 1960 and 1975), more women are poor, and, conversely, more of the poor are women. It is striking, for example, that while the number of poor people living in male-headed households declined 55 percent between 1959 and 1976, the numbers of the poor in female-headed households shot up by 36 percent in the same period. (“Poor” here means with family incomes less than one-half of the federally defined poverty level.) The result is that, after more than a decade of feminist organizing and agitating, we have only one macroeconomic trend that we can point to with any certainty: what has been called the “feminization of poverty.”

Contrary to the “worsism” theory school of social change (“if things get bad enough, people will be bound to do something”), the overall deterioration of women’s economic prospects has not done anything to advance the feminist cause. For one thing, it has meant that some of the most committed activists — especially those who spent their twenties or thirties building the movement rather than their own careers — are now in the “treading water” category. For another, it means that for many women the risk attached to becoming a feminist is as great or greater than it was five or ten years ago. An economically dependent woman — a full-time housewife or secondary contributor to the family income — might well think twice before challenging authority relationships in the home, whether to demand some help with the housework or a few nights off to go to meetings. If the husband gets annoyed enough he can leave, and contrary to the myth of male nurturance advanced by films like Kramer vs. Kramer, men who have left do not tend to be overly sentimental about their former families. Over half of them default on child support payments within one year after divorce. Wilma Scott Heide’s famous observation that the average woman is “only one man away from welfare” can be as intimidating as it is infuriating.

Moving on from economics to the realm of images and expectations, something else hap-
pened during the seventies which, I believe, has had a profound impact on the movement and on women in general. On the face of it, it was a welcome change: The media image of the ideal woman shifted from the fully domesticated suburban housewife, who had reigned from the post-war period into the mid-sixties, to the upwardly mobile career woman. New Magazines, like Working Woman, Savvy, and Working Mother, brought her trim, skirted-suit figure into supermarkets and stationery stores. Old magazines like Woman’s Day began to acknowledge the working woman as something other than a social problem; Ladies Home Journal actively sought to dissociate itself from the now-discredited housewife image. A 1977 “LHJ” ad pitched to advertisers described the typical reader thus:

SHE’S IN THE MONEY AND ON THE GO.
AND HER INITIALS ARE LHJ.
One moment, she’s off to the mountains for some skiing. The next moment, she’s off to the islands for some tennis. And in between, she’s a growing family [sic], an exciting career and a creative way of life that’s hers and hers alone.

Meanwhile, television brought us (in addition to sit-coms featuring working women, divorcées, and other former deviants) an irrefutable image of female success in the new anchorwoman: authoritative, affect-free, fully at home in the public world of the “news.”

In part, this transformation of feminine imagery was a response to feminism — or, more broadly, to the proto-feminist aspirations of the thousands of women who had joined the workforce in the sixties and seventies. What is tragic is that the new imagery gradually came to represent feminism, not only to an apolitical public but to many feminists too. Of course, grassroots feminist activism presented a very different face (or faces): whether as the caring environment of a women’s health center, or the energetic sorority of a clerical workers’ organizing project, or the friendly ambiance of a women’s coffee shop. But the face-to-face self-presentation of feminism did not stand a chance compared to the media’s representation of feminism, and what the media presented was not a movement at all, but a self-improvement program for the upwardly mobile woman.

This reformulated feminism fit in respectably enough with the “me generation” outlook of the mid-1970s middle class. If women in the late sixties and early seventies had experienced feminism as a revelation, wrenching them out of
customary relationships and into collective action, women in the mid-seventies could experience it as a “lifestyle” or a “perspective.” Recall, for a moment, the revolutionary elan of the early radical-feminist movement, as expressed in the Redstockings Manifesto:

We...reject the idea that women consent to or are to blame for their own oppression...We do not need to change ourselves, but to change men...

We call on all sisters to unite with us in struggle... The time for individual skirmishes has passed. This time we are going all the way.

Contrast this to the individualistic, inward-looking version of feminism defined by Erica Jong in 1975:

A feminist is a woman who assumes self-dependence as a basic condition of her life. She may live with and love other people...but she knows that her own fulfillment is her responsibility, that if she wastes her life, she will have no one to blame but herself. It seems to me that sooner or later, all intelligent women become feminists.4

The new “lifestyle-feminism” quickly took its toll at the grassroots level. Irene Weinberger, an untiring activist and president of Huntington (Long Island) NOW, reports that for a period in the late seventies:

There was general apathy. For a lot of women, it was like you might take ceramics one year and join NOW another year. Sure, they became women’s libbers.” But the impact was that they would think “maybe I should get a job or get divorced or whatever.”... They had no sense of unified struggle.

Many more middle-class women simply bypassed political organizations like NOW and went straight for assertiveness training courses, “success seminars,” and the like, which hammered away at the distinctly unfeminist mess-
sage that “you have no one to blame but yourself.”

The co-opted, individualistic version of feminism helped ensure that the women’s movement would remain within the class and generation of women who initiated it. Young college women, especially at the more elite schools, tend to assume that there are no institutional barriers to their success: they will have brilliant careers and babies too. (Returning students are far more militant; they know better.) Outside of the middle class, lifestyle-feminism can be actively repellent. If feminism is for women who are slender, “intelligent,” and upwardly mobile, and you are over-forty, perhaps overweight, and locked into a dead-end job and/or marriage, then you are more likely to see feminism as a put-down than as a sisterly call to arms. A housewife in the blue-collar town of Lindenhurst, L.I., told me (and I still wince at the memory) that feminism was not for her, not because she opposed it, but because she did not have any education and was not really young anymore.

Now, when you put together the cultural reformulation of feminism-as-lifestyle with the real economic situation women face as a class of people, then you begin to have big trouble. As many other observers have noted, the constituency for antifeminist causes lies in the economically dependent women of the lower to upper middle class. Theirs is a backlash, not so much against feminism as against anything that might threaten the tenuous security which marriage alone seems to provide. The expectation that women should work is a threat (it makes it easier for any man to leave with a clear conscience). ERA is a threat (it means that a husband’s peers at work may eventually be other women, as well as threatening the ultimate sanctuary of alimony). Nor are these threats entirely imaginary. The courts, in their efforts
to be nondiscriminatory, have tended to weaken the financial situation of divorced women, e.g., by no longer assuming that child support is a man’s burden, without at the same time recognizing a divorced woman’s continuing labor as a homemaker and child raiser. Abortion rights, as Deirdre English argues in the Februaary/March 1981 issue of *Mother Jones*, can be seen as further undercutting male responsibility towards women and children, by seeming to make pregnancy entirely “a woman’s choice.”

Long-range financial self-interest is not the only explanation for the emergence of an anti-feminist women’s movement, of course. No one could discount the organizing role of the Catholic church, rebounding from the liberal “excesses” of Vatican II; or of the fundamentalist Protestant churches, which are moving in to build a community infrastructure in the swelling Sunbelt suburbs, or of overtly right-wing groups like Schlafly’s STOP-ERA. But these organizing efforts would not succeed if there were not an underlying anxiety to build on. In the absence of collective economic gains for women, and in the aftermath of a “sexual revolution,” which — as feminists would be the first to acknowledge — did far more to free men than women, the economically dependent housewife has real grounds for alarm.5

Of course, genuine, radical feminism addresses these very fears. It addresses the need for the deghettoization of women’s work, for equal pay for equivalent work, for incomes and pensions for full-time homemakers, for supportive social services — and all the other measures that could free women from an uneasy dependence on individual males. But genuine, radical feminism is culturally invisible, almost an underground phenomenon. And what is visible — the lifestyle feminism of the rising young managerial or professional woman — offers no comfort: If you can’t make it in a man’s world, tough luck; if you can’t take the heat, better stay in the kitchen.

The question that prompted all this was: Why, at a particular local confrontation, were there so many of them and so few of us? I have talked about the decline of volunteer energy in the feminist movement. I have talked about some of the reasons why we failed to replenish our forces (and energy) when, “objectively speaking,” we should have. Now think for a moment about the “other side”: As economically dependent housewives, they are the ones with energy to spare.* Perhaps the most ominous strategy to come out of the 1980 Right to Life convention was a plan to call every single registered voter in America, in order to compile a complete antichoice mailing list for fundraising and electoral campaigns. Who will be working day after day to make this veritable blizzard of phone calls? The rank and file, of course, the housewife volunteers.

It is almost as if the economic stresses of the seventies split women into two camps: those who went out to fight for some measure of economic security (either out of necessity or choice, though the distinction is not always a meaningful one), and those who stayed at home to hold on to what they had. Both groups are fighting for survival, but it is not likely that both groups can maintain the conditions for their survival. If the women who are struggling to hold their ground within the workforce prevail — all the worse for those who are clinging

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*I am not suggesting that housework and child raising do not take a great deal of time. But it’s common wisdom, within the PTA for example, that if you’re looking for a volunteer, you don’t bother calling the “working mothers.” Locally, one interesting side effect of the influx of women into the workforce has been a decline in the number of Cub Scout and Brownie troops: there are fewer and fewer women with the time to be den mothers or Brownie leaders.
to their men. Every independent working woman, no matter where she is in the occupational hierarchy, by her very existence helps undercut the patriarchal prerogatives of women as the permanent wards and dependents of individual males. And, if the antifeminist forces prevail — e.g., by stopping ERA and further reducing reproductive rights — working women will be forced back into an ever more marginal economic position. Right now, it is the antifeminist forces who have the energy, the organization, and the adrenalin to win.

This is the point where, I think, a prudent writer would haul out Antonio Gramsci’s increasingly popular injunction to “pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will,” exhort the faithful to keep on trying, and sign off. But at the risk of being too vague, too obvious, or — worse still — wrong, I would like to end with a few modest suggestions:

First, I think it’s important to resist the temptation to retreat, ideologically, in the face of the antifeminist offensive. I am thinking of the recent literature critical of feminism for going too far in “attacking the family” (Jean Bethke Elshtain’s article in the November 17, 1979, issue of The Nation, for example) and exhorting radicals to respect “traditional values” (Joe Holland’s pamphlet, “Flag, Faith and Family” is an example, as are some of Harry Boyte’s recent articles). Anyone who feels inclined in this direction should be reminded that today only 14 percent of American households enclose the kind of traditional family apotheosized by the antifeminist New Right (employed husband, dependent housewife and children.) There are many kinds of families, and we should be concerned with defending those which are truly under attack, such as gay couples, lesbian mothers and their children, and parents who are “disqualified” by their poverty or race and forced to surrender their children to foster homes.

Second, at the level of theory and analysis, I think we need to do more hard thinking about the dramatic changes which have occurred in the short time since the emergence of the women’s liberation movement in the sixties. Perhaps justifiably, feminist writing has tended to focus on what has not changed — violence against women, sexual objectification, gender bias in language, persistent stereotypes of women as homemakers and nurturers, and so forth — rather than what has changed. We have a body of “high theory” addressed to seemingly timeless structures of male domination, but we have only the scantiest understanding of the totality of changes which have occurred within our own lifetimes. Without this kind of understanding — in fact, with a body of recorded wisdom which could for the most part, as easily have been written in 1965 as in 1981 — we are singularly ill-prepared for the antifeminist onslaught.

Finally, I think we need to take seriously the neglected feminist project of building supportive networks and communities. These are rough times, and if we are not going to be submerged one by one, we will have to find ways to hold each other up. At the individual level, this means breaking with our own internalized versions of “lifestyle feminism,” and becoming more accountable and available to each other and our collective undertakings. Those who are “making it,” for example, owe something to their sisters who have been left treading water — in the interests of a renewed activism within both groups. But beyond individual efforts, we need a renewed vision of sisterhood as a connection which is respectful and not exclusive of the other ties which define our lives. Black and Hispanic women have a common cause with the men of their races, as do poor and working-
class women with the men in their lives. It will take a new and nonseparatist notion of sisterhood for the women’s liberation movement of the eighties to grow powerful beyond the generation and class of women who initiated the movement more than a decade ago.

I have said very little in this article about the women who have remained activists throughout the decade. That is another story, and I suspect it would dwell at much greater length on the issue of sisterhood and community. I had asked one such activist, Irene Weinberger, what sustained her through so many years of work, and initially she said it was anger. The next day she called with an urgent amendment. “That was too negative,” she said. “Of course I’m angry, but what keeps me going is the support I have gotten. I would even say love. Be sure to put that in.”

NOTES
5. Deirdre English and I discussed this at greater length in the last chapter of our book For Her Own Good, Anchor Books, 1978.

BARBARA EHRENREICH is a journalist and coauthor of For Her Own Good: 150 Years of Experts’ Advice to Women (Anchor paperback, 1979).
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We feel that there is a relevance to the label *gay socialist* that goes beyond the fact of being both gay people and socialists. In this editorial we wish to argue against those who believe that any socialist project must inevitably be male-dominated *and* against those socialists who deny the relevance of exploring the social construction of the personal.

The idea of socialism does not involve a uniform programme nor a preordained hierarchy of tasks. Advanced capitalist society produces various types of power relations which in turn give rise to varying levels of struggle. For us, socialism demands changes to be in both the personal and in the structural relations of power. To ignore the former is actually to inhibit the latter.

**PROBLEMS OF SOCIALISM**

There is a fundamental lack of coherence within the socialist project as currently posed. This incoherence is manifest at all levels: theoretical, strategic, organizational. Unlike previous periods there is no longer a simple choice between two total views and strategies which compete for dominance on the Left, as there was for example in the interwar years between the Communist Party and the ideology of Labourism. Today, we are faced with multiple and incompatible visions of what society is, what its alternatives are and how we move from the present to a more democratic future.

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This article is a collective statement by the editors of *Gay Left*, a publication from Britain. The magazine has existed for five years. During that time the *Gay Left* editors have been able to project a socialist politics radically transformed by the ideas and activities of the gay and feminist movements.
There is an absence of single legitimated and generally accepted socialist strategy. Neither the Labour Left, the Eurocommunist tendencies within the CP nor the far left groupings offer an adequate and comprehensive account of the dynamics of this phase of capitalism which can be accepted by others. Within each of these groupings there are different and often antagonistic theories, each advance with much energy and fervor but all failing to reach more than a tiny section of the population. The traditional left alternatives have failed to provide new socialist visions to fill the crucial space opened by the political collapse of social democracy.

This political disarray is matched by a disintegration of the unitary theory of Marxism. Marxist and non-Marxist thinkers as diverse as Fernando Claudin, Nicos Poulantzas, Rudolph Bahro, Edward Thompson, and Michel Foucault have contributed to the creation of conflicting schools within Marxism, by reformulating such concepts as the State, power, political organization, class, the nature of already existing socialism, and history. The result is an apparent dissonance within left theory. Adding to the confusion is the production within autonomous movements of theories which claim to account for specific oppressions but which are at the same time generalized and contend with Marxism for total explanatory status. A clear example is the use of the concept of patriarchy to explain not only the oppression of women but also the genesis of all class societies.

In an otherwise static or regressing political situation, the autonomous movements have often been very successful in mobilizing people both around particular issues such as race, housing, and the environment, and the wider questions of the relationship between the individual and society. The women's movement and the gay movement have politicized and radicalized sections of the population untouched by traditional socialist organizations. The fact of the relative success of these movements in expressing perceived needs, coupled with the atrophy of traditional socialist organizations, poses some major questions. Should these struggles be unified? If so, how? What can we draw from these struggles for the revitalizing of the broader socialist movement? These questions are pressing in that, for all the advances of socialist theory, the popular images of socialism are bankrupt and discredited. Social democracy in Britain has been socialism and its systematic failure through twelve years of Labour government has destroyed the general credibility of a socialist alternative. Nationalized industries have not meant workers' involvement in control and organization nor a responsiveness to community needs. Many aspects of the Welfare State have been experienced as huge bureaucratic institutions — both by clients and those working in them. From council housing to comprehensive education, the reforms of social democracy are experienced as undemocratic and unresponsive.

The failure of social democratic policies, with this unappetizing emphasis on bureaucratic efficiency and statism, provided the base for the new Thatcherite bloc to seize the initiative. Its selective call for individualism, its demagogic attack on the welfare state and trade unionism offered a reactionary response to real problems. Not surprisingly it has been all too easy to draw analogies between social democratic paternalism and the bureaucratic formations of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The success of antisocialist propaganda is built on a real popular distrust of authoritarian communism and its apparent parallels within welfare statism.
The socialist alternative has to be built in opposition both to the authoritarian populism of a precarious capitalism and to the paternalistic state of social democracy. This has to be done in a climate of increasing social anxiety which leads to the closing of ideological space — that space in which new perspectives can be developed. It is harder now to rethink political conceptions, harder to find points of access to the political process. There is an entrenchment of old ideas and an atrophy of innovative practice at all levels, as concerns about employment, housing, and education come to preoccupy most people in their daily lives. The stage management of this anxiety by the Right, its focusing on "scroungers," "reds," "deviants," is one of the most frightening achievements of Thatcherism, and the one the Left seems least able to counter. The existing forms of socialism fail to speak clearly to people's needs and in that failure abandon the political and social terrain to domination by reactionary images, models, and philosophies. The continued repetition of slogans calling, for example, for a general strike is limited and idealist insofar as it fails to connect to how people really see their lives. It is true that the Thatcherite offensive will create new points of resistance, new areas of struggle, as it cuts back the material basis of people's lives; but the coordination of these struggles and their conceptualizing into a new model of socialist politics requires strategies and tactics that have yet to be agreed on and developed. Whether, and how, people struggle is as much a question of how they see themselves as of their being propelled into action simply by their material circumstances.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GAY POLITICS

This is where the significance of gay politics lies. The oppressive regulation of homosexuality has been a feature of society for a very long time, yet it is only in the last ten years that the struggle for definition of our sexuality and sexual practices has been the attempt to redefine sexuality, and hence to take control over our own bodies, our own pleasures, and the direction of our own lives. The struggle for definition, within the established categories yet transcending them, is a model for at least some aspects of the new socialist project.

It has involved collective action, and a transformation of self through a variety of political practices. In reaching out for control of the institutions that produce and reproduce those definitions and categories, these practices challenge the existing order in a basic way.

The grounds for the changes in sexual attitudes have been developments within capitalism itself, yet these changes have not been automatic and there is no immediate identity between our struggle and the interests of capital. True, capitalists, straight and gay, have intervened in the space gay people have created but it would be fatalistic to assume the co-option of the gay struggle. Rather there is a shifting and unstable relation between our interests as gays and the space, facilities, and constant redefinitions created for us by capital.

Capitalism is a complex unity that does not work with a single agency or effect. One of the failures of the theories of the Left has been the inability to conceptualize politics in other than dualistic terms. Right/Left, Capitalist/Socialist, Good/Bad, Reformist/Revolutionary: static dichotomies that barely describe let alone prescribe the ways struggle actually goes on. Capitalism, in its multiplicity of contradictions, is not something that can be abolished overnight, nor is it something that produces its own antithesis, fully formed, pure and innocent, awaiting its historical destiny. There are innumerable struggles and points of opposition that
interact to produce shifting configurations of power and advantage, gains and losses.

Sexual politics opened up new areas of struggle, conceptualized anew the forces acting on members of society, especially in the rubric “the personal is political.” What we mean by this is not that every action we perform is political, but rather that our “private” lives, our selves and our desires, are targets for intervention by social forces — definitions, models, rules, woven in ideology and lived by us. In opening up that area as one of struggle, gay politics has also revealed the necessary antagonisms that operate within apparently homogeneous categories: the divisions between lesbians and gay men and the dissonance of those interests; the operation of race and class as lines of power within the gay world; the hierarchies contradictorily constructed around age. All these have surfaced as gay liberation has developed, and these problems — of intimate power relations — continue to be the concern of personal politics.

Perhaps our signal contribution to the redefinition of socialism is the insight that the transformation of our most intimate desires, and of the conditions of their satisfaction, has to be part and parcel of the new society for which we are working. Those intimate needs, wishes, fantasies are the substance of struggle — why we fight in the first place. Gay politics speaks with a sensitivity to our felt needs and the felt restriction of those needs. It is with a similar sensitivity that we conceive of a socialist politics gaining mass legitimacy. That legitimacy will be built through time and within capitalism. It is not a luxury, nor something that can wait until after the seizure of power by a self-elected vanguard.

RETHINKING SOCIALISM

Socialism is offered as an alternative to the capitalist organization of social and economic life. In the classic Marxist version it is the necessary, and in some variants almost preordained, antithesis of capitalism. But what it is more than that is left vague. Marxism has been traditionally hostile to utopian system building. So when the self-described Marxist regimes have captured state power with popular backing (Russia, China, Yugoslavia), been elected to it (Chile), or simply been imposed on countries (Czechoslovakia et al), they have faced the problem of what to do with it. Different and often appalling results have followed, and socialists outside those countries have often been unsure of their reactions. Is “defense of the revolution” more important than defense of democracy? Is state planning to transform
an undeveloped economy more relevant than workers’ control? Is the control of sexual relations in the interests of building socialism more vital than the “right to choose”? Such questions are to the fore over Afghanistan. Many socialists think it more important to defend the “building of socialism” there even if it is being enforced by Soviet troops. Others feel that the defense of the right of a nation to self-determination is more important. In other words, there is no simple series of ultimate goals which can be used as guides through the maze of current political dilemmas. Hence the attraction of a socialist politics which concentrates on an easily delineated (if elusively difficult) task: the attainment of power.

We would affirm the necessity of developing a socialist vision as against the aridity of what passes for Marxist analysis, and against the concentration on party building in which the immediate task obscures the ultimate goal. But this does not remove from all of us who describe ourselves as socialists, the task of understanding the actual workings of capitalism. For we would agree that a socialist politics cannot be a simple opposition to all things capitalist, but has to be a product of the struggles actually produced within capitalism. That is, capitalism is not a single entity to which can be counterposed another, socialism. It is a highly complex set of relations: economic, social, geographical, ethical, and gender.

While the workings of economic and social relations define the parameters of possible actions, there is no unitary determination of beliefs, behavior, ideology, or sexual forms. Multiple struggles develop at all levels of this complex structure, at all points of power. They have one thing in common in that they are attempts to resist and challenge the workings of the relations of power and to gain control over them. We would argue that the main task of socialists is to ensure that this struggle for control is democratic in all its phases, that the goal of the socialist project is the democratization of all social processes in order to gain popular control of the shaping of individual and collective existence.

The possibilities of democratic control are inhibited in society as it exists now, despite its calling itself democratic. Bourgeois democracy rests on a representative parliamentary form which actively discourages people from taking decisions and initiatives themselves. Real economic power and decisions remain outside of even these limited democratic forms. The anarchic, crisis-ridden market forces of capitalism and the power of multinational corporations are not accountable to us as producers, consumers, or “citizens.” Real democratic control of the workings of the economy is therefore a prime task for socialists. At the same time we cannot ignore the level of the state. The state, is not simply a clique of the ruling class: it is more a space of power than a single source of domination. It is always a potential site for intervention and contestation. But this does not mean that the repressive state apparatus, military, police, judiciary, can be wished away. Processes of democratization can be reversed or halted by these agencies and the various forms of class domination, as the example of Chile all too clearly shows. Ultimate control of the state by democratic forces is vital. The exact form that the process of gaining democratic control will entail, and the political forces that can achieve it (party or parties for example), lies at the heart of contemporary socialist debate. All we can say is that socialists who ignore the moment of state power are in danger of losing their socialism — and perhaps their very lives.

The struggle for democratization requires more than the establishment of a “socialist
state”: it requires the building of effective popular control in all aspects of social existence. This means that challenges must be made at all points of oppression, which cannot be reduced to a pale reflection of bigger oppressions, and must not be subordinated to a “more important” struggle. They are the struggles with which people can identify, the oppressions they feel in all areas of their lives. If socialists fail to recognize the validity of the micro-struggles at the point of oppression, the discontents that give rise to them will be taken up, colonized, and utilized by the Right. This is what is happening under Thatcherism and other forms of right populism in various parts of the world.

**CONTROL OF OUR BODIES**

Feminist and gay politics are an essential part of people gaining control over their lives, the part of the process whose aim is control over decisions concerning our bodies and identities. The sexual political movements have pinpointed these areas as crucial for democratic struggle, and they have offered a series of insights into the ways this can be done in collective activity, often in small pluralistic struggles. Beginning with the immediate experience of oppression, they are responsive to felt needs rather than guided by abstract slogans. There are, however, problems. Pluralism can often lead to a total lack of coherence. Success in one area can have totally demobilizing effects in others. One of the effects of the early gay movement was a major expansion in the sub-culture, which achieved some of the aims of GLF though on a different basis, and very many gays fail to see the need for further struggles.

But, we believe that the many struggles around sexuality have been very important in pointing to two issues central to any socialist project. Firstly they have underlined the vital importance of understanding the ways in which
the different forms of power shape and inform individual meanings and identities. Secondly they illuminate the determined ways in which individuals can resist and begin to transform oppressive definitions. There is a third point: in our very marginalization we have attempted to work out different ways of living relationships and sexuality which question many basic attitudes that cement existing patterns. Feminist and gay politics provide a subversive challenge to conventional ideologies and aspirations, and socialism cannot grow without such challenges.

We have only touched briefly upon wider issues which are central to socialist advance, particularly the unification of disparate struggles and the necessary incompatibilities within them. It is never going to be easy to hold together such complex unities as "sexual politics" and "socialist politics." We believe that criticisms that stress our inability to offer a simply strategy are misplaced. All we can offer is an investigation of the problems as we see them. These problems — whether of our sexual lives or of the political allegiances of our sexual radicalism — will not disappear. They still have to be explored. And if gay socialists don’t do this, who will?
IN THE WINGS

New Right Ideology and Organization

Allen Hunter

There will be a great difference between Ronald Reagan's performance in office and what he presented in his campaign rhetoric and inaugural address. Indeed, the disparity between Reagan and Reaganism has already been criticized by the New Right and is the space in which it hopes to flourish. There is a political constituency that is ready to support thoroughly conservative policies, and ready to feel betrayed by Reagan. The New Right hopes to organize these people and new adherents to win power for itself. "We're Ready to Lead," a New Right slogan puts it.

Expressing a political and cultural backlash against the social movements and liberal social policies of the 1960s, the New Right ideology is an even more conservative vision than Reaganism. It is a defense of the male-headed family against its alternatives; of America against its external and internal enemies; of capitalist free enterprise against its socialist and welfare-state alternatives. It is a defense of hard work and virtue against moral lassitude and sexual freedom, of whites against blacks, of men against women, of parents against children. It is a politics that seeks to regain control of America for the white middle strata of America, "the people" who felt they were bypassed and put down by the changes of the

My overall approach to the New Right has benefited from conversations with Linda Gordon and Ralph Miliband. About this article in particular, Diane Balser, John Ehrenreich, Robert Horowitz, and the editors of Radical America made important suggestions. A special thanks for Margery Davies for her editing. To the extent that this article is coherent, logical, and readable I am indebted to Jim O'Brien for his virtuoso editing and his commitment of large amounts of time and energy — comradeship of the best sort.
1960s. The New Right wants to mobilize the sectors of the population that hold these sentiments. Its leaders already have several core groups, a network that includes numerous organizations dealing with economic and social issues, and close ties to a strong religious Right through the Moral Majority and parallel groups. Its organizational success, coupled with its articulation of an American right-wing populist ideology, highlights the importance of the New Right today.

REAGAN, REAGANISM, AND THE NEW RIGHT

Can I tell you... one of our dirty little secrets on the Right? And that is that we know that there are at least two Ronald Reagans. There are some of us who wonder how much of a Reaganite Ronald Reagan is. We see the one we like and, of course, that's the one we're going to scream and point at and recite his promises and say that's the one we'd like to see follow through in office. But that is a problem. — John Lofton, New Right journalist, as quoted on “Bill Moyers’ Journal,” aired December 12, 1980.

Partly the difference between Reaganism and Reagan is between a vision pronounced by an outsider and the vicissitudes of daily rule imposed on an insider. The Reagan administration will not “get government off the backs of the people,” even if it does get out of the way of business. The Reagan administration will not decrease inflation, increase employment, stimulate production, and maintain living standards for working-class people. The Reagan administration — even with a SALT-free diet — will not reestablish US primacy in the world through military might, will not break the power of OPEC, will not roll back the Soviets, will not save Western civilization from decline and moral turpitude. The Reagan administration will neither save us from the netherworld of narcissism nor — its western-oriented sagebrush rebellion notwithstanding — provide us with the moral equivalent of the frontier.

But the difference between promise and performance is not only the distance forced upon him by a stubborn reality. It is also the difference between what he implies he intends and what he actually intends. There are enough vagaries in his rhetoric that it appeals to quite different elements in the coalition that elected him. Different futures are envisaged by major capitalists who “only” seek a restructuring of class relations and the re-creation of US dominance in the world, and those further to the right who also want to see a thorough restructuring of the state and society as a whole. The difference is between a capitalist offensive within the current order and a thoroughly right-wing populism that views the restructuring of society as the secular manifestation of the struggle for redemption. Reagan is in the former camp even though the platform he stood on incorporates aspects of the latter’s vision. Incorporating items from a vision is not the same as embracing the organic whole of that vision.

Let there be no mistake: Reagan’s administration will be costly to the natural world as he weakens environmental laws and promotes nuclear power; to the Third World as he intervenes openly or clandestinely; to Europe and Japan as they are pressured to increase their “fair share” of defending the West; to blacks, other minorities, and women in the US as affirmative-action programs are cut back; to labor as unions are weakened even further; to liberals and others concerned with such basic liberties as free speech. After all, the US is in a period of crisis. The costs of working out the crisis, in the view of Reagan and all his advisors, have to be shifted away from capital.
The election of Reagan, with support from so many sectors of the population, reflects a widely shared sense that dramatic changes in economic policies are needed. While working-class people do not seek to bear the burden of those policies — do not long for increased dangers on the job, decreased compensation for their labor, decreased public services, and a decline in the general quality of life — they do know that Carter’s policies have not worked. Within the parameters of the two-party system, which robs us all of imagination as well as choice, Reagan was the option.

It is evident that the basis for his electoral victory — Carter’s economic failures and the Tehran hostages — only gives Reagan a short-term opportunity to consolidate political support. Whether or not his economic policies “work,” they will alienate large numbers of working-class people who voted for him. If the policies do not work, then the economy will get worse and that will provide an opening for more middle-of-the-road, technocratic candidates; if they do work, the economy will improve at the expense of most workers and that will provide an opening for more liberal candidates. Other things being equal, then, we could expect a drift toward less conservative candidates around economic questions. But other things are not equal. To complement the economic policies and to forestall that electoral move to the left — or to complement more technocratic forms of oppressing the working class — we can expect the Right, with or without Reagan, to highlight patriotism and social conservatism as a way of keeping and building support for conservative candidates and programs.

The social issues can provide an explanation for the failure of economic policies or they can provide solace if the policies do work at the expense of working-class living standards. Either it can be argued that the lack of old-time values has hampered measures to increase worker productivity — hence we need to strengthen the family to improve the economy — or it can be argued that virtues like hard work, godliness, meekness, and self-sacrifice are better than consumerized hedonism, and that by strengthening the family we will more than compensate for decreased living standards.

Reaganism, not Reagan, speaks to that solace. Reagan himself may be the best orator of Reaganism, but the New Right better understands what it entails. The New Right seeks not only a new electoral coalition, but a new sense of the “people.” It believes, as does Norman Podhoretz, that the “groups who voted for Reagan are diverse rather than monolithic, and they are by no means unified in their support for particular programs. What they are unified in is a yearning to make the country productive and powerful once again — to make it great again.”  The last sentence is hype, of course; yet forging that unity is what the New Right is all about.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE NEW RIGHT SENSIBILITY

The principal force which broke up the Democratic (New Deal) coalition is the Negro socioeconomic revolution and the liberal Democratic ideological inability to cope with it... The Democratic Party fell victim to the ideological impetus of a liberalism which had carried it beyond the programs taxing the few for the benefit of the many (the New Deal) to programs taxing the many of behalf of the few (the Great Society). — Kevin Phillips in The Emerging Republican Majority.

The New Right developed as a political and cultural sensibility in the late 1960s before it took on an organizational coherence in 1974.
The term “New Right” refers both to that sensibility and to the organizational network that draws on it while giving it strategic focus and ideological coherence. In this section I will briefly discuss the sensibility and the social forms it has taken before turning to the organizational features of the New Right.

While today it is antifeminist and conservative sexual issues that most define the New Right’s outlook, racism was central to its emergence and remains crucial for its overall appeal. The above quote from Kevin Phillips, active in Nixon’s 1968 presidential campaign, suggests the links between racial backlash, a growing tax revolt, resentment of big government, and electoral flight from the Democratic Party. The backlash against the sixties radicalism and the Great Society was mobilized by George Wallace and Richard Nixon in the presidential campaigns of 1968 and 1972. The 1968 campaign was pervaded by the notion of a majority (or a real majority, or a middle-class majority) of hard-working, sober, tradition-minded patriots fed up with welfare handouts, “peace creeps,” hippies, black militants, and street violence. The emphasis placed by both Wallace and Nixon on law and order and on respect for the flag signalled the invocation of “the people” against the “interests” allied in the Democratic Party. One of the rhetorical flourishes of Wallace particularly, but also of Nixon, was to pose as an outsider, an opponent of the slick, intellectual Eastern Establishment. Big government, liberals, and cultural radicals — not big business — got labeled the elite.

The resentments later crystallized as the New Right first gained coherence in electoral politics. Yet it was the emergence of independent single-issue groups in those same years that really made the New Right possible. Without these groups, the backlash sentiment would have been latent, only catalyzed by political candidates at regular electoral intervals. Without the single-issue groups, the New Right would not have been able to promote itself as the center of a dynamic movement.

These movements included local antibusing groups that developed from the mid-1960s on; local and nationally coordinated efforts to oppose sex education which began in 1968/1969; the antiabortion movement which got its start in the late 1960s and leap forward in 1973 with the Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion; the anti-ERA movement begun in 1972; and the antigay campaigns that date from the mid-1970s.

While some of the particular movements had their origins in already existing far-right organizations, the concerns they addressed and the enemies they identified constituted a shift in the major concerns of the Right. The social issues — race, sex, and family — all intertwined to direct more of the Right toward social conservatism to complement its continuing economic conservatism and anticommunism.
An underlying anxiety about loss of control in daily life, the increased power and independence of women, the prominence of black and youth culture, sexual liberation, changes in family life — all these, as opposed to the hunt for Communist spies and dupes, characterized the new movements.

These new groups gave a resonance, continuity, and dynamism to the rhetoric of Wallace, Nixon, and Agnew. Nixon let the South know he would slow down civil rights enforcement; in Pontiac, Michigan, antibusing crowds chanted “Power to the people, fuck the niggers!” Agnew railed against effete intellectual snobs; opponents of sex education sought to ban their books in schools. Nixon invoked the family: opponents of the ERA and abortion mobilized social movements to keep women in their place. The social movements derived legitimacy from the president’s rhetoric and, at the same time, fed disappointment with the limited actions he actually took.

It is that terrain that the New Right exploited to develop organizationally; it will exploit similar space between Reaganism and Reagan as it vies for power.

THE ORGANIZATIONS OF THE NEW RIGHT

Our success is built on four elements — single issue groups, multi-issue conservative groups, coalition politics and direct mail. — Richard Viguerie in The New Right¹

The backlash began before the organized New Right. Yet the New Right organizational network that the backlash helped to produce has broadened its appeals and has given it a strategic focus. The leaders of the New Right, in explaining the label New, underline two main qualities: greater pragmatism and more hunger for real power than the old Right, and more stress on social issues. As New Right activist (and Reagan aide) Lyn Nofziger says, “The old right were talkers and pamphleteers. They would as soon go down in flames as win. But the New Right has moved toward a more pragmatic goal of accomplishing things.”⁵

The New Right as a tightly controlled nexus of multi-issue conservative organizations dates from 1974. Leaders of these groups meet regularly to plan strategy, allocate resources, and evaluate ongoing activities. Then there is a large number of other organizations that tie into the core groups, either as spin-offs from them or as independent groups that have been brought into the New Right’s sphere of influence. The most important of these are the conservative single-issue social movements. Since 1977 the New Right leadership has been drawing together many of these as a “pro-family coalition.” Finally, dating from 1979, and potentially the most significant development, has been the New Right’s alliance with the fundamentalist Christian preachers of the airwaves.

The Gang of Four

The New Right... is so tight-knit... that any diagram of its organization looks like an octopus trying to shake hands with itself, so completely interlocked are the directorates of its various components. Basically, however, the movement can almost be understood by a glance at its unofficial politburo, which consists of four men and a couple of computers. — L.J. Davis, “Conservatism in America,” Harper's⁶

The four individuals Davis refers to are Richard Viguerie, Paul Weyrich, Howard Phillips, and John “Terry” Dolan, each of whom controls a core organization. They all developed politically in old-right groups or in conservative Republican Party politics. Around 1974 they established the core organizations of
that "octopus" and have been building an effective conservative complex ever since. These four men are young, successful, upwardly mobile, hungry for power, and ostentatiously religious.

The computers are Viguerie's. In the mid-1960s, after a stint with the Young Americans for Freedom, Viguerie began the direct-mail company (RAVCO, for Richard A. Viguerie Company) that has been crucial to fundraising and propagandizing for the New Right. In the course of working for various accounts, Viguerie built his own fortune by charging a high percentage of the money raised and by using the mailing lists to build his data banks for further fundraising. In addition, he publishes Conservative Digest, the monthly New Right magazine, and the biweekly newsletter New Right Report. He is also active in numerous other New Right organizations.

Paul Weyrich formed the Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress (CSFC) in 1974. It is one of the most successful of the recent political action committees; it not only provides funds to aspiring New Right candidates but also does cadre training. It specializes in developing organizations at the precinct level. Weyrich is much more than the leader of the CSFC; of the four he is the best strategist and coordinator of the New Right's development. In 1973, with money from brewer Joseph Coors, he formed the Heritage Foundation, the New Right's think tank. It publishes Policy Review, the closest approximation to a scholarly journal of the New Right. He perceived the importance of the "pro-family" social issues and the political potential of fundamentalist Protestantism.

Howard Phillips, another graduate of Young Americans for Freedom, was brought into the Nixon administration to dismantle the Office of Economic Opportunity. In 1975, after disillusionment with Nixon, he organized the Conservative Caucus with the help of Viguerie's mailing lists. It is organized to put pressure on members of Congress. With over 300,000 members, it operates in about 250 of the 435 congressional districts in the nation. Phillips's method is to pick a district coordinator who then seeks to organize a steering committee composed of thirty or so leading activists from already existing organizations in the district. These organizations may be single-issue conservative groups focusing on abortion, busing, taxes, or gun control, or they may be from groups like the Chamber of Commerce, a newspaper, or the local Democratic or Republican party. They try to expand their influence many times over by bringing along substantial parts of the organizations from which they were recruited. The Caucus has been active in opposing SALT II, the Panama Canal Treaty, "and has assisted in defeating instant voter registration, opposing compulsory unionism, fighting gun control, and organizing efforts against the Carter and Kennedy proposals to socialize American medicine." Phillips was also active in organizing the Moral Majority and the Religious Roundtable.

Terry Dolan heads the fourth of the central groups, the National Conservative Political Action Committee (NCPAC), organized in 1975. It is the largest of the conservative PACs, spending millions of dollars not only in direct contributions but also in other expenditures that are not counted in the official costs recorded by the candidates whom NCPAC aids. Like the other central figures of the New Right, Dolan is active in other organizations. He chairs the Conservatives Against Liberal Legislation (CALL) and the Washington Legal Foundation, one of a number of New Right "public-interest" law firms that are viewed as a response to the Ralph Nader groups and are thoroughly probusiness." In addition Dolan is
the leader responsible for developing ties with the Mormons.

“Networking”

Important for the New Right success is its leaders' willingness to work as a team. The New Right network has regular meetings of citizen action groups, political action committees and political strategists, and, while all participants of course maintain autonomy of action, the exchange of viewpoints is smooth and usually results in harmonious activities. — *Conservative Digest*, “The New Right: A Special Report”

These four plus a number of others in related New Right organizations are the core leadership of the New Right. In regular biweekly meetings (called the “Kingston meetings” for the room where they first met) between ten and thirty leaders strategize, exchange information, allocate funds, and evaluate past and ongoing work. These meetings clearly increase the overall effectiveness of the different organizations.

Library Court meetings are another forum for New Right strategizing. With so many New Right causes being related to a defense of the traditional nuclear family, in 1977 the New Right quite insightfully began to pull together a “pro-family coalition.” Weyrich has said that what the war in Vietnam was to the sixties and environmentalism was to the seventies, family issues will be to the eighties. He has been working to make that a reality. The organizational focus “is a fairly close-knit coalition of over 20 nationwide groups whose leaders meet every other Thursday morning to discuss tactics. This group of pro-family representatives is named ‘Library Court,’ after the street where its original meeting place was located.”

Given that the group is thoroughly New Right, there is more than a bit of duplicity in the *Conservative Digest’s* claim that the participants “are quick to emphasize that their first commitment is to traditional pro-family, pro-God values and they are political conservatives
second, if at all.” Yet claims like this do suggest the centrality that traditional family and moral issues have for the New Right.

In addition to the core organizations, the Kingston and Library Court meetings, and the ties to single-issue groups and religious organizations yet to be discussed, there are several other organizational features of the New Right that merit attention because they reveal an infrastructure that radiates out in many directions yet is centrally controlled. There are publishing houses of or near the New Right; there are religious publishing houses that regularly bring out New Right political tracts that complement (or contradict) the spirit of their evangelical tracts. New Right activists are forever writing introductions and prefaces to each other’s books in a way that is as ingroupy as the New York intellectual establishment’s back-cover blurbs. Among the most prodigious of these boosters is Senator Jesse Helms, whose other activities are also indicative of the organizational impulses of the New Right.

Elected to the Senate from North Carolina in 1972 in a campaign fueled by racism, especially antibusing rhetoric, Helms has been the foremost New Right spokesperson in Congress on a range of issues. Not only has he led the fight against busing, but he has been among the most persistent and punitive opponents of abortion rights, a militant militarist, and a leading critic of SALT II, the Panama Canal Treaty, and majority rule in Zimbabwe. In 1973 he set up the Congressional Club to help pay off the debt from his 1972 campaign. Since then he has raised funds so successfully that he not only financed his own reelection campaign in 1978 — when he was called “the $6 million candidate” — but has helped elect others as well. Most notable is his protege John East, who won North Carolina’s other Senate seat in 1980. As Viguerie gloats, the money his club has raised gives Helms “a financial and political base unsurpassed by any other Senator in American history. Consequently, the national Republican Party has next to no ability to influence Helms.” In fact, the North Carolina-based staff of the Congressional Club is larger than those of the Republican and Democratic parties in the state combined. In addition to funding election campaigns, however, Helms has also used the Congressional Club to set up several foundations or think tanks. Through the most active of these, the Institute for American Relations, Helms sent two aides to Great Britain and Africa seeking to negotiate a conservative solution to the war in Zimbabwe.

Like liberal members of Congress the conservatives, with New Right guidance, have their study groups and research affiliates known as the Republican Study Committee and the Senate Steering Committee. These give conservative legislators forums to “network,” caucus, and get research and political advice. Viguerie credits Paul Weyrich with a central role in organizing these bodies around 1973. They tie together a growing number of senators and representatives who consider themselves close to or part of the New Right.

More important than assisting conservatives once they are in office, however, is getting them there in the first place. Helms has not been alone in this. The discussion of the four core groups above suggests the great importance the New Right places upon winning elections. They have been quite successful. With the past few elections an increasing number of representatives and senators consider themselves part of or close to the New Right. Gordon Humphrey, who won the New Hampshire senate race in 1978 is considered “the first U.S. Senator to come up through the ranks of the New Right.” Humphrey first came to the New Right leaders’ attention through his work in the
Conservative Caucus. A number of the senators elected in November 1980 will join the incumbent conservative senators, and will thus provide a vocal group to protest Reagan's lapses from within Congress as the New Right orchestrates protests from "below." In 1974 another important vehicle for creating cooperation among legislators was organized. The American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) was at first independent of the New Right, but through the offices of Weyrich — who had access to foundation funds — the New Right was able to gain control. Today it has a membership of over six hundred elected state officials with committed New Rightists as the core elected leaders and with New Right cadre as the permanent staff. Clearly the single-issue groups discussed below are active at the state level, but the ALEC is one of the main ways that the New Right leadership directly makes contact with state governments from the inside, through lobbying and campaign donations. This form of politicking complements the more issue-oriented politics to which I now turn.

The Single-Issue Groups

Attention to so-called social issues — abortion, busing, gun rights, pornography, crime — has also become central to the growth of the New Right. But to imagine that the New Right has a fixation on these issues misses the mark. The New Right is looking for issues that people care about, and social issues, at least for the present, fit the bill. As Weyrich puts it, "We talk about issues that people care about like gun control, abortion, taxes and crime. Yes, they're emotional issues, but that's better than talking about capital formation." — Conservative Digest, "The New Right: A Special Report," June 1979

Without the single-issue groups which were already tapping popular sentiment and activity, the New Right would not have been able to organize the center as it has done. The single-issue groups are the soil out of which the New Right grows. The very sophisticated political apparatus and technological hardware in Washington and its Virginia suburbs has to "interface" with real people in local communities. The voter registration drives, the leafleting of churches, the pressure on school boards to stop sex education, and the pressure on city councils to cut funding for abortions and birth control counseling — all of these activities are necessary if the RAVCO hardware is to count politically.

In considering the single-issue organizations, there are several important distinctions: whether an organization primarily operates with a paid professional staff or also has an active base of volunteers in local communities; whether it began independently of the New Right core or as a New Right creation; whether it is currently tied into the New Right core nexus.

Broadly put, there are top-down organizations that are basically for lobbying, legal defense, and propaganda, and there are mass-based social-issue movements. The first group tends to represent interests of different segments of the capitalist class, and the second tends to represent the interests and concerns of cross-class social groups with traditionalist social and cultural concerns. On the whole the first are older groups that come out of the old Right but have developed ties with the New Right or collaborate with it. The second group is composed of the newer organizations that began or really took off in the seventies. They are the distinctive element of the New Right; they are the groups that most tap popular activity and that reach the new segments of the populations not attracted to the older right-wing organizations.
It is wrong, however, to think that the New Right only uses the social issues in order to gain support for its economic program. While this might be true for certain individuals and for certain organizations within the complex, the New Right as a whole does work to combine them, to work out a politics that speaks to both broad areas of concern. An AFL-CIO staff person was wrong, then, when he said that the New Right is "distracting working people with very emotional issues that come and go, while obscuring such very real concerns as job security, health care and educational opportunities."17 Issues such as family life, sexuality, women's status in society, race, and the quality of public services do not just come and go

The New Right's top-down, narrowly probusiness groups do gain legitimacy from the social-issue groups. It also works the other way: traditional moralism gains legitimacy from being aligned with American freedom and individualism as symbolized by the free market. On balance, though, the New Right is more open about its fight against abortion and sex education than about its right-to-work activity and its hostility to public-sector unions. The National Right to Work Committee, while it has a membership of hundreds of thousands, does not mobilize its constituency for local actions, meetings in churches, bake sales, and the like. It elicits financial support and at times signatures for letter-writing campaigns to
influence public officials. But it mostly operates through its regular paid staff and through contacts with businesses and other conservative groups.

Contrasted to this mode of operation is Stop-ERA, which Phyllis Schafley controls tightly but which is based on the volunteer labor of many thousands of women organized in chapters in numerous states. Stop-ERA grew out of, fed, and crystallized popular discontent with the ERA. The antiabortion movement consists of many organizations large and small. The largest, the National Right to Life Committee, was initiated by the Catholic Church and is tightly organized at the top, but it has hundreds of chapters in all the states; it depends on the volunteer labor of thousands of housewives and others who go door to door, picket abortion clinics, and lobby state legislators. To mobilize this labor, the networks established through the churches — largely Catholic, but others as well — are tremendously important.

The most dynamic single-issue groups existed prior to, and are independent of, the New Right core. Still, the New Right has attempted to gain control over various groups and has initiated groups in several areas.

The National Right to Work Committee (NRTWC) is a case of a group with a long prior existence that has developed close ties to the New Right. Founded in 1955, it remained a relatively small lobbying and pressure group for years. Through his association with the New Right, longtime NRTWC president Reed Larson used direct mail to increase his support list from twenty-five thousand in 1971 to 1.5 million in 1980. Further, “his top aides are increasingly from the young New Right mold. Membership Director Henry ‘Huck’ Walther is 35 and identified by Vigerie as part of the New Right Leadership Network.”

The National Rifle Association (NRA) affords a different example. The oldest, largest, and most powerful of the progun organizations, the NRA has resisted assimilation into the New Right even though it has used RAVCO for fundraising. In the mid-1970s internal disputes arose between a conservative, individualist progun faction and a faction that “put more stress on gun safety, environmentalism, and the like.” Even though the conservatives won, the New Right exploited the situation to set up two competing organizations. Led by New Right activists, both of these new groups are rival centers of opposition to gun control, drawing some of the gun-owning individualists who might not care about the “pro-family” causes of the New Right. The Citizens Committee for the Right to Keep and Bear Arms and its legal arm, the Second Amendment Foundation, in Bellevue, Washington, are directed by Alan Gottlieb. Similarly, a former John Birch Society organizer, and California state representative, H.L. “Bill” Richardson, organized two groups — Gun Owners of America and Gun Owners of California — in 1975 with fundraising organized by Vigerie.

The New Right has attempted the same thing in relation to the largest of the antiabortion organizations; it has set up its own rival groups. Claiming ten million members, the National Right to Life Committee is the oldest, largest, and most established of the antiabortion organizations. It is not part of the New Right’s “pro-family coalition” even though it takes the family and traditional sexual mores very seriously. But seeking to keep the abortion issue (relatively) separate from other social issues, it has resisted integration into the New Right. As a result the New Right has set up competing organizations led by individuals close to the New Right complex. The couple Paul and Judie Brown, respectively, are head of the Life
Amendment Political Action Committee (LAPAC) and the American Life Lobby (ALL), and are active members of the New Right leadership network.

Clearly the New Right cannot denounce the NRTLC, as it is the largest and most important anti-abortion group. But the New Right’s response to the June 1980 NRTLC convention in Anaheim, California reveals the manner in which it distances itself from and competes with the NRTLC. Dr. Bernard Nathanson was a featured speaker at the convention. An early and active supporter of legal abortion, he worked for its legalization politically and himself performed numerous abortions. He has now changed his mind, as he discusses in his recent Aborting America. Clearly it was something of a coup for the NRTLC to feature him as a speaker. Yet the May 1980 LAPAC newsletter criticized the decision: “LAPAC questions the wisdom of any one group or individual romancing a doctor who does not yet understand the meaning of fertilization; who does not represent our view that women should be totally informed; who does not even support the HUMAN LIFE AMENDMENT. Is this movement romancing the devil? . . . LAPAC thinks the answer is yes . . . BEWARE!”

The Religious Connection

There are an estimated 85 million Americans — 50 million born-again Protestants, 30 million morally conservative Catholics, 3 million Mormons and 2 million Orthodox and Conservative Jews — with whom to build a pro-family, Bible-believing coalition. — Viguerie in The New Right

Separation of church and state . . . does not mean separation of God and government. — Ibid.21

The New Right has recently turned with great fervor to organizing conservative religious groups. Weyrich, Phillips, and others have played key roles in erecting three significant religious organizations. Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, James Robison, and other radio-TV ministers had earlier taken political positions and organized rallies, but it was with the creation in 1979 of the Christian Voice, Moral Majority, and Religious Roundtable that the fundamentalist spokesmen really threw their lot in with the New Right.

New Right strategists had ample reason to seek these ties. Forever on the lookout for new single-issue groups to bring into their network, they realized that fundamentalists not only agreed with the New Right on certain issues but shared an overall conservative outlook. Weyrich “encouraged the [New Right] movement to expand by taking up the cause of a number of segregated southern Christian schools just as the Internal Revenue Service began belatedly to move against them. By doing so, he hoped to open up a line to the unexplored territory of the nation’s religious fundamentalists, and his efforts were immediately successful.”22 The New Right also sought ties with the media ministers because of its understandable suspicion that the mainstream media could not be counted on to present its views. Howard Phillips has said, “We must recognize the need to develop our own systems for communication so that we are not dependent upon the errors or good natures of our adversaries to communicate our views.”23 The millions of dollars that flow into the coffers of the fundamentalist preachers every week must have been another incentive, for they could be counted on to pay their own way and then some. Finally, the opportunity to develop networks to mobilize an activist base independent of the existing single-issue groups must have been attractive.

Christian Voice was organized first. Based in Los Angeles, it is chaired by the Reverend Robert Grant and has a board that includes
such New Right senators as Orrin Hatch, James McClure, and Roger Jepsen. However, those responsible for organizing it were right-wing activists from Weyrich's CSFC and the American Conservative Union, an older right-wing organization now close to the New Right. It already has an annual budget of $3 million and about 200,000 members including tens of thousands of ministers. It circulates Christian-morality scorecards on the voting records of legislators. In addition it has worked actively against gay rights and has done fundraising and direct-mail advertising for Reagan.

The largest of the new groups, the one that is most synonymous with the religious Right today, is the Moral Majority. It has the advantage of having formal leadership in the hands of Jerry Falwell, whose "Old Time Gospel Hour" broadcasts out of Lynchburg, Virginia, are heard by as many as 50 million people each week. Falwell already had developed a formidable operation, fueled by about one million dollars a week in contribution. Thus the contacts by Weyrich, Howard Phillips, and Bob Billings (a New Rightist long active in conservative Christian politics and in organizing the Christian school movement), led quickly to a very successful takeoff. The first members of the Moral Majority were those who responded to mailings to the "Old Time Gospel Hour" list. In less than two years the Moral Majority has implanted itself in many states and communities, has helped to register hundreds of thousands of new voters, and successfully organized numerous petition drives and letter-writing campaigns. The Moral Majority controlled twelve of the nineteen members of the Alaska delegation to the 1980 Republican convention. Jeremiah Denton, the new senator from Alabama who thinks adultery merits capital punishment, considers himself a senatorial voice for Falwell and the Moral Majority. As head of the Senate Judiciary Committee's newly organized Subcommittee on Security and Terrorism, he may well cast a broad net in his search for subversives. Through conservative ministers in many states, the Moral Majority is building infrastructures to carry on local organizing as well as electoral activity.

Religious Roundtable is the third of the new groups formed in 1979. It was organized and is headed by Ed McAteer, a long time Christian activist recently associated with Phillips's Conservative Caucus. It organizes four two-day meetings a year in which thousands of ministers gather to hear luminaries of the political and religious Right. The one held in the summer of 1980 in Dallas was attended by over seven thousand pastors, and the speakers included Jesse Helms, Phyllis Schlafly, and Ronald Reagan. As usual Weyrich was a key organizer of the conference.

For building these organizations Weyrich credits Billings and McAteer, noting that they "really had the network between them to reach most of the people that needed to be reached to form these different organizations. It was they who brought Howard Phillips and myself together with the Jerry Falwells..." The close links Billings, McAteer, Phillips, and Weyrich have forged distinguishes the current period from the early 1960s, when the rise of the religious anticommunists like Billy James Hargis was organizationally separate from the rise of the like-minded John Birch Society. The ties have been developed at the top; yet so far, the new groups seem to be mobilizing activists in many areas of the country. They are structured in a way that recognizes the need for grass-roots mobilization. In addition to signing up single individuals as members, these groups are organizing tens of thousands of ministers of local churches. The ministers are brought to seminars and conferences like those of the
Religious Roundtable. They are seen as the intermediaries through whom laypeople can be mobilized. The connections, in turn, are a way for the New Right to build its own base of local volunteers. Potentially, if not already, the Moral Majority and similar religious organizations can operate as parallel structures to the existing single-issue groups which currently mobilize activists at the base.

Paul Weyrich speaks of the politicization of conservative religious leaders and organizations as “reverse ecumenism.” Among the leaders of the New Right are Catholics and Jews as well as Protestants, yet they have worked to organize fundamentalist groups. On the one hand, this suggests opportunism. On the other hand, it does reveal certain changes in the meaning of religious affiliation. Partly it can be seen to herald the rise of a nondenominational religiosity as a forceful means of expressing Americanism. Surely religious modes of thought that tend toward dualisms of good and evil fit with the Right’s inclination toward manichean and conspiratorial views of history; beyond that, the “reverse ecumenism” reveals larger changes in the society.

The theological criticisms that conservative and evangelical Protestants harbor, not only toward Catholicism but also toward such heresies as Mormonism, are currently being submerged because of an interest in political collaboration. Mormon senator Orrin Hatch of Utah is on the board of Christian Voice, and two Mormon groups, Pro-Family United and United Families of America, are close to the New Right. The Mormon church itself has actively opposed the ERA, homosexuality, and abortion, and its doctrines put strong emphasis both on the traditional family and on the value of wealth-producing labor. Catholic Phyllis Schlafly and Mormon activists were early allies in opposition to the ERA.

The antiabortion movement was predominately Catholic in its early days. It still gets support from the Family Life Division of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, even as conservative Protestants have become more active. Many Catholics working in the antiabortion movement hold back from linking their cause to the thorough conservatism of the New Right, yet there are also many conservative Catholics who do embrace the New Right program. For instance, along with the 37,000 Protestant ministers in Christian Voice, there are also 13,000 Catholic priests and nuns.

Just as important, I think, is the shifting relationship between class and ethnicity. Catholics, who were once identified with the lower portions of the working class, are now arrayed throughout the class structure. Thus anti-Catholicism as a religious, nativist expression of labor-market competition and of upper-class Anglo-Saxon cultural condescension has decreased (not ended) because its material base has eroded. It is instructive that compared to the 1920s, when the KKK’s growth outside the South was due at least as much to anti-Catholicism as to racism, its attraction today is mostly racist. Its appeals to blue-collar ethnics in northern cities have been similar to the appeals to white southerners. More generally, the silent majority cuts across religious as well as regional lines; it excludes blacks, not Catholics. Just as the discovery of ethnicity in the seventies was partly a way of responding to the “blue-collar blues” without mentioning class, so the rhetoric of Christianity is a way of saying white without mentioning race.

Similarly, with the class shifts among Jews in the United States, with the conservative opposition of Jewish leaders to affirmative action and with the very strong pro-Israel position among most conservatives today, antisemitism is actively discouraged. The inclusion of (at least
a few) Jews in the New Right, the inclusion of certain Orthodox Jews in antiabortion activity, and the racial and class appeals to Jews—who remain electorally critical in certain states—are all important strategically and ideologically.

Yet antisemitism frequently creeps into the rhetoric of leaders of the religious Right. One senses that Falwell, who has made slips himself, must be working hard, not only to convince the national media that he and his brethren are not antisemitic, but also to suppress a very real antisemitism in the ranks. Recently asked how to combat antisemitism, Falwell replied, "Every preacher has an obligation from God to work and preach toward putting an end to hate and hate groups." He added, "There is not one anti-Semite in a Bible-believing church in America." Yet last summer the head of the huge Southern Baptist Convention, a fundamentalist supporter of the New Right, told a Religious Roundtable audience that God did not hear the prayers of Jews. More recently, the head of the Moral Majority of New York state, the Rev. Dan C. Fore, "embraced" the Jews by stating, "I love the Jewish people deeply, God has given them talents he has not given others. They are his chosen people. Jews have a God-given ability to make money, almost a supernatural ability to make money. They control the media, they control this city [New York]."

The evidence thus suggests that the current "love for the Jewish people" springs more from the pro-Israel posture of military hawks than from any ecumenicity, reverse or otherwise. With the increased number of antisemitic incidents in the past couple of years, and with the possibility that US interests will turn away from staunch support of Israel, the religious Right's invocation of the great Judeo-Christian heritage could easily become an unhyphenated celebration of "our" Christian heritage.

NEW RIGHT IDEOLOGY

Mr. Viguerie uses the term the "New Right" to speak of those moral citizens who now must come together and let their voice be heard, those...he has described as the backbone of our country—those citizens who are pro-family, pro-moral, pro-life, and pro-American, who have integrity and believe in hard work, those who pledge allegiance to the flag and proudly sing our national anthem. He has described that group of citizens who love their country and are willing to sacrifice for her. America was built on faith in God, on integrity, and on hard work. — Jerry Falwell, introduction to Viguerie, The New Right. We're Ready to Lead.

The New Right ideology is a diffuse petit-bourgeois ideology. It is diffuse because it works to draw together people from many strata into a social bloc. It is petit-bourgeois because the center of it is in the middle strata and because its appeals — while not directed just to the classic petit bourgeoisie — play the broad middle strata off against the extremes. Thus small-business interests are appealed to against the intrusions of government and the privileges of big business. The permanently employed members of the white working class
are appealed to against the lower-paid, irregularly employed, and colored segments. Further, it is petit-bourgeois because the ideology is explicitly procapitalist and incorporates the production-oriented managerial strata while excluding the so-called New Class. In this way, the ideology not only defines a legitimate middle against the extremes, but also defines the righteous portions of the middle strata. Crucial to this process of exclusion is the antistatist element of the ideology. Members of the unrighteous “New Class” are excluded from the social bloc because they use their control of the state to assist the excluded groups to the detriment of those to be included.

Because the traditional moral and social order was once assumed to be permanent, its elements were not originally an explicit part of a petit-bourgeois ideology. But as capitalist development has eroded or transformed the old ways, they have had to be consciously and explicitly defended. Thus today the whole range of social groups that threaten the middle strata have to be marginalized and excluded from the bloc. In this way blacks, foreigners, feminists, sexual libertines, homosexuals, and many others are excluded from the social bloc and are viewed with a mixture of indignation and envy. The religious rhetoric of the ideology reinforces the view that these are agents of the devil, not legitimate players on the stage of history.

Thus the petit-bourgeois ideology forms a definition of who “the people” are. The ideology suppresses class distinctions and highlights social distinctions as relevant criteria for excluding or including groups among “the people.” It is a right-wing populist vision. Let me now turn to a discussion of some of the more important cross-class appeals and suggest how they work both to define a desired social bloc and to defend a vision of competitive capitalism.

Some of these cross-class appeals are clearly related to capitalist class relations, but have such deep cultural roots that they are experienced as independent of economics. Among the most important of these is the ideology of individualism. Myths of mobility, self-made men, liberty, and freedom are linked to “free enterprise” and to an attack on the state. Conservatives are eager to claim a traditional, even religious basis for individualism and to separate its history from that of liberalism, which they view as politically and religiously heretical.

Jim Bakker, TV evangelist who heads the PTL Club (“Praise the Lord,” or “People That Love”) presents a “health and wealth theology” that justifies materialist striving and explains economic failure. “If you turn to Christ, your life will work.” India’s problems, he says, are due to that country’s rejection of Christian principles. And accommodating to the jargon of the consumer society he says, “I’m convinced that Christianity is a lifestyle — a way of life — not a religious experience.”

The religious and traditional American view of individualism are joined; they defend capitalism and occlude class relations (and imperialism). Yet, with their defense of the market, possessive individualism, and class inequalities, the New Right is at some pains to argue that liberals, not they, are really the crass materialists. Jesse Helms maintains that liberals “see their fellowmen in primarily economic terms.” In contrast the conservative “acknowledges the economic and material side of man’s nature, but always gives primacy to the spiritual and moral dimension.”

Liberals deny those dimensions, the New Right argues, largely by promoting the growth of an already bloated secular state. The state interposes itself between economic individuals and their fate in the supposedly natural market, that “mesh of individual volitions” as conserv-
ative journalist M. Stanton Evans calls it. The imagery of the state that Helms employs is striking:

For forty years an unending barrage of “deals” — the New Deal, the Fair Deal, the New Frontier, and the Great Society not to mention court decisions tending in the same direction — have regimented our people and our economy and federalized almost every human enterprise. This onslaught has installed a gigantic scheme for redistributing the wealth and rewards the indolent and penalizes the hardworking.

Thus the social bloc is invoked once again, as the rhetoric joins the hard-working members of the employed class together with the creative capitalists. The productive are aligned in opposition to the unproductive, that is, to the subordinate strata and to the parasitic state functionaries who live off revenue derived from taxing the productive.

There are many valid criticisms of the way that the state works. Its size, inefficiency, intrusion into people’s lives, and the arrogance and self-serving manner of its administrators are clearly crucial issues. The recent Left, of course, has not ignored these features of contemporary life; and opposition to the state is no more a hallmark of conservatism than is defense of liberty and freedom. It is the content of the criticisms and the content of the alternatives that are at issue, not the fact that individuals are defended against the state.

New Right opposition to the state is allied not only with class perspectives and a defense of (male) individualism but with the defense of the family. The family as enshrined by the New Right combines images of male individualism, female supportiveness, and children’s reverence for their parents. It combines a defense of men in the market and women in the home. It is an image of the so-called traditional family of mom, dad, and the kids, and is favorably contrasted to other, “non-conventional” families such as single mothers with kids. When combined with hostility to the state, taxes, and welfare, family imagery thus blends in with other sources of racism. It also conveys a sense of sex roles and sexual repression that demands, quite explicitly, that women know their places and stay there.

A great many issues are thus combined in the defense of the family. In this way family imagery acts as a “condensation symbol,” and — like the “pro-family coalition” — is used to draw together a wide range of distinct issues and to give them a positive image. Enemies are lumped together too. Feminists, youth culture and drugs, black music, homosexuals, abortion, pornography, liberal educators, liberal divorce laws, contraception, and a melange of other phenomena, are all assimilated to a common feature: they are destructive of the family, and along with it the society.

The New Right’s family is viewed as the primary unit of society, as an entity that exists essentially outside of history. It is natural and God-given. In addition the separation between a domestic sphere and a public sphere — in reality an ideological construct of the bourgeois epoch — is presented as a natural dichotomy. The economic is the main arena into which men enter and it too is viewed as natural.

The family is an institution with trans-historical continuity — as much as it has changed. But the separate economy, an economy freed from moral and institutional constraints, is about as “unnatural” as any major social institution going. Yet it and the family, the economic and domestic spheres, are presented as natural in distinction to the artificial constraints imposed upon them by the secular state. The state is not natural; it stands over and above society; society in its two
spheres is natural. What is natural is good and godly.

Yet there are obvious inconsistencies here. For the free market is viewed as more natural than nature itself. Environmental laws, in fact, are opposed as artificially hampering the "natural" workings of the market. The dynamism of the "pro-growth" impulses and the stability of the "pro-family" impulses are thus resolved into an expressive unity. While this unity is no doubt sincerely believed by many in the New Right, it can also be used to argue for crass economic policies that would not in the slightest maintain the stability or quality of family life. For instance, the New Right is currently attacking "regulations outlawing home work in the knitted outerwear industry." The principal criticism is that "These regulations are anti-family and particularly hard on women with young children." 34

This kind of sophistry does not obscure the fact that the "pro-growth" and "pro-family" impulses are in tension with one another. Nothing so subverted the family, social life, traditional morality, and religious certitude as the spread of market relations and the rise of commodity production. The rise of capitalism, that is, has been the most disruptive, revolutionary, and unnatural force in history. It constantly revolutionizes relations between family and society, between different elements in society, between members of families. It constantly redefines which things are public and which are private. Designer jeans and ready-mix pancake batter, toasters and televisions, drive-in movies and toxic shock, agribusiness and assembly lines — all these have done as much as New Class liberal planning to change the family. Capitalism with its thoroughly instrumentalized way of treating people has done more than secular-minded state admini-

strators to displace religious morality from its central role in society.

But the ideology of the New Right defends both capitalism and traditional social values. The ideology doesn't allow changes in one sphere to be explained by changes in the other. If one is to stay the same and the other constantly change they cannot be mutually interactive. Thus the myriad ways that they do modify each other are either suppressed or ignored. This suppression serves to mask the tensions between capitalist economic relations and those traditional cultural forms still existing.

Thus the opposition between the capitalist economy and revered aspects of family life is displaced onto a dichotomy between society and the state. The state, it is said, stifles growth in the economy by too much regulation, while promoting change in the domestic sphere by pushing cultural modernism, sexual liberation, and unearned equality.

The defense of family and opposition to the state operates ideologically to define the social bloc of the middle against extremes on various issues. I will look at two ways the family is thematized: (a) in a general racist outlook, and (b) in opposition to abortion.

Pat Robertson, a fundamentalist TV preacher, says that "The home... is the basic unit of the church, the basic unit of the fabric of our society. You have to have some unit, and the home/family has been it so far. Now when this goes you begin to have the corollary problems... You have the flotsam and jetsam of the ghetto where young people don't know who their parents are." 35 In juxtaposing the family to the sexual promiscuity of the (black) ghetto, he has used nonracial criteria for writing blacks out of the moral middle strata and into a place beyond. Thus the underlying racism is given a veneer of legitimacy because
blacks do not, in this view, measure up to proper, moral standards.

This connection of racism with a defense of a way of life is not new, of course. In the 1950s Southern "massive resistance" to school desegregation "associated the threat to white supremacy with the decline of economic individualism, respect for private property, limited government, the influence of religion, family solidarity, traditional sexual norms, and patriotism." The similarity of these concerns to those of today's New Right "pro-family" position is striking.

In response to school desegregation in the South, commencing in the 1950s and continuing on through current opposition to busing, many parents have organized segregated academies. In the South the first were organized by the White Citizen's Councils, and today these form the core of the fundamentalist Christian school movement. In his recent Penthouse interview, Jerry Falwell says of these schools: "We've grown from 1,400 schools in 1961 to 16,000. We're adding a new school every seven hours." In an article on Jesse Helms, journalist Mark Pinsky writes,

One longtime observer of North Carolina schools, noting that many of the so-called Christian schools were thrown together in the wake of court-ordered desegregation and are known throughout the South as "seg academies," remarked, "When they said busing," they usually meant "niggers." Nowadays when they say "Christian," they usually mean "white." 

The movement now extends far beyond the South and has roots in a general social conservatism that deplors many aspects of current public education in addition to busing. The
Christian school movement is one of the clearest ways in which the social and economic concerns of the New Right are united, for the cultural preservation they seek in their Christian schools will be more affordable if they can get the tax credits they seek. Thus the opposition to the state, and its "educationists," again combines with racism and a "pro-family" stance.9

Strivings for racial justice and the distorted ways in which they are partially enforced by the government are thus attacked from both strands of conservatism. Black demands for racial justice — the Right argues — threaten family, community, parental control; they also threaten individual rights, liberty, freedom to compete and be rewarded for one's own efforts. While some of the Right's criticisms of the ways that the state has addressed busing and affirmative action are well taken, they are ultimately repressive because they are raised in order to maintain racial domination, not as part of a criticism of the ways state action perpetuates it or alleviates in costly ways.

The "pro-life" inclusion of the unborn in its populist social bloc calls upon some of the same arguments used to exclude blacks. Concerns of antiabortion leaders interviewed in the mid-1970s are strikingly similar to the views of opponents of desegregation. One careful student found that two themes predominate in the concerns expressed by... anti-abortion leaders: concern about eroding religious/moral/familial traditionalism and opposition to centralized government.

The anti-abortion movement can be best described as conservative in tone — a movement to preserve or regain traditional moral, religious, and laissez-faire political values.40

The contemporary antiabortion movement arose in response neither to the existence of abortions nor to an increase in their number. It arose in response to the legalization of abortion. It is this legitimation, more than the act of abortion itself, that threatens traditional social and sexual values. Ultimately the main opposition to abortion is not a defense of the fetus but fear of women's independence and fear of female sexuality. Opposition to abortion is part of a larger opposition to changes in family relations, sexual mores, and the status of women. The New Right opposes not only abortion but also contraception and sex other than within marriage. Viguerie recently wrote that "Pre-marital sex and adultery, in my view are much more serious threats to our society than homosexuality."41 Viguerie and others fear teenage sex not only because it can result in pregnancy and abortion, not only because it is "dirty," but also because it represents a threat to the kind of family and society they hold dear.42

Like the family, the fetus is a condensed symbol. The fetus simultaneously stands for the desire to regain traditional society, and for hostility to feminism and freer sexuality which threaten that world. Symbolized as a minute pair of feet (the size of the feet of a several-week-old fetus) and worn on a chain as a necklace, the fetus is a symbol of life, of the patriarchal chain of being and the wonder of life. Symbolized as a bloody mass of tissue in a plastic garbage bag, the fetus is a symbol of the costs of female sexuality let loose. Further, the desire to protect the fetus — itself thematized as a miraculous meeting of nature and God — is connected with the view that the world is changing in ominous and threatening ways, ways that even deny life itself the opportunity to come into being. The legally sanctioned medical penetration of the woman's body to abort the fetus, thus murderously parallels similar penetrations of the body politics by pernicious social trends. The desire to protect
the fetus is the desire to stand fast against these threats to absolute morality.

**Sources of New Right Ideology**

Well, it is easy for people today who are violating God’s law and man’s law to ridicule those who oppose them by simply saying, “That fellow’s repressive; he is suggesting a return to where America was fifty years ago, morally.” That is exactly what I am proposing, morally. Not technologically. I certainly am very much a progressive person… But there’s a vast difference between technology and theology. — Jerry Falwell, interview in *Penthouse*

The New Right’s ideology quite purposefully taps into a wide range of discontents. It provides overlapping symbols and explanations of how things became so terrible and how they can be set right. The ideology itself has several sources. It incorporates conservative strands of the dominant American culture and its various regional, religious, ethnic, and class subcultures, and all of these as they are mediated through mass culture. It is also a version of what has been called “fusionism” in conservative intellectual thought, a combination of traditionalist and laissez-faire conservatism. Finally, it is a very strategic, instrumental, media-oriented use of ideas and symbols. The New Right combines these into a salient, if philosophically confused, ideology.

The family and the free market are both elements in the cultural heritage of the US. The male individual has long been heroized and the rootedness and moral constancy of the good woman, the wife, long celebrated. The family is celebrated as the embodiment of self-sacrificing women and self-made men living together with proper, complementary roles for each, self-reliant and hostile to interventions by the state. Children know their places and grow up to be like their folks. The American people claiming the plains from unproductive Indians is surely an image that combines familial stability and economic dynamism. Further it naturalizes the market relations of the settlers and makes the Indians a colorful but devilishly cunning part of nature. Familial pastoralism and frenetic production are bound together in this conservative vision of American expansion.

Against this image of the traditions that made America great are images of a rising secular state, of meddling professionals, of women, blacks, and others who seek government handouts, of moral relativists, and of moral decadents. The ways the Right views the forces impinging on America and “her” “people” changes. In the 1950s many features of American life were defended against images of conspiratorial Communism. While Phyllis Schlafly and others on the Right still do attack the Trilateral Commission, the Rockefeller cabal, the UN, and one-worlders as essentially in league with the Communists, they give as much or more attention today to those they term “secular humanists.” The utility of the term is that it reveals the common features of the various trends and groups they oppose, and also points to a common enemy.

One feature of the New Right’s use of tradition is that many of the symbols and images are abstract — they lack detail. The abstractness of the symbols and images the New Right uses is “functional” because it allows people in different classes, subcultures, regions, and religions to fill in the details from their own relevant sets of experiences. The family imagery is mostly of a nuclear family without many elderly people around, without extended kin networks evident. Yet its vagueness allows social conservatives among isolated suburbanites, working-class city dwellers, rural whites, Mormons, Catholics, and Protestants all to see their idealized families in the ideology and imagery of the New Right.
Fusionism

What was so strange about simultaneously opposing centralized government, supporting a non-socialist economy, and adhering to traditional morality? What was so inconsistent about being at once a Christian, an anti-Communist, and a believer in private property and individual responsibility? — George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America*

The combination of elements of different ages of the past has not developed so easily among conservative intellectuals as in the popular cultural forms of conservative thought. There have been two main strands of systematic conservative theory. For some, conservatism has meant the embrace of tradition, of revealed Biblical truth, of community and localism, of landed property and patriarchal authority and social hierarchy generally; that is, of essentially precapitalist society. For others conservatism has meant the embrace of classical liberalism, competitive capitalism, the market economy, and individual liberty as opposed to state intervention and economic planning. Traditionalist conservatism promotes an organic view of society with the whole superior to the individual; laissez-faire conservatism promotes an atomistic view of society with the individual and individual rights superior to social constraints. In the words of George H. Nash, a conservative historian of conservative thought, "While libertarians asserted the right of the individual to be free, the right to be oneself, traditionalists were concerned with what an individual ought to be." 45

The problem, then, is how to create a fusion between these radically different philosophical approaches. That is, how can the dynamism of unfettered economic man and the timeless stability of traditional (wo)man be joined ideologically? Fusion involves several processes: heightening those features of each current that are most compatible with the other, lopping off the most unassimilable features, naming common enemies, and forsaking methodological rigor. In the current political context, defense of the family (as the embodiment of both the economic and the domestic sphere) and opposition to the state (as the enemy of both) are ways that the two spheres are rhetorically and symbolically joined.

Ironically, the political advantages of fusion are achieved at the expense of the analytic insights that exist in both strands. The traditionalist current, at its best, provides insight into the full range of dehumanizing tendencies of capitalist industrialization. But this critical perspective is lost when money as a universal medium of exchange, production for profit, and instrumental hierarchies within capitalist enterprises are all excluded as causes of the destruction of traditional society. The libertarian current, at its best, is a call for freedom, a critique of the many forms of domination in both traditional society and the modern bureaucratic state. In addition, many libertarians have recognized that imperial extensions of the nation-state subvert domestic freedom at the same time that they oppress other peoples. All of these are lost in a fused ideology that opposes only the secular state, not the state per se.

Another way of describing the fusion is to say that the New Right’s selective antistatism puts it in opposition to the liberal welfare state but not the military nation-state. The nation-state expresses the unity of “the people” whereas the welfare state redistributes wealth and thus acknowledges the class nature of society. Fusionist ideology enables those who are mostly interested in economic conservatism — who seek to roll back working-class power through attacks on social services, on public-
sector unions, and on the minimum wage — to do so by claiming to speak for "the people." The fusionist rhetoric works to mask class interests in these areas just as it masks male interests when the traditional family is invoked.

But it would be wrong to think that there are two distinct groups of people — one seeking to advance its economic interests and another defending a way of life — that are brought together through rhetorical devices. No doubt this is true for some adherents; no doubt many of the particular social issues such as abortion or pornography are not burning issues for many capitalists. Yet this dichotomy is too easy. It tends to divide the social base of the New Right into those who are interested in economic, material interests and those who are motivated by ideals and beliefs. Actually, family life and other social patterns are as material as any set of economic indicators.

The loss of control that the people in the New Right feel is real. Changes in state and society have deprived the elements of the middle strata of certain forms of control they had previously had over their social, economic, and cultural milieu. (This loss of control is not sudden or recent, of course, but the acuteness of a sense of loss and the ability to mount social movements rise and fall. Further, right-wing movements are backlash movements and the New Right is in many ways responding to the New Left and its associated movements.) The changes in the organization of capitalism, the increased role of the state in regulating economic and social and cultural relations, the 1960s movements of minorities, women, students and cultural radicals, the threats world-wide from allies as well as foes to US hegemony — all these have been experienced as threats to the solid middle of America.

CONCLUSION: "THERE'S A MAN GOIN' ROUND TAKIN' NAMES"

In the backlash against the movements of the sixties and the liberal social policy developments of the Great Society, the so-called silent majority has sought to reassert its position in the nation. It has been forced to deal politically with a whole series of topics — the family, sex roles, culture, race, distributive justice, and the US role in the world — that it does not think are really proper for political action. If the New Right is successful it would attempt to depoliticize them by relegating them once again to tradition, custom, and economic market forces, to the implicit natural rules of the game. Yet the
very attempt to depoliticize these issues has to proceed through the route of a counter-political movement. The New Right then, has been forced to politically address, and arrive at policy for, a whole series of issues that it feels are best left to the authority of custom and the “neutrality” of the market.

Moreover, the New Right has offered a set of images and cultural references that are meant to have a cross-class and cross-gender appeal, made possible by their abstractness. The actual implementation of New Right goals will most certainly not meet the needs of the whole constituency. Cutbacks in public services, a decline in real wages, collapse of public education, and the imposition of rigid moral codes will have very different meanings for people of different classes. The upper portions of the New Right’s social bloc will clearly benefit from depressed wages; the lower portions will not. Wives who can hire housekeepers can carry out their responsibilities for the home with greater ease than those wives who are the housekeepers. The continuity of the double standard will mean that restricted access to birth control for teenagers will weigh more heavily on girls than boys. The religious Right’s successes in achieving a Christian America will surely threaten its ecumenicity, and antisemitism and other forms of religious intolerance will threaten many now attracted to the New Right.

These fissures and tensions in the New Right have already begun to surface, and if the New Right were to achieve state power they would be crucial contradictions with which it would have to deal. If successful the New Right could not actually depoliticize all those areas of life it would like to. It would be necessary to use the repressive powers of the state against offenders, against protesters. With apologies to Marx, while history may repeat itself, the first time is as tradition, but the second is with force. Jeremiah Denton has written:

Democracy and freedom are rarities; hard to attain, harder to preserve. The pages of history are littered with freedom’s stillborn, of people who rose against their oppressors, only to have sweet victory stolen from their grasp by another oppressor."

Senator Denton is right, but he might have added that the second oppressor often presented itself at first as a champion of “the people.” So it is with the New Right.

ALLEN HUNTER is an editor of Radical America.

Footnotes
3. The most active old-right groups in the early campaigns against sex education were the John Birch society, through its front Movement to Restore Decency (MOTEDE), and Billy James Hargis’s Christian Crusade. Attacks on sex education continued through the decade and are currently being waged by many groups including Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority, which is working to ban Our Bodies, Our Selves from public schools. The best book about the sex education controversy remains Mary Breasted, Oh! Sex Education! (1970; New American Library paperback, 1971).
4. Richard A. Viguerie, The New Right: We’re Ready to Lead (The Viguerie Company, 1980), p. 103. In addition to Viguerie’s own book promoting the New Right, there are several other useful sources about the New Right. Alan Crawford, Thunder on the Right: The ‘New Right’ and the Politics of Resentment (Pantheon Books) is by a former New Right journalist who now considers himself a “true” conservative. In addition to detailing many of the same features of the New Right that Viguerie draws attention to, Crawford also provides examples of infighting on the Right, shows how the New Right activists moved in on existing organizations, and the like. In addition he provides
a critical account of the direct mail fundraising methods so central to the New Right. His conceptual framework is weak, and he doesn't have an explanation of why the New Right arose when it did. Thomas J. McIntyre wrote The Fear Brokers with John C. Obert (Pilgrim, 1979). A three-term senator from New Hampshire, McIntyre provides an angry account of his defeat by New Right candidate Gordon Humphrey in 1978. William A. Hunter (edited by Thomas W. Bonnett), The "New Right": A Growing Force in State Politics (Washington D.C.: a joint publication of the Conference on Alternative State and Local Policies and the Center to Protect Workers' Rights, 1980) usefully shows how several New Right groups operate at the state level and has ten short case studies. It is marred by a narrow focus on the economic issues the New Right addresses and only mentions state-level activity on the social issues in passing. There have been several magazine articles about the New Right, and some of the more useful are listed in the notes below.

8. James G. Watt, the new secretary of the interior, was president of the Mountain States Legal Foundation. See Alexander Cockburn and James Ridgeway, "James Watt, Apostle of Pillage," Village Voice, January 28-February 3, 1981. See Crawford, pp. 25-27, for more information on these "public interest law firms."
15. This article does not sufficiently emphasize the growing power of New Right elected officials; that would merit yet another article. For an indication of their growing importance see Peter Ross Range, "Thunder from the Right," noted above. For the New Right's view of their importance see Viguerie's The New Right, and articles in back numbers of Conservative Digest.
25. A useful discussion on the role of women and the family in current political-theological thinking and political activity within the Mormon church can be found in Marilyn Warenki, Patriarch and Politics: The Plight of the Mormon Woman (McGraw-Hill, 1978).
30. Ibid., p. 28.
32. Helms, When Free Men Shall Stand, p. 11.
33. The term "condensation symbol" is from Murray Edelman, The Symbolic Uses of Politics (University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1964). He writes, "Condensation symbols evoke the emotions associated with the situation. They condense into one symbolic event, sign, or act patriotic pride, anxieties, remembrances of past glories or humiliations, promises of future greatness: some one of these or all of them." (p. 6).
Paul Mattick, 1904–1981

Early in February in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Paul Mattick died at the age of 77. Since his youth as a worker in Germany and his ties to the revolutionary Spartacist League after World War I, he was dedicated to the emancipation of labor from wage slavery — and from the various vanguards, be they social-democratic or Leninist. A member of the semisyndicalist KAPD (Communist Workers Party of Germany) in the early 1920s, he left Germany for the US in 1926 and remained here. In Chicago, where he lived and worked for many years as a skilled metal worker, he was active in the German-language workers movement and the Chicago group of the IWW, and became, in collaboration with Anton Pannekoek and Karl Korsch, a key publicist and editor of left — or council — communist ideas in the late 1930s and 1940s. His 1947 essay, “Anti-Bolshevik Communism in Germany,” perhaps the most fascinating statement of his political outlook, is reprinted in Telos #26 (winter 1975-76).

The left wing of the German student movement rediscovered Paul Mattick and council communism in the mid-1960s. During the past decade both his older and his more recent writings (Marx and Keynes, Critique of Marcuse, Economic Crisis and Crisis Theory) have found lively audiences in Europe. To those in the Cambridge-Boston area with the good fortune to have met Paul Mattick, he was a special sort of teacher: straightforward, without frills, clear-headed, witty, bitingly critical of all but the militant libertarian Left and saturated with the experience of a half-century of practical and intellectual work. He always left you more thoughtful than before. We could now do worse than let ourselves be nurtured by the visions for which he so tirelessly worked.

Paul Breines
The Radical History Review

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THE NEW COLD WAR

Noam Chomsky

Perhaps the best way to approach the topic of the New Cold War is to take a running start and look at the old Cold War to see what we can learn about the post-World War II system, and about the new phase of it which is now beginning. I think it is reasonable to suspect that there will be some fundamental differences and similarities between the two phases.

As far as the differences are concerned, the most fundamental and the one that I think will be most significant in shaping the course of events is that the New Cold War is likely to be a pretty lonely affair for the US political leadership. In that respect it will be very different from the earlier phase of the Cold War.

During the Second World War most of the industrial world was either severely damaged or totally destroyed. In contrast, the United States flourished during the war and industrial production soared. This led to a situation of extreme dominance of the United States over very large parts of the industrial world. As a Trilateral Commission report correctly states, the US was “the hegemonic power in a system of world order,” and remained so for a quarter-century.

In response to the situation that was developing, some high-level planning took place in the United States during the war. Most of the top-level State Department planners were involved and, of course, the Council for Foreign Relations, which is essentially the corporate input in the planning process. The planners understood that the United States was going to emerge from the war as the world’s dominant power and they proceeded to determine how

This is a slightly revised version of a speech to a conference held by the Mobilization for Survival in May 1980.
the world should be organized in such a way as to meet their interests. They devised the concept known as the Grand Area.

The Grand Area was to include at a minimum the Western hemisphere, the former British Empire, and the Far East. The maximum would be the limit — the universe — and somewhere between the two was to be the Grand Area. The Grand Area was to be organized in such a way as to serve the needs of the American economy, and that, of course, means the needs of those who own and manage the American economy — what is called "the national interest" by political scientists. This was the plan to be adopted and implemented in the postwar period.

Within a few years after World War II the world was broken into two major blocs: the Soviet bloc, which at that time uneasily included China, and the US-dominated Grand Area bloc. In the course of construction of this system there were many conflicts internal to the major blocs themselves.

For example, within the Grand Area there were conflicts during and after the Second World War between the United States and its major allies. There was a kind of mini-war going on during the Second World War between the United States and Great Britain. The United States intended that the Grand Area be constructed in such a way that it would be responsive to the needs of the American economy. That meant pushing the British out of their traditional markets in Latin America and removing them gently from such places as Saudi Arabia, where the oil was and is.

There were many devices used. One of them was manipulation of Lend-Lease Aid. Of course, Britain was on the front line, while the United States did not want to be the front-line power itself — too bloody. (Actually, it was the Soviet Union that bore the brunt of the Nazi attack, but let's put that aside.) In order to keep Britain on the front line it was necessary to supply them with sufficient aid. In fact, the Lend-Lease Bill had a stipulation that British reserves should not go below $600,000,000, the level required to keep Britain fighting at the front line of the war against Germany. At the same time it was also stipulated that British reserves should not rise above a certain level, namely a billion dollars. The thinking behind that appears to have been that if Britain were in too strong a position it would be able to resist American penetration of British traditional markets and it would be able to maintain its position in the Middle East, and that wasn't the way the postwar world was supposed to be organized.

In Saudi Arabia, it was recognized that King Ibn Saud wanted to get on the take himself. It was decided that he must be bought off to follow Western interests properly. The first idea was that the British would pay him. However, this was decided to be too dangerous because the British might exploit the opportunity "to diddle the U.S. oil companies out of the concession," as Navy Undersecretary William Bullitt put it elegantly. For that reason, the United States should pay him off. This was a little tricky since the only device for doing this was the Lend-Lease Bill and according to law, lend-lease was to be given only to democratic allies who were fighting in the war against Hitler. It was a little difficult to interpret this in such a way as to apply to Ibn Saud. Putting the question of democracy aside (the USSR was receiving lend-lease aid), Saudi Arabia was in no way involved in the military conflict. But Roosevelt succeeded. In 1943, he announced that he hereby designated the Saudi Arabians as fighters for freedom and democratic allies. In this way, $100,000,000 in Lend-Lease aid was granted to Saudi Arabia. So it went in the post-
war period, too. France was evicted from the Arabian peninsula in the late 1940s by some legal chicanery, and before long, control over Middle East oil — along with North American oil, of course — was fairly firmly in the hands of US-based corporations, closely linked to the state.

I am straying from what seems to be the Cold War because it is important to understand the internal structure of a system that is coming apart. The fact that it is coming apart is very important for the future. In the early postwar period the United States acted so as to block the rise of national capitalism in Europe. It succeeded in forcing the French and the British out of the Middle East to a substantial extent, with the United States taking over most of the concessions. The theory behind it all was presented in terms of energy, which was then and is now the focus of considerable conflict within the blocs themselves.

The theory was expressed succinctly in a State Department memorandum on petroleum policy in 1944 which stated that the United States (American oil companies) should retain its absolute control in the Western hemisphere, while in the rest of the world there should be an open door to penetration by American enterprise. This is an intriguing interpretation of the open-door doctrine: We hold on to what we have and the rest should be open to competition (in which we expect to do quite well, given the distribution of wealth and power). This is roughly the way things evolved for the early period of the Cold War.

There was a good deal of unity, or perhaps better, obedience. There was not much dissenion within the alliance. There was some, however. For example, in 1956 the British and the French tried with Israeli aid to reinstate themselves as effective actors in the Middle East, though they were quickly pushed out.

There were other elements of conflict and tension, but on the whole, it was a unified Western front under US leadership. That was true of Europe and it was also true of Japan. Japan is now a major competitor of the United States but you must remember that this is a relatively recent phenomenon. It is not true for the whole postwar period. In fact, as late as the early sixties you will find that the Kennedy administration was concerned about the viability of Japan’s economy. It was thought that we might have to help them. In fact, it was not until the mid-1960s that the trade balance between the United States and Japan shifted in favor of Japan, a reflection in part of the Vietnam War. While the war was very costly to the United States by the late 1960s, the Japanese economy gained quite considerable benefits from their role as an off-shore procurement area backing up the war in Vietnam. One of the secrets of the Japanese miracle was to be in just the right place when the United States was fighting in Korea and Vietnam.

Up until the late sixties, in fact — until the cost of the Vietnam War began to really bleed the American economy significantly — the Grand Area alliance was a fairly obedient and unified bloc in spite of some internal dissenion. Now that situation is significantly different. First of all, Europe is moving toward a degree of independence in a slow but I think inexorable fashion. Every year there are further steps: the currency bloc, a parliament, the Euro-Arab dialogue, and other regular developments. It will presumably be a European bloc largely under German dominance with a subsidiary role played by France.

Another manifestation of Western European independence is that they are refusing to go along with the steps the United States has been urging toward a revival of a sharp Cold War confrontation. They have been refusing to
break trade links with Eastern Europe or to undertake a massive armaments program. However, these refusals are tempered. Sometimes they agree and sometimes the agreements are very dangerous.

For example, in the fall of 1979, Europe agreed, under American pressure, to arrange for the installation of Pershing II land-based missiles and cruise missiles which could hit the Soviet Union. This will include missiles placed in Germany, which doesn't make the Russians very happy. Apparently the flight time to Moscow is 5-6 minutes, and the Russians have some memories concerning Germany. That may have been one of the factors, not a major factor, but one of the factors that led the Russians into military intervention in Afghanistan. Whether or not Europe will actually agree to have these missiles installed is not so obvious. It is highly possible that the agreement could collapse in the next few years.

Even though European countries agreed to go along with the United States on the sanctions with respect to Iran, they were very explicit in saying that it was because they hoped that this would delay American military action and put
off confrontation and perhaps the nuclear holocaust that might result if American action were to proceed. Then they were rewarded for that move with the hostage rescue attempt, to which Europe did not react with great enthusiasm, to put it mildly.

Though Europe is still acceding to American pressure to maintain or increase the level of confrontation, they are doing so very reluctantly, dragging their heels, unwilling to undertake the economic sanctions against the Soviet Union that the United States has been urging. There is also little doubt that Europe will simply move into the vacuum created by the US refusal to supply high technology to the Soviet Union, again exacerbating the conflicts that are increasingly developing between Europe and the United States.

Much the same is true with regard to Japan. The United States is trying to press Japan into large military expenditures just as it is trying to do with Europe. The Japanese too are dragging their feet. They are reluctant to enter the system of confrontation toward which the United States is trying to impel them and again you find that sometimes the Japanese acquiesce and sometimes not. Meanwhile Europe and Japan are increasingly moving into areas of primary US concern, such as Saudi Arabia.

These tendencies seem to point in the direction of a breakup of the world into several more or less independent blocs, in particular a breakup of the Grand Area alliance into three monetary and political blocs. One would, in effect, be the European Economic Community, which with its European currency union and other institutions is slowly moving toward a German-dominated independent Europe. Another would be a US-dominated North American bloc — a dollar bloc, incorporating much of the Western hemisphere and other places, including most of the oil-producing regions of the Middle East. If not, I suspect there might be a major war because I don’t think the United States would give that up. Thirdly, a yen bloc which would perhaps increasingly resemble the “New Order” which led to war in the Far East. In addition to these three blocs, there would be a Russian bloc, perhaps including some of the countries around the periphery of the Soviet empire.

There was a recent study of the OECD — the international organization of industrial capital powers — which discussed a set of possible scenarios for the future. Something like this was the one which they thought most likely to develop. This is the kind of situation which has led to war repeatedly in the past. This time it could lead us to the kind of war which civilization could not survive.

* * *

The other factor that differentiates the new phase of the Cold War from its predecessor is something really new in the history of industrial civilization. Throughout much of history there has been a fear of scarcity of resources. The fear has always been overcome either through the discovery of new resources or through improvements in technology. There may be a surprise again, but it does seem that the pressure on increasingly scarce resources has become qualitatively different from what it was in the past. Energy is the obvious case but it is by no means the only one. Almost everywhere you look you will find that there is an actual or impending scarcity of resources, which means that conflicts among the economic units which are competing for them will become more harsh and exacerbated. This makes for an ominous situation. It has not gone without notice. There have been a number of recent statements by diplomats throughout the world saying that the current situation is reminiscent of the situation prior to World Wars I and II, when it was clear
that events were drifting toward war. It wasn't entirely clear what kind of a war, or exactly what the alignments would be, but it was clear that the situation was getting out of control and heading dangerously toward war.

Although the Soviet Union is a military competitor of the United States, it is by no means an economic competitor. It is still a very backward economic unit. About all that they produce effectively is armaments, and even that not too well, quite often. The GNP of the Soviet Union is roughly half that of the United States.

Europe, a highly advanced industrial unit, is a different story. It is slightly larger than the United States and operates at a very high level of technology, comparable to that of the United States. If the United States turns its production more toward the production of waste (military production) and Europe does not, then disparities will develop. This is one of the reasons why the United States is trying to impel Europe and Japan to more military (that is, waste) production. However, it does not seem that either Europe or Japan is going to do this.

Some of these economic concerns were reflected in parts of the speech Henry Kissinger gave in 1973 when he announced the "Year of Europe." He stated that there were conflicts in the Atlantic alliance, problems between the United States and Western Europe. He went on to describe the conflicts. Among them was Europe's unwillingness to give the United States the support it needed.

Kissinger then described the way the world ought to be organized. He described the ideal arrangement as an alliance among the industrial capitalist nations and their clients with the United States managing the overall framework of order. In turn, other powers would have regional responsibilities within this overall framework of order.

However, Kissinger continued, there is now the possibility that Europe might move toward a closed trading bloc which would include the Middle East and North Africa and exclude the United States. In fact, if such a system did develop - trading blocs of the sort that Kissinger was warning against - the United States could become a second-class power with regional responsibilities within an overall framework of order for someone else to manage. This is not a picture of the world that American planners are very eager to contemplate. These possibilities are all very significant differences which, I think, are likely to make the New Cold War system very different from the old one, even though there are some respects in which it is likely to be very similar.

It is worth comparing what the old Cold War system really was with the official version served up by propagandists in both the United States and the Soviet Union. The official version describes the Cold War as a confrontation between two superpowers, one trying to defend itself while the other is trying to expand its power, in a kind of zero-sum game: what one gains, the other loses.

That is the way the system is described by ideologists of the two superpowers and it is not totally false. Effective propaganda cannot be entirely false. But, on the other hand, the real truth of the system is quite different.

It is important to ask oneself why the Cold War system has persisted for so long. The system has, in fact, been highly functional - functional for the ruling groups in the two major power blocs controlled by the Soviet Union and the United States. It has been functional in a way very different from the zero-sum game described in the propaganda.

The real way in which it has operated has been a system for mobilizing support within
Why We Oppose Votes For Men

1. Because man’s place is in the army.

2. Because no really manly man wants to settle any question otherwise than by fighting about it.

3. Because if men should adopt peaceable methods women will no longer look up to them.

4. Because men will lose their charm if they step out of their natural sphere and interest themselves in other matters than feats of arms, uniforms and drums.

5. Because men are too emotional to vote. Their conduct at baseball games and political conventions shows this, while their innate tendency to appeal to force renders them particularly unfit for the task of government.

—Alice Duer Miller, 1915

Alice Duer Miller, the American novelist and poet, lived from 1876 to 1942

each of the superpower blocs for repressive, and often vicious and destructive actions against those who sought a degree of independence within the blocs themselves. The real way the system has functioned is illustrated by what you see now in Afghanistan, where the Russian leadership effectively exploits the Cold War conflict to provide a domestic justification, a way of rallying their population to support the invasion. The explanation that is presented to the Russian people is that they are entering Afghanistan to defend a legitimate government against attacks sponsored by the imperialist powers, who have designs on the USSR itself. Afghanistan is not a very plausible enemy for the Soviet Union nor for its population, but the United States and Western Europe are. The most effective means of winning the approval of the Russian people was to present the invasion as a defensive act against an aggressive major power. Remember that even a totalitarian state must rally its population behind brutal and costly actions. For the moment, Soviet propaganda has succeeded, in this case.

It is precisely the same way, almost in the same words, that the American political leadership, American journalists and the American intellectual establishment presented the Vietnam War to the American people. We were not invading South Vietnam, but responding to a request of a legitimate government for defense against an aggressor that was simply the puppet
of the great superpower enemy. The documentary record shows that American planners understood very clearly from the late 1940s that they were fighting the nationalist movements of Indochina. They tried very hard to find links to international communism for propaganda purposes, but were never successful, not that it mattered.

The doctrine that was formulated by the Eisenhower administration to justify military intervention in Guatemala in 1954 was virtually reproduced by the Russians to defend their invasion of Hungary in 1956. Throughout the entire Cold War period, the system was used, is still being used, and will be used in the future as a means of mobilizing domestic support for actions taken against those who are trying to achieve a degree of independence within the power bloc.

The symmetry which I am describing, however, is only a functional one. The United States has been doing this to a considerably greater extent than the Soviet Union, again a reflection of the greater American power. In terms of degree of violence, number of countries subverted, the number of bombs dropped, and the number of troops overseas, it has by no means been an even balance.

There is no level of absurdity beyond which the propaganda system cannot go. A good example is when the United States backed the invasion of Guatemala in 1954, even sending bombers to Nicaragua with nuclear weapons. This was presented to the American people not as an attack against Guatemala, but as a defense against Russia. This is the way it is still described.

In short, the Cold War system has to a great extent served as the ideological framework for the state to mobilize its population for intervention and subversion. This ideological framework is necessary because the reality involves the application of very ugly measures which are morally difficult for people to accept. These measures may also be very costly in terms of life and material resources.

That is the kind of system the Cold War was, and to a large extent, that is what the New Cold War is going to be too. An increasing amount of the war strategy and technology is designed by the superpowers not for war against each other, but for war against the weak, the defenseless people in underdeveloped countries who cannot strike back. This involves among other things helicopters, napalm, rapid deployment forces, and tactical nuclear weapons. These are not designed for wars against powerful nations. With them you would fight a war of total destruction to prevent them from destroying you. That would, of course, be impossible, but that is the only way a war like this could be fought — for a few days, that is.

These wars against the weak, as I mentioned before, will continue to be conducted within the rubric of the Cold War system, that is, within the traditional pretense that we are somehow defending freedom from the onslaught of Russian imperialists. If you really tried to give an accurate description of the Russian world power you would find something quite different. In a relative sense, Russian power probably peaked in the late 1950s and has since been slowly declining, as U.S. power has. Though there are a few areas in which Russian power has advanced, there have been major defeats. Their greatest defeat, undoubtedly, was the departure of China from the system of Soviet influence, which produced a great shift in the world power balance. The Russians have also suffered setbacks in Indonesia, Egypt, Somalia, Sudan, and Iraq, along with gains elsewhere.

It is very revealing to see how the American propaganda system responds to these changes.
For example, when the Russians had dominant influence in Somalia, this was described as one of the major threats to world peace because Somalia dominated the Indian Ocean. Then when the Russians were booted out of Somalia and the United States moved in, suddenly it turned out that Somalia is not important at all. It is Ethiopia that counts. So now we find that it is Ethiopia that controls the Indian Ocean. It didn’t have such major importance when it was a US satellite.

If you look at the estimates of Russian military power you find similar chicanery with regard to how it is estimated. There are countless articles and statements which allege that the Russians are enormously outstripping us in military expenditures. Occasionally a truthful analysis becomes available. There is a very good one by Frank Holtzman, an economist at Tufts whose specialty is the Russian economy. He gives an account of how the CIA estimates Russian expenditures.

The CIA constructs what is called a dollar equivalent of the Soviet military effort. The question becomes: what would it cost us to do what they do? Now, the military system of the Russians is labor-intensive, while ours, of course, is capital-intensive. For us labor is expensive; for them it is cheap. For us capital is relatively cheap. For them it is expensive. This means that for us to duplicate what they do would be very expensive; in fact, for us it is relatively cheap to have a high-technology military force with a relatively small number of bodies. For them it is the other way around. Therefore, when we translate the costs for us to duplicate their system, it is very expensive. It would also be enormously expensive for us to duplicate the Soviet agricultural system, but we do not therefore conclude that we are far behind them in this area.

Now let us turn it around and construct a ruble equivalent to our military system. It turns out that the ruble equivalent is infinite — that is, there is no way for them to duplicate our system. They could spend every ruble they have and they simply could not construct our military system because the technology is too advanced for them to duplicate.

Holtzman also points out that there is a striking contradiction between the picture presented to the public and the information given to Congress on military power. On one hand, when the military establishment addresses the public, it claims that the Russians are outspending us on defense, but on the other hand, when the Joint Chiefs of Staff testify to Congress they always say that we are much stronger militarily than the Russians. Obviously, both of these statements cannot be true. Furthermore, NATO outspends the Warsaw pact by any measure, and much of the Soviet military effort is directed against China. Soviet military power is no doubt a major menace to the world, but there is much deception in the picture presented to the public.

There are all parts of the strategy that is being used domestically to persuade the public to support the renewal of the Cold War system — a system which is going to be used as it has been used in the past, for war against the weak. This is why we often find that the people who are supposed to be defended by this system are the most upset about it. It turns out that they do not want to be defended because they know that it is pretense to justify American military intervention in their region. For example, the Kuwaiti press, which is quite conservative and anticommunist, makes a strong case concerning the dangers of American interventionism in their region, and even Saudi Arabia has warned against it, as has Mexico with regard to Central America.

In fact, it is very lucky for the world that the
American hostage rescue attempt failed. If it had succeeded, in spite of the very sharp conflicts between the Arab states and Iran, the Arabs probably would have supported Iran against any measures taken by the United States. We might have seen a great political explosion in the oil-producing regions, one that might have brought industrial civilization to its knees.

The next time around, if the United States resorts to military action, that may happen. It is a very unstable region. In Saudi Arabia, for example, there have been a series of coup attempts in the past years. There is a great deal of unrest in these countries where a very small ruling elite controls extraordinarily rich systems, but where much of the general population lives in poverty. This is a very dangerous and unstable situation and may explode at any time.

Another respect in which the New Cold War is likely to be like the old one is in its focus on the Middle East. When the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan were announced, the focus of attention was really not on Europe. There was a fear that the war in Greece and the instability of Turkey would spill over into the Middle East, the locus of the major resources of energy. This was the earliest version of the Domino Theory. Presently, concern over
Southwest Asia is also oriented toward the Middle East, which remains the major source of relatively cheap energy for the world. Any threat to US domination of the oil-producing areas could lead to an explosive international conflict. This is one of the most persistent and most dangerous continuities between the old Cold War and the new Cold War.

Although it is important and right to stress the dangers of nuclear war within the context of US interventionism, I do not want to end this talk without saying something about the world that has been created within the Cold War system. One ought to think about the permanent costs of these systems of repression that are developing. This is sometimes harder to grasp than the danger of a terminal nuclear war. There are countless examples.

A recent one that I ran across was a report buried in the Living Section of the Christian Science Monitor. It says that almost 200,000,000 children throughout the world are slaving away, often in dismal poverty, most of them in the “free world.” This article was based on a study of child labor by the London-based antislavery society. Children have been maimed in India in order to become more effective beggars, sold to work under appalling conditions in Thailand, and turned into chattel slaves at the age of three in Latin America. Latin America is singled out as the area in which child labor will be harder to eradicate than in any other part of the world. In countries with large Indian populations, such as Bolivia, girls as young as three years old are adopted by white families; they are made sexually available to the sons in the family and not allowed to marry, and the children they conceive become virtual chattels themselves. This is only a part of the general pattern of atrocity which results from this system of intervention within the pretense of international conflict.

So, as I have said, it is right to pay attention to nuclear holocaust, which is a great potential danger, but it is even more right to pay attention to the daily violence which is being committed as a consequence of policies we follow all the time. These are the things that should be at the forefront of our attention when we consider the significance of the New Cold War.

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Sometime this spring, the Rapid Deployment Force (RDF) will conduct the first full-scale test of America’s reconstituted apparatus for military intervention in the Third World.

Several thousand soldiers of the crack 7th Marine Amphibious Brigade (MAB) will be flown from Twenty-Nine Palms, California, to Somalia or Oman, where they will pick up their heavy equipment from supply ships “pre-positioned” in the Indian Ocean area, and then participate in several weeks of desert combat maneuvers. Accompanying the marines will be several squadrons of A-6, F-4, and AV-8 fighter planes, plus hundreds of specialists in military logistics, communications, and intelligence.

This force is considered the “spearhead” of the RDF, and would be the first sent into combat should Washington decide to invade the Middle East. And while the Iranian hostage crisis no longer provides the pretext for such action, it is not impossible that this force will be used in some other military venture in the Middle East — especially if the current Iraq-Iran war spreads to other countries of the Persian Gulf.

If US forces go into combat in the Persian Gulf area, they will find an elaborate intervention apparatus already in place:

- In July, the Pentagon deployed in the Indian Ocean seven cargo ships filled with arms, ammunition, fuel, and supplies to serve as a “floating arsenal” for any RDF forces sent to the region.
- The United States has the largest war fleet ever assembled in the Indian Ocean, with two
aircraft carriers equipped with tactical nuclear weapons, plus 1,800 Marines aboard amphibious assault ships.

- Furthermore, the AWACS radar patrol planes now in Saudi Arabia are designed to serve as an airborne command post, capable of housing an entire battle staff with all the communications facilities needed to direct the entire RDF force in the region.

- Finally, to assure effective support of any large RDF force sent to the region, the United States has established basing agreements with the governments of Oman, Kenya, Somalia, and Egypt. US technicians are already deployed at these bases, and the Pentagon is expected to spend several billion dollars over the next few years to convert these facilities into full-scale support bases for the RDF.

All of these activities suggest a major effort to enhance US intervention capabilities in the Middle East. While no one can predict when and how this apparatus will be used, I believe the US buildup has attained a momentum which will not diminish until some crisis or provocation triggers its actual use, leading possibly to another Vietnam in the Middle East area.

But while the Middle East is the most likely locale of a new Vietnam, it is not the only place which is receiving attention of US war planners. At MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, home of the RDF, strategists are working feverishly to complete computerized plans for US intervention in many Third World areas, including Central America, the Caribbean, Africa, and Southeast Asia. The RDF itself, now with 200,000 active-duty troops and 100,000 reservists, is designed to fight in any Third World locales where US economic interests are threatened by popular upheavals. Indeed, outgoing secretary of defense Harold Brown has often warned that it is a mistake to assume that the RDF is exclusively aimed at the Middle East, since the US faces grave threats throughout the Third World. "In a world of disputes and violence," he said on January 29, 1980, "we cannot afford to go abroad unarmed."

What explains this dramatic expansion of US intervention capabilities? The official explanation, of course, is that US officials are responding to popular pressures for a tougher military posture in response to the taking of US hostages in Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. This explanation, however, is faulty in two respects. First, the decision to reconstitute US intervention capabilities was made long before the Iranian and Afghanistan crises; the RDF, for instance, was first authorized in August 1977, two years before the hostage takeover. Second, the decision was made secretly, and at highest elite levels, at a time when the public still adhered to the so-called "Vietnam Syndrome" (as reflected by the secret White House decision to ready US forces for intervention in Yemen in February 1979, ten months prior to the Afghanistan invasion). If the official explanation is faulty, what then is the real reason?

To answer, I think we have to go back to the end of the Vietnam war and look at the struggle that emerged in the foreign policy establishment over the course of US policy in the post-Vietnam world. Although all policymakers agreed that the United States must maintain its leadership of the capitalist world, there were profound differences in defining the threats to that leadership and in forging the strategies for overcoming those threats.

On one side in this contest are the people I call the Traders, the leaders of the big multinational corporations and the international banks. This group believes that the greatest threat to US supremacy is disunity among the advanced capitalist powers in facing the
growing economic nationalism of the Third World, and that the appropriate strategy for dealing with this threat is to form a united front of the “trilateral” powers of Western Europe, Japan, and the United States and to coopt Third World elites through token reform of the world economic order. In case of conflict, the Traders seek to avoid direct intervention by US forces but prefer to rely on “surrogate gendarmes” like President Sadat of Egypt to police critical areas.

Opposing the Traders is the group I call the Prussians, composed of the military leadership, the intelligence agencies, arms manufacturers, and the Cold War intellectuals who were discredited by Vietnam and hope to make a comeback through cultivation of a new Cold War environment. This group believes that the greatest threat to US supremacy is the growing political upheaval in the Third World coupled with growing Soviet support for radical Third World regimes, and that the appropriate US strategy is to resume its role as world policeman and to build up its nuclear arsenal in order to discourage Soviet involvement in future Third World conflicts.

At first, the Traders won the upper hand in this contest, and top Trader leaders — e.g. Cyrus Vance, Paul Warnke, Andrew Young — were given top positions in the Ford and Carter Administrations. Under their leadership, the United States has pursued a noninterventionist military policy for most of the 1970s, staying out of conflicts in Iran, Cambodia, Angola, Ethiopia, and Nicaragua.

But in the past two years the Trader position has crumbled and the Trader leadership has been driven out of Washington by the Prussians, who now control US foreign policy and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

The Prussian takeover is due, I believe, to several key factors:

• First, the Traders, because of their own anticommmunism, were never willing to contest the inflated estimates of Soviet military power which were the Prussians’ key weapon in the struggle to win political support. Although both sides know the Soviet Union is number two and slipping, the Traders refused to challenge assertions that they are number one, and thus allowed the alarmist Prussian view to dominate the press, the public, and Congress.

• Second, the Trader position rested, to a very great extent, on the use of surrogate gendarmes, especially Iran, to protect US interests in critical Third World areas. With the collapse of the Shah’s regime in January 1979, therefore, the whole strategy of using surrogates collapsed with him, thus undermining the credibility of the Trader position.

• Finally, and most important, there is a growing recognition that the world capitalist system is unable to provide Third World countries with the First World standard of living they’ve been promised, and that therefore Third World masses will increasingly turn to radical solutions to their continued poverty and backwardness — thus threatening America’s privileged economic position. And because Third World elites, in the wake of the
Shah's and Somoza's demise, no longer appear able to control popular movements with their own repressive capabilities — no matter how elaborately aided by US arms and advisers — American leaders now believe it is necessary for the United States to dispense with surrogates and to reaffirm the traditional US role as global policeman. This new stance was best described by Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, architect of US intervention in Vietnam, in Foreign Affairs magazine: "As the leading affluent 'have' power, we may expect to have to fight to protect our national valuables against envious 'have-nots.'"

As I suggested earlier, this stance was originally adopted by US elites in February 1979, following the fall of the Shah, and now dominates US foreign and military policy. Thus, although from 1975 to 1979 the Warsaw Pact threat to NATO was cited as the principal rationale for increased US military spending, now the threat of what ex-secretary Brown calls "international turbulence" is the driving force behind the US military buildup.

Evidence of this new emphasis abounds:

- First, the creation of RDF, a force designed specifically for military intervention in the Third World. Originally set at 100,000 troops, the RDF has now increased to 300,000 soldiers backed by several aircraft carriers plus several squadrons of B-52 bombers in the so-called Strategic Projection Force.
- Recent US military exercises, such as Operation Gallant Eagle (a combined Army-Marine exercise in the Mojave Desert), and MABEX-81 (a full-scale test of the 7th MAB's rapid mobilization capabilities), designed to test the RDF's capacity for intervention in Third World areas.
- Registration for the draft, along with plans to move toward actual reinstatement of conscription.

- The Fiscal Year 1982 military budget, the biggest in US peacetime or wartime history, which places great emphasis on the RDF and so-called mobility forces designed to carry US troops to likely sites of conflict in the Third World.
- Reconstitution of US counterinsurgency programs, as evidenced by stepped-up US military aid to internal-security forces in El Salvador, Honduras, Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia. Soon to come: an administration effort to repeal all human-rights restrictions of the 1970s and to restore US aid programs for Third World police and intelligence agencies. Also to come: stepped-up covert operations by the CIA, along with the use of Green Berets in counter-guerrilla operations in Latin America, Africa, and Asia.
- A massive expansion of America's nuclear arsenal, which I believe is designed to intimidate Moscow from involvement in any US-initiated conflict in the Third World.

- Ultimately, of course, the most dramatic and momentous outcome of this buildup will be an actual US intervention in some Third World country. This could come as soon as next month if the Persian Gulf war spreads, or US forces intervene in the Salvadoran guerrilla war, but at this point it appears certain to me that US leaders are committed to an exercise of military power sooner or later to demonstrate America's intent to defeat future challenges to the existing world economic system. This commitment is demonstrated, I believe, by the speed with which the RDF is being constituted, as well by an explicit description of the RDF as a first-strike, preemptive assault unit. As noted by former presidential adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, the RDF "will give us the capability to respond quickly, effectively, and even preemptively in the parts of the world where our vital interests might be engaged and where there
are no permanently stationed American forces.” This view was recently reaffirmed by Lt. Gen. Paul X. Kelley, commander of the RDF, in testimony before the House Budget Committee.

But, while US leaders are avariciously looking for some Third World conflict in which to intervene, their hopes for a rapid victory may be shattered by developments beyond their control. For the world is a very different place than it was in the 1950s, when the sight of a few hundred Marines was thought sufficient to force any guerrilla organization into surrender or annihilation. As a result of the international arms trade — in which the United States is the number one supplier — many Third World armies are as well equipped as those in NATO, and their officers are as well-trained as graduates of West Point and other US military academies. (Between 1950 and 1979 the United States trained over a half-million foreign military officers and combat personnel.) Thus, as one Pentagon official noted, “When you begin looking at the mid-1980s, we aren’t talking about barbarians armed with spears. Because Third World armies have so much advanced military equipment, we can’t stabilize an area just by showing the flag.”

This reality is what explains the sharp increase in RDF strength from 100,000 to 300,000 men. And because even this force may not be sufficient to triumph in some future Third World conflict, Pentagon leaders are talking openly of the use of tactical nuclear weapons to protect outnumbered US expeditionary forces. And because Russian troops and advisers are located in many potential Third World conflict zones, it is possible that a US intervention could produce a confrontation with Moscow and, once nuclear weapons are used, escalate into a full-scale thermonuclear conflict.

What will all this mean for us? I think the consequences are pretty obvious:

- **A new Cold War**, to overcome the final vestiges of the Vietnam Syndrome and to mobilize public support for the expansion of America’s interventionary capabilities.

- **Staggering increases in military spending**, reaching $200 to $225 billion in Fiscal Year 1982, along with massive cuts in social and education programs.

- **Reinstatement of the draft**, perhaps as soon as 1982. And, linked to that,

- **Decreased tolerance for dissent** on foreign policy issues, as demonstrated by right-wing attacks on New Left institutions such as the Institute for Policy Studies and talk of resurrecting the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC).

- Finally, **increased risk of US involvement** in another Vietnam which would be far more costly and destructive than the last one, and which could easily lead to thermonuclear annihilation.

What are the chances all this will come about? Clearly, much of it is already underway — a new Cold War, higher military spending, registration for the draft, and so forth. But there are some mitigating forces which could prevent a complete catastrophe. These include:

- **Opposition of US allies in Europe**, which fear the destabilizing effects on a US intervention in the Middle East, and the economic costs and risks of a new arms race with the Russians.

- **Possible countermoves by the Traders**, who, while largely defeated, can still mobilize substantial elite pressure on Washington.

- **Possible resistance within the US military itself**, when soldiers (especially blacks and Hispanics) who joined up to learn a trade and escape unemployment are ordered to risk their
It was a good wake — music, memories, and people. Our first breathing space since the election: the young and not so young sharing a vision of a different time and space. The media told us it was nostalgia. In isolating and individualizing John Lennon, they trivialized us. Politics and culture can share a common expression. The dream is not over.