<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHERNOBYL'S CHALLENGE TO ANTI-NUCLEAR ACTIVISM</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Richard Rudolph and Scott Ridley</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHERNOBYL, U.S.A.</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Jennifer Scarlott</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;A TOWN BORN OF THE ATOM&quot;</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO HAVEN FOR THE HOMELESS IN A HEARTLESS ECONOMY</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Michael Fabricant and Michael Kelly</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENTS AND UNIVERSITY DIVESTMENT:</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is There a Movement in the Wings?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>William Hoynes</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HARVARD'S STOCKS AND APARTHEID'S BONDS:</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crashing the University's Party</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ken Schlosser</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FREEDOM AND ILLUSION IN VIETNAM</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weighing the Balance of Forces</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>David Hunt</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOOD READING</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Willoughby on Third Parties</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Reebee Garofalo</em> on Pop Music</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

A recent newspaper article informed us that the radioactive fallout released by the damaged nuclear power station at Chernobyl totaled more than that released from all the previous atomic bombings and nuclear tests combined, with potential health effects worldwide. The political fallout from Chernobyl has been worldwide as well: anti-nuclear power movements are resurgent throughout Western Europe, and here in the United States there are signs of renewed activism in campaigns opposing nuclear power plants. Under heavy political pressure, the governors of Massachusetts, Vermont, Ohio, and New York have recently refused to submit emergency evacuation plans for proposed nuclear reactors in or near their respective states, delaying if not halting altogether the licensing of these plants. Polls now indicate that the majority of Americans oppose the expansion of the US nuclear program. Here in New England, the Clamshell Alliance—one of the first of the many anti-nuclear alliances born in the 1970s—is renascent, as are many other grassroots organizations.

In “Chernobyl’s Challenge to Antinuclear Activism,” Richard Rudolph and Scott Ridley take a look at some of the grassroots work being done by anti-nuclear activists in the wake of the Soviet disaster, particularly focusing on opposition to evacuation plans. They contrast
this opposition with the “second coming of nuclear power” pushed by the Reagan administration and some key members of Congress. Even after Chernobyl, the US government continues work to standardize reactor designs and at the same time to limit citizen intervention in the licensing process. The goal is to keep questions technical, outside the reach of democratic politics.

While major US energy corporations will benefit from a renewed investment in nuclear power, it is local communities that will have to face the risks. Rudolph and Ridley argue that local opposition to nuclear power is critical: not only as an effective check on nuclear power’s “second coming,” but as a first step in the potential transformation of energy from a privately-owned commodity to a non-profit service under local public control.

Part of the justification for the second coming lies in the argument that “it can’t happen here”—witness recent statements by US nuclear industry executives that, in the words of one, “Three Mile Island looks like nothing compared to the Russian accident.” The accident at TMI “just reinforced the fact that safety procedures we use in our plants are doing the job.” Yet as Jennifer Scarlott points out in “Chernobyl, USA,” there are some essential similarities between the Chernobyl reactor and many nuclear power plants currently operating in the United States. The sanguine platitudes of the US nuclear executives are chillingly reminiscent of the cheery paens to nuclear power offered by their Soviet counterparts in the pages of Soviet Life magazine—three months before the Chernobyl disaster.

* * * * *

Recently, the city of Boston mobilized 100 volunteers in an effort to take a one-night “census of the homeless.” The census takers fanned out to churches, shelters and 143 “likely street sites” identified by shelter providers and police. While their goal was to challenge federal figures that undercount the homeless, homeless advocates charged that the census methods and the stereotypes behind them remain trapped in dominant myths about homelessness.¹ In their article, “No Haven for the Homeless in a Heartless Economy,” Michael Fabricant and Michael Kelly begin to unravel some of those myths. Beyond documenting the alarming magnitude of current homelessness, they underline the changing composition of those who find themselves on the streets: increasingly women, children and entire families add to the already formidable numbers of men. Others, former mental patients, released through “deinstitutionalization,” end up homeless after finding community refuges and treatment unavailable.

If welfare cuts in the face of economic crises aren’t repression enough, then local government policies providing criminal penalties and the suggestion that trashcans be poisoned certainly are. Perhaps more importantly, the authors suggest that these policies have been accompanied by a philosophical shift toward a revived social Darwinism—another dinosaur step backward toward the future.

Fabricant and Kelly provide an important diagnosis of some of the structural causes of homelessness and the ideology behind the official response. Their analysis also raises other questions. Apart from the effects of the economic crisis and welfare rollbacks, feminists have identified domestic violence as a key cause of homelessness, accounting for an estimated forty percent of all family homelessness.² Such analyses suggest the importance of broadening the agenda in battles for housing to include the recognition of the interrelationship of such services as day care, transportation, divorce, and shelters for the battered women and children as well.


* * * * *

Rather than restrict the title “Back to the Future” to the recent cinematic blockbuster, a scanning of last year’s news suggests a broader use. The “reconstruction” of Richard Nixon, Sylvester Stallone’s “victory” over the Vietnamese, and the “Gulf of Tonkin” carte blanche given Ronald Reagan in the Congressional contra-aid vote, register as
signposts of a decade-long effort to refight, and rewrite, the Vietnam War. It was an effort to rescue the US from the legacy of that war that lay at the cornerstone of Reagan's "Let's Make America Great Again" jingoism.

As one writer recently noted, 'Vietnam déjà vu is of a particularly static, ethnocentric nature. One might add myopic. In examining the war, lessons seem to be restricted to their utility for US foreign policy or military strategy; the historical actors are often confined to those who resided in the USA; and the consequences located only in the American psyche or national morale.'

Gabriel Kolko's Anatomy of a War: Vietnam, the United States, and the Modern Historical Experience, reviewed in this issue by David Hunt, is a timely and much needed antidote to what is frequently offered as "history." As importantly, Kolko's study of the war as an event in which thousands of people became historical actors, presents an informed and grounded exploration that is inspirational as it is corrective.

As Hunt states, "Kolko argues for the importance of 'will and choice in history' and at the same time analyzes... what it means for revolutionaries to work amidst circumstances not of their own choosing." Hunt argues that the author's three-cornered analysis (treating equally the roles of Vietnam, the US, and the Vietnamese Communist Party) has produced the best book available on the war, one that is comprehensive and analytical. In an appendix that follows his review, Hunt places the work in the body of recent literature on the Vietnam War, examining the biases and limitations of some better known works and highlighting some lesser-known but useful ones.


* * * *

The growing strength of the student South Africa divestment movement and the recent Congressional override of the president's veto of sanctions against the apartheid regime have suggested that the Reagan administration's "teflon coating" might be wearing thin. While far from a major break in the political consensus that Reagan seems to have fashioned since coming to power in 1980, the power of both these developments lies in the reappearance of a risk-taking, confrontational politics noticeably absent on campuses and even in traditional "oppositional" camps during the past decade.

As has been the case many times in the past, it was the action of student activists along with a parallel organizing effort by black and progressive anti-apartheid forces outside the electoral arena, that ultimately pushed Congress into action. In this issue we are printing two articles that focus on the divestment movement, raising questions of future strategy and direction. The articles represent perspectives from inside the student movement and from that of a community-based organizer. Bill Hoynes' "Students and Divestment: Is There a Movement in the Wings?" presents an overview of the campus-based activism of the past two years and examines university attempts to prevent the activists from developing a broader political critique. Hoynes contrasts the glossy media exposure given divestment activity with the under-reported opposition to issues of militarism and intervention. He suggests that an ability to shift strategies in the face of university concessions is critical, not only to South Africa-related organizing but to the development of a radical student movement.

One of the issues Hoynes raises is the ability to link university demands to those that may be voiced by campus workers and residents of neighboring communities. Ken Schlosser's "From the Movement" report about campus and community anti-apartheid activists who crashed Harvard University's gala 350th anniversary offers a view of the benefits of that linkage—in this case through the organizing of creative actions exposing the complicity of the nation's best known institution of higher learning not only in South African apartheid but in speculation and land-grabbing in its own backyard.

While the successes and widespread publicity of divestment activity speaks to renewed social activism, links to other ongoing mobilizations, such as against US policy in Central America, remain to be forged. As historian and writer Jon Weiner recently noted, the focus of much of the divestment efforts has been based on the liberal definition of apartheid as a solely moral issue. So while possibilities exist for such tactics as South African divestiture to spark reforms along the lines of democratic control of wealth, little indicates connections to a more systematic challenge. The Harvard protesters' decision to focus their actions on
South Africa served to strengthen their impact more than a multi-issue format. At the same time as events in Central America bear out daily, activists need to reinforce the direct relation of US economic support for apartheid in South Africa and military intervention in Nicaragua. Moving the citizen's coalitions that have pushed for a shift in policy in towards South Africa to address the militarization of Reagan's "back yard" might strip the teflon some more.

MAURICIO GASTON

The editors of Radical America sadly note the recent death of a friend, fellow activist, academic colleague, and contributor to these pages, Mauricio Gaston. We wish to join in the spirit of the several hundred friends and family who recently met in Boston to celebrate Mauricio's life. For to celebrate his efforts to work for the empowerment of all, to celebrate his struggle for justice and peace and understanding, touches, ennobles and inspires us all. Mauricio Gaston, Presente!
The tragic meltdown at Chernobyl has raised an unparalleled challenge for the anti-nuclear movement—both internationally and in the United States. For US activists the radioactive wind out of the Ural Mountains arrived at a time of relative calm. Since the flurry of protests in the mid and late 1970s many grassroots groups working on nuclear power issues have shifted to nuclear weapons opposition or have dissolved; funding from progressive foundations has likewise followed this course; and despite skyrocketing rates and persistent pragmozi organizing efforts in isolated areas, the energy glut has kept electric bills relatively low and middle America largely pacified.

If only momentarily, Chernobyl has lit up this landscape with a renewed awareness of the dangers of nuclear power. The question is: What changes will it bring? And more importantly: will the changes last? With the nuclear industry, Wall Street, utility companies, and the Reagan administration in the midst of putting the pieces in place for a “second coming” of nuclear power in the 1990s, the events of the coming year will be critical.

At 1:23 a.m. on April 26 when an explosion and fire swept the engine room of unit four of the Chernobyl nuclear plant it touched off a far-reaching series of events. In Europe scattered opposition had taken place during the previous months, revealing a continued
resistance to nuclear development. In West Germany 40,000 people were reported to have participated in a rally at Wackersdorf, the site of a proposed nuclear waste reprocessing plant. In December and January 700-800 people occupying the site clashed with police. In France, the Superphoenix breeder reactor at Malville went on line in January, but opposition and referenda against radioactive waste dump siting were taking place. In Britain, Energy Secretary Peter Walker’s plans to move ahead with nuclear construction were plagued by resistance of people who refused to have a reactor in their community. A Gallup poll showed a majority of the British people opposed to nuclear development. In Denmark the Parliament voted to shelve plans for nuclear plants. And in Sweden, Energy Minister Birgitta Dahl presented a strategy to phase out the nation’s twelve nuclear reactors beginning in 1995, a plan called for in the referenda passed in 1980 which set a complete shutdown date of 2010. But despite these developments, most Common Market countries were clinging to long range plans for new nuclear plants.¹

It was much the same atmosphere in the United States. In Washington, national environmental organizations had their backs to the wall. Congressman Edward Markey had convened negotiations over legislation that would streamline the licensing process for new plants, limit liability in the event of an accident and assure investors of their returns. At the local level, isolated fights continued in regulatory hearings and meeting rooms over issues of safety, economics, and public takeovers. Much of what was happening was stalling actions, a kind of stalemate that evolved in the wake of the Three Mile Island accident in April 1979.

The accident at Chernobyl threw a wave of excitement into anti-nuclear organizing. In West Germany, the Social Democrats picked up the anti-nuclear cause and in Great Britain, the Labor Party began making anti-nuclear statements. In the United States on May 24, more than forty anti-nuclear protests were held across the country. USA Today reported 8 percent of the people surveyed believed that the kind of accident that hit Chernobyl “can happen anywhere.” An “NBC News”/Wall Street Journal poll showed 65 percent opposed to building more nuclear plants. And in many areas citizens began joining in attempts to stop plants nearing completion.

But to halt the momentum of the nuclear industry means confronting long held dreams of boundless energy and one of the most powerful and influential industries in the world. Events that took place around the time of the Chernobyl disaster showed the need for institutional change.

Shearon Harris

In rural Wake County, North Carolina, about eighteen miles southwest of Raleigh, activists were working to stall opening of the Shearon Harris plant. On April 19, just a week before the Chernobyl accident, a new organization was formed—the Coalition for Alternatives to Shearon Harris. The catalyst was the prospect of the plant going on line at the end of the year. Wells Eddleman, a leader of the coalition, who had been fighting Carolina Power and Light for the past decade, said, “Some people had believed that the plant would never go on line. Others just accepted that it was bigger than them and nothing could be done.”²

Carolina Power and Light has been wrestling to get the plant off the drawing boards and generating electricity since 1971. The litany of trouble the project has seen is similar to the cost overruns, construction glitches and controversy that has plagued reactors all across the country.

Shearon Harris started as a very ambitious project. In 1974 foundation holes were dug for the $2 billion, four-reactor complex. The Conservation Council of North Carolina had argued unsuccessfully before the state utility commission that the plant wasn’t needed and that major problems existed for disposal of highly radioactive nuclear waste. A number of factors slowed construction but in 1978 serious building began.

By 1981 cost estimates had more than doubled while growth in demand for electricity was sinking. Carolina Power and Light gradually cancelled all but one of the four planned reactors. All across the country it was the same story as overbuilding of nuclear plants pushed the nation’s power reserve to nearly 40 percent.

Although the radical cutback in the size of
Shearon Harris undermined Carolina Power and Light’s ambitions, the state utility commission in 1983 still allowed the company to charge consumers $600 million for the three abandoned reactors. Like other states, North Carolina allows a utility company to base its rates on the value of its assets. As the cost of assets such as generating plants rises, so do rates and profits. The $600 million charge was in addition to the steady string of rate increases which had already taken place.

By 1985 the pricetag for the one unit alone was $3.6 billion—nearly equal to the original estimate for all four reactors. The cost for electricity from the plant was estimated at 15-25 cents per kilowatt hour. Critics pointed out that burning oil at $100 per barrel, more than five times the current price, would produce electricity cheaper than the Shearon Harris plant.

But despite some opposition to the soaring rates, consumers generally accepted the high cost. The fatalistic consumer attitude Wells Eddleman perceived appeared widespread. Jackie Scarborough, one of a number of housewives who attended the April 19 coalition meeting, said many people thought it was too late to take action against the nearly completed plant and that Carolina Power and Light had too much influence and money to be stopped. But “once we tested it,” she said, “we found a sleeping giant—thousands of people out there feel the same way we do.”

At that first meeting, the coalition had decided to hold a public gathering in Pittsboro on May 13. They invited several residents from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania to speak about their experience during the accident at Three Mile Island in 1979. In the interim the Chernobyl accident hit.

When Norman Aamodt, a farmer from the Three Mile Island area, arose to speak before some 350 people at the Pittsboro Town Meeting a week after the Chernobyl accident, pessimism about stopping Shearon Harris had changed to a growing desire to know what could be done. The prospect of an accident at the plant was reinforced by the testing of emergency sirens and tone alert radios which were distributed to people living within five miles of the plant. As in many other areas around the country, where reactors were operating or about to go on line, the Chernobyl accident brought highly focused attention to evacuation planning.

Unlike the eighteen mile evacuation zone in the Soviet Union, the United States requires only a ten mile evacuation zone. Proposals have also been in circulation to shrink the evacuation zone to two miles in order to diminish growing opposition to the plants. The soft spot citizens had found in the process, and what they had picked up in their fight against Shearon Harris, was the fact that a utility company must have evacuation plans demonstrated to be workable and approved by the state government for a reactor to receive its final operating license.

A week after the Pittsboro meeting, members of the coalition convinced the Durham City Council to unanimously oppose operation of the plant and to have the plant converted to
some other fuel. The city of Chapel Hill passed similar resolutions. But the biggest victory was when an overflow crowd of 1,200 pressured the Chatham County commissioners to withdraw from the evacuation planning process. Following that success, activists planned to take similar petitions to boards of commissioners in nearby counties. They also began efforts to stop Governor Martin's approval of evacuation plans for the plant.

Carolina Power and Light has responded to this latest challenge with an expensive electronic and print media campaign. One full page ad pointed out why an accident such as Chernobyl couldn't happen with Carolina Power and Light reactors. Another criticized the idea of a $1.5 billion conversion to coal-fired generation. The company also publicly accused the coalition of spreading false and misleading information and sent workers to observe the opposition's meetings. In a move similar to common utility industry harassment of the 1970s, company officials have asked the State Bureau of Investigation to conduct an investigation of coalition members.

The company's political muscle did its work. Under pressure from both Governor Martin, a supporter of nuclear power, and Carolina Power and Light officials, the Chatham County Commissioners rescinded their vote in early July without any advance public notice. While the biggest elements of an "alleged deal" may never been known, coalition members cite CP & L's letter to the commissioners promising additional funds for hospital and civil defense equipment as one aspect of a bribe.

Despite this setback the coalition continues to build support. During the last weekend of September 1986 five hundred demonstrators marched from the state capitol to the governor's mansion to deliver the names of 25,000 petitioners who oppose the plant's start-up. The coalition has also persuaded the state's attorney general to file a request with the NRC to require Carolina Power and Light to conduct a new full scale evacuation drill before granting
an operating license. Company officials claim such a test would be too costly, but opponents believe the company’s opposition is based on fear that such an exercise may further alarm the public about the inadequacies of the evacuation plan.

The outcome remains uncertain. At best, the evacuation issue is likely to buy time for a feasibility study of a conversion of the plant to coal. But much will depend on the political muscle that opponents can muster. Sherwood Smith, president of the company, has assured company stockholders that the plant will be in commercial operation at the end of 1986.

Seabrook

In New Hampshire and Massachusetts, similar town-by-town organizing has already produced a political base that could affect the opening of the Seabrook nuclear plant, often seen as the flagship of the nuclear industry. While organized protests date back to the mid-1970s it was not until 1983 that community organizing around evacuation planning began in many of the twenty-three towns within a ten-mile radius of Seabrook. Activists from the Clamshell Alliance and concerned citizens met and formed a loose organization called Citizens Within a Ten Mile Radius. The focus of their work was on local government and home rule.

In 1980, residents of Rye and Hampton Falls had voted not to spend any town money for Civil Defense related to Seabrook. Following their lead, six other New Hampshire towns dropped out of the planning process, as did the five Massachusetts towns. “We don’t want to be labeled as dissidents,” said Angie Macherios, chair of the Board of Selectpersons in Newbury, “but we don’t want our plans being submitted [to federal authorities] without local input. We just want our home rule.”

In New Hampshire, Governor Sununu has forcefully pushed evacuation planning despite local opposition. In February 1986, many local fire, police, and town officials refused to take part in an emergency evacuation drill scheduled by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as part of the licensing process. Sununu used state police to fill in for the absent local authorities. But a report issued by FEMA found fifty deficiencies in the drill—ten times the number of problems for any other exercise at the seven nuclear plants in New England. Part of the report criticized the state’s inability to assure proper evacuation for the communities refusing to participate.

Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis refused any state participation in the drill. Instead, hearings were held to allow citizens to become involved in the planning process. In the wake of Chernobyl, Dukakis ordered his own study on dangers posed by Seabrook. Dukakis had earlier suggested that he might approve an emergency evacuation plan if a deal could be struck with the joint owners to either shut the plant down in the summer to protect the summer population at the beaches, or to build seaside radiation shelters.

In recent months, public pressure on Dukakis over the Seabrook issues has been intense. Opponents, especially from the 6 Massachusetts towns closest to Seabrook, have lobbied Dukakis. They argue that the region’s unpredictable weather, poor access roads, lack of

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Chernobyl, USA
by Jennifer Scarlott

In absorbing fast-breaking news, particularly news about emergencies, many people believe the first official statements they hear, and not subsequent clarifications or even complete reversals of important facts. In the case of the Chernobyl accident, this problem has been compounded by the natural inclination to believe what one wishes to believe, i.e., Chernobyl could not happen here. After the April 26th accident, U.S. citizens were informed by their government, by the nuclear industry, and by much of the media that there was no cause for alarm since U.S. plants are of a completely different design than the Chernobyl reactor. In spite of the fact that much of the media now recognizes that there are important similarities between Chernobyl and a host of U.S. plants, the American public continues to believe that U.S. reactors are much safer than Soviet ones.

What are the facts? Confusion over the threat embodied in the Chernobyl accident has arisen in large part because of obfuscation, deliberate or otherwise, on the issue of containment. Immediately following the Soviet incident, Americans were informed that Chernobyl’s structure was entirely different from that of U.S. plants — it had no containment dome. The implications were that: 1) all American plants have containment domes, 2) “containment” and “dome” are synonymous and thus Chernobyl had no containment at all, and 3) American plants are not susceptible to a Chernobyl-type accident.

All of these implications are false, in part if not in whole. The facts of the matter are these: 1) Nearly half of American plants do not have containment domes, and in fact have containments strikingly similar to the Chernobyl design. 2) Containment and dome are not synonymous. The familiar steel-reinforced concrete dome is only one of several types of containment design. Another type is the “pressure suppression” system used at Chernobyl, and at thirty-nine U.S. plants designed by General Electric. 3) The thirty-nine U.S. plants with a pressure suppression containment are indeed suitable shelters and other conditions make safe and rapid evacuation of the area around Seabrook impossible. They also began organizing to persuade state officials to expand the evacuation planning zone to twenty miles. This would bring other towns into the process and potentially deepen opposition to licensing the plant. Activists also organized a series of protests at the plant gates. Since the Chernobyl accident, 250 protesters have been arrested for trespassing, one of them the wife of a New Hampshire Superior Court judge. Ongoing trespassing protests were planned for each Friday.

Faced with the political choice of overriding home rule or saying no to evacuation plans, Dukakis announced in late September 1986 that he would not approve any evacuation plan for the Seabrook project. Drawing on an analysis of the Chernobyl disaster, he said, no plan could be made that would adequately protect public health and safety in the event of a serious accident.

Public Service Company claims that Dukakis’ decision will push the on-line date of the plant back by at least six months. Company officials had hoped for a start up in October, and now see the spring of 1987 as more realistic. The delay is expected to add $300 million to the cost of the $5 billion plant.

Seabrook executives maintain they have the cash and stamina for a protracted fight. In anticipation of Dukakis’ decision New Hampshire Yankee officials last summer considered drawing up emergency plans for Massachusetts communities. They have also asked the NRC to consider a plan for shrinking the evacuation zone to one or two miles, thus removing Massachusetts towns from the planning process.

In New Hampshire, Seabrook has become a ballot box issue. The Democratic gubernatorial candidate Paul McEachern has promised to withdraw, if elected governor, the state’s evacuation plan in order to prevent the plant from going on line. The incumbent Republican governor, John Sununu, has criticized both Governor Dukakis and McEachern for their stance on the Seabrook issue. As in the case of Shearon Harris the political atmosphere in New Hampshire will determine the future of Seabrook.
susceptible to a Chernobyl-type accident.

How does the pressure suppression method work? The principle is the same at Chernobyl and the GE plants: in the event of a mishap such as a broken pipe, the steam released from the pipe is condensed in order to limit or "suppress" the pressure buildup inside the reactor structure. Accidental increases in pressure are controlled by bubbling the steam through a pool of water. In the case of ten Westinghouse plants — which use a somewhat different pressure suppression system, but one also susceptible to failure — the steam is forced to flow through baskets of ice. The pressure suppression design has enabled GE and Westinghouse to justify a much smaller and cheaper containment structure around their reactors than the large steel-reinforced concrete dome built at other U.S. plants.

What makes the pressure suppression system hazardous? If it fails to keep up with the flow of steam into the containment structure, pressure can increase to an intolerable point. Since the containment structure used in pressure suppression is a great deal smaller and weaker than the concrete dome, the point at which it can no longer withstand overpressure is more easily reached. Pressure suppression containments are also susceptible to hazards of "bypass leakage," which occurs if steam eludes the condensation mechanism through an open door, a crack, a faulty weld, or any number of defects. The most common model of GE plant has a particular type of valve which would allow steam to bypass the condensation pool if opened at the wrong time. Plants have operated for months with these valves accidentally open.

Another important safety hazard of pressure suppression containment is the risk of hydrogen explosions. The release of hydrogen is common, even in relatively mild accidents, and when it occurs within the small containment structure of a pressure suppression system it constitutes a greater percentage of the atmosphere within the structure than in the case of the concrete dome containment. Hydrogen production is thus a more serious safety problem in the pressure suppression method. The current scientific consensus is that it was a steam explosion followed by a hydrogen explo-

Shoreham

In New York, the showdown over the Shoreham nuclear plant on Long Island reveals how deeply the electric utility industry is wound into the political power structure. The fact that electric utilities are the nation's most capital intensive business, generate about half of the income for investment bankers, release half of the new common industrial stock each year, and have long held substantial clout over regulatory agencies explains much about the odds citizens face in fighting utility companies. It also foreshadows events that may occur in the campaigns surrounding plants like Seabrook and Shearon Harris.

Back in 1970, the first hearings on the proposed plant got underway. Environmentalists hoped Shoreham would be the test case on nuclear power. Local citizens, nationally renowned scientists, and Nobel prize winners testified in opposition to the plant. However, the case dragged on for two and a half years and in 1973 a construction permit was granted for work which had already begun.

Today officials remain deadlocked over whether or not the completed plant will open. On one side are local elected officials and citizens backed by Governor Mario Cuomo. On the other side is the Long Island Lighting Company and representatives of the federal government. If the plant does not go on line the company will be bankrupt. If it does go on line there will be rate increases of more than 50 percent and the potential that in the event of an accident, much of the island will not be evacuated. While a decision is pending, financing costs for the plant are accumulating at the rate of $1.3 million per day, and some $220 million per year for Shoreham has already been added to consumer bills by the New York Public Service Commission.

In 1982 at a highly emotional meeting, the Suffolk County legislature voted down evacuation plans prepared by nationally recognized experts as unworkable. The problem is that the plant is located halfway down the peninsula, and in the event of a serious accident, residents living to the east would have to drive through the danger zone in order to evacuate. County Supervisor Peter Cohalan called the plant a "billion dollar mistake." And Representative Wayne Prospect of Dix Hills expressed the determined opposition of local residents, say-
sion that blew the roof off the reactor at Chernobyl.

The U.S. government has known about the special hazards inherent in the GE containment design since the early 1970's, but has chosen to keep that information secret. A series of confidential memos obtained by the Union of Concerned Scientists under the Freedom of Information Act many years after they were written indicates that the decision in favor of secrecy was made to help nurture the fledgling nuclear power industry. In an internal Atomic Energy Commission document (the AEC was the precursor to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, which oversees and regulates the industry), one adviser proposed a "ban" on the defective GE design. This step was rejected by Joseph Hendrie, an AEC official who later became head of the NRC, on the basis that it would raise embarrassing questions about GE plants already in operation. In a subsequent memo, Hendrie mused that "the acceptance of pressure suppression containment concepts by all elements of the nuclear field...is firmly embedded in the conventional wisdom. Reversal of this hallowed policy, particularly at this time, could well be the end of nuclear power. It would throw into question the continued operation of licensed plants, would make unlicenseable the GE (and some Westinghouse) plants now in review, and would generally create more turmoil than I can stand thinking about."

Until recently, Soviet officials have insisted that human error was the chief culprit in the Chernobyl accident, refusing to speculate on flaws in the fundamental design of the plant and eighteen others like it in their country. In a detailed report on the accident submitted at the end of August to the International Atomic Energy Agency, the Soviets conceded that design deficiencies made the reactor vulnerable to human error and have prompted the Soviet nuclear industry to undertake costly modifications. As the head of the Soviet delegation to the IAEA conference put it, "The accident assumed catastrophic proportions...because all the negative aspects of the reactor design...were brought out by the operators." The implications of this belated acknowledgement of Chernobyl's defective containment design for the safety of the thirty-nine GE plants in this country are clear.

In July 1985, over the dissent of county and state officials and in the absence of approved evacuation plans, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission approved a low power testing license for Shoreham. The industry also mounted an expensive public relations campaign at the local level.

During the winter of 1984-85 Long Island Lighting Company hired Winner-Wagner, a public relations firm that specializes in utility campaigns, to establish a front group called Citizens to Open Shoreham. The group sought to change the vote of the Suffolk County Legislature against evacuation plans. They succeeded in gaining the support of County Executive Peter Cohalan, but failed to move the legislature. Cohalan ordered county officials to participate in the company's test of evacuation plans, but was stopped by a suit from the legislature.

In anticipation of the fall elections, Long Island Lighting Company spent an estimated
We now know that the Chernobyl plant was one of the Soviet Union’s newest, incorporating many safety systems found in U.S. plants. The accident reveals uncomfortable similarities not only in the technical features of Chernobyl and many American plants, but in Soviet and American management practices as well. During Chernobyl’s construction, a Soviet Ukrainian journal reported that the plant was being built at an “unprecedented tempo,” and a month before the accident, that “technical problems...had been left unresolved and had multiplied over the years.” These intimations of slipshod management and cavalier disregard for public safety are sharply reminiscent of the warnings of whistleblowers in our own country.

According to a new study by the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California, the Chernobyl accident caused as much radioactive fallout to be absorbed by the world’s air, topsoil and water as all the nuclear tests and bombs ever exploded. While nuclear weapons produce radiation which can cause greater health damage in the short-run, the core of a nuclear plant contains isotopes which take much longer to decay, thus posing a smaller, but longer-lasting, threat to life. Belatedly, the superpowers agreed to ban above-ground weapons testing, largely because of concern over the health effects of radioactive fallout. Where the atom is concerned, mankind has thus far learned its lessons the hard way, by experiencing tragedy rather than anticipating it. But Chernobyl is not the only horse in this particular barn. There is still time to close the door before another “incident” occurs, by dismantling all nuclear reactors in this country and around the globe. Nuclear power technology as presently constituted is inherently unsafe. And, as should be clear from the post-Chernobyl pronouncements of the U.S. government, the nuclear industry, and the press, the transition to safer energy alternatives is going to take the concerted effort of everyday Americans, rather than the elites who “lead” them.

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$750,000 to $1 million on direct mail, radio, television, and print advertising. But the Shoreham Opponents Coalition countered with a door-to-door campaign and radio and newspaper ads. In the November 1985 election at least fourteen pro-Shoreham incumbents or challengers were defeated and all eighteen legislators elected took stands against the plant. The legislators also unanimously favored a strategy for a public takeover of the company, and formation of a newly public owned and operated power system. Peter Cohalan called the company “the big loser in the election.”

Following the Chernobyl accident, official opposition to the plant deepened. In June, the Nassau County Board of Supervisors barred the use of the Nassau Veterans Coliseum as an emergency evacuation center and said that no county facilities would be available to Long Island Lighting Company without prior approval. It was the first time Nassau County had joined with Suffolk County to take action against the plant. One of the county supervisors told the New York Times that the board had changed its mind about Shoreham when members “felt the wind of Chernobyl blowing.”

Because Nuclear Regulatory Commission rules require an evacuation center where cars and people can be decontaminated, the coliseum is critical to LILCO’s plans. Nora Brede of the Shoreham Opponents Coalition says that the decision puts a serious dent in the company’s plans for operation. Company officials maintain, however, that they expect to get a full operating license from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and that in a “real emergency” county and state officials would cooperate in the evacuation process. The issue is scheduled to come before the NRC later this summer. Suffolk County and state officials say they will take the evacuation issue to the Supreme Court if necessary.

The Big Picture

What’s clear from these examples and dozens of others concerning the explosion of local protests over the siting of radioactive waste dumps, or the high costs of nuclear power, is that the nuclear issue is not so much one of technology
as it is of politics, and who decides the economic and environmental risks communities will face. The string of regulatory failures and the influence of the industry is most evident in the fact that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission has accepted a tradeoff in public safety. The commission has approved new plants despite its estimate of a 45 percent chance of a severe meltdown in the United States before 2005. Without stronger political clout and long term institutional changes that will give the public a greater voice, the United States risks meltdowns and disputes over the future of the electrical industry.

Unfortunately, long term concerns have been written off with the assumption that nuclear power is dead of its own economic weight. Alternative energy sources such as solar, conservation—and an array of decentralized generation from cogeneration (using industrial boilers to make electricity and waste steam to drive machinery), small hydro, wind, waste-to-energy, and geothermal projects—are expected by many people to meet new power needs. The analyses behind these perceptions are sound, but the political support needed for such a technological transition does not exist. A recent survey shows only eight states with the authority and guidelines to mandate “least-cost” energy planning by utilities. And among industry leaders and federal officials there is broad skepticism over the potential of alternative power sources. Cogeneration advocates, for example, foresee 20 percent of the nation’s power needs coming from industrial sources by the year 2000. The utility industry sees five percent and is currently embarked on programs to sell cheap bulk rate power contracts to large industrial users that will undermine the development of cogeneration. Similarly, although energy efficiency could save half the electricity used for lighting across the country, power companies are reluctant to reduce their sales by implementing vigorous efficiency programs. The industry has also successfully saved much of the tax subsidy for nuclear power from the budget axe, while solar technology and other renewable sources are set to lose their tax credits. This will seriously affect alternative energy investment and development, and at the same time reinforce the message being given to investors about the long term prospects for nuclear power.

There is a deeper political reality too. Energy Secretary John Herrington and Lando Zech, Jr., the new chairperson of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, claim that the nation needs 200 new nuclear and coal plants by the year 2000. If the plants are not built they say we will see brownouts, blackouts and power rationing. Added to this threat are the projections from the Department of Energy for increasing oil imports from the Middle East in the 1990s as domestic production begins an inevitable decline. The general strategy is to automate industry and electrify the economy as much as possible. Last November, Herrington told an industry gathering in San Francisco that “nuclear power must be prepared to be the workhorse that, along with coal and others, will meet this challenge of our future electrical needs. As we move forward to meet this challenge, I want all of you to know that we do so with a President of the United States and a Secretary of Energy that are irrevocably committed to nuclear energy as an option for the future.” The substance of that commitment lies in a plan to create a “second coming” of nuclear power in the early 1990s. Its building blocks are now being put in place.

According to the Draft Strategic Plan for the Civilian Reactor Development Program and other internal Department of Energy documents, the first stage of the second coming plan is to clear away “institutional barriers.” Legislation currently before Congress would accomplish that. Reactor licensing would be streamlined into a one step process, limiting public participation in the hearing process. Reactor design would be standardized and given advance approval. Sites for new reactors would also have advance approval. The industry’s financial liability in the event of accidents would be limited. Financing of plants would become more automatic with bills for construction passed immediately to consumers during the building of a plant, avoiding major rate increases when the plants come on line and guaranteeing a return to investors. And new consortiums which could include insurance companies, banks, oil companies, or other major corporations would be allowed to form and
build the new plants.7

To many observers who have been convinced that nuclear power is dead it seems incredible that Congress may be considering legislation that would speed reactor construction and curtail opportunities for citizen intervention. Yet, this is exactly what is happening. Even as one congressional committee was hearing testimony on casualty figures at Chernobyl, a majority of the House Subcommittee on Energy Conservation and Power was urging quick passage of the legislation that would streamline the licensing process and standardize reactor designs. The real impact of Chernobyl did not reach Capitol Hill or the corridors of the Department of Energy.

In addition to clearing institutional barriers, the second coming plan calls for a two-pronged approach for development of new reactors. The first prong is to have consensus among utilities, equipment suppliers, and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission on a new light water reactor by 1988. The reactor is claimed to cost half the price of current reactors, be constructed in six years, have a capacity factor of 80 percent and a lifetime of up to sixty years. It would be promoted as the new “safe” reactor and be available for commercialization around 1990.

The second prong is the creation of a new liquid metal breeder reactor. Construction of a prototype is expected by 1995 and many of the early phases of this project are already funded. Alternative designs for evaluation are expected by 1988.

Even if the brownouts and blackouts that could force a reluctant public into accepting these plants don’t materialize, the Department of Energy has a broader rationale. The draft strategy report states, “Crosscutting each element of this strategy is a vital effort to maintain US influence in international nuclear policy and to recapture the once preeminent position of the US in international nuclear markets.” In the international arena, the primary assumption is that the nuclear genie is “out of the bottle” and will never be put back. The major catch is, however, the high cost of his services and the risks communities are forced to take to have nuclear generated electricity.

Without greater control over the industry, this strategy may have a chance of succeeding.
"Frankly, I’d rather face a meltdown than a morning of housework without my home appliances."

We're Nuclear Power... Let us worry about the future for you.

Nuclear Energy Women, from Critical Mass, August 1983

Community Response

To stop the resurgence of nuclear construction and endless brushfire fights with the nuclear industry, a political and economic bridge is needed for a technological transition. This means a new strategy for institutional change that has its roots in home rule, a sense of self-sufficiency, and democratic process—essentially providing a decision-making base for the choices needing to be made on tradeoffs between various technologies and their economic and environmental impacts. It also means a shift in the economic definition of electricity from a “commodity” dependent on maximized sales and production by private companies—to a non-profit “service” such as water that mandates least-cost policies and comprehensive efficiency measures.

This new strategy is already beginning to take shape in the rediscovery of an old American institution—the public power system.

Public or Private Control?

The United States is one of the few industrialized nations with an electric industry dominated by private interests. While 78 percent of the nation’s power comes from 210 private power companies, there are some 2,194 municipal and public utility districts which range in size from the city of Los Angeles to the hamlet of Readesboro, Vermont; 870 rural cooperatives stung through 45 states; and 6 federal power agencies. At the turn of the century, before Samuel Insull and other private power industry leaders urged the creation of state regulatory agencies, public power systems were growing at twice the rate of private systems. The private power companies’ support of regulation and other strategies seriously undermined the growth of public power. Most of the municipal systems in place today were formed in the early part of the century. They offer rates which average 30 percent less than the private companies, and ideally provide access to policies through the election of commissioners, petitions, and referenda. In the best systems, local voters have the ability to approve or deny major investments, and the systems are linked by a regional coordinating body. They are not a panacea and can go as sour as any political institution, but they do allow essential avenues for public decision-making and establish electricity as a non-profit service from which least cost policies can flow.9

In the past few years, rising costs from nuclear plants have brought a wave of proposals for public takeovers of private systems. There are currently about twenty takeover efforts in various stages, with the most visible examples in New Orleans, Chicago, and on Long Island. Long Island is the most advanced effort, with feasibility studies showing significant savings if Long Island Lighting Company is taken over. On July 3, 1986 the New York legislature passed a bill to create a Long Island Public Power Authority. The Suffolk County legislature and local citizens have also mounted an effort for a local public takeover, the best method of a takeover the concept has gained
the support of Governor Mario Cuomo and key members of the state legislature. In addition to the cost savings, many Long Island residents see the takeover as a way of assuring that the Shoreham plant will never open.

There have been a dozen or so small takeovers in the past five years, but if the Long Island takeover proceeds it will be the first major takeover of a private power company in sixty years. A prolonged battle with the company is likely, and it may well provide a model for other communities facing similar dilemmas. It could also provide a model for democratization and reform in European countries where public power systems are run by the national government and are often unresponsive to local voters. Most importantly, a trend for local control and takeovers could provide the missing political and economic bridge for a transition to least cost policies and use of decentralized solar, cogeneration, and other alternative technologies.

The fights for home rule now rising in North Carolina, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and other communities battling nuclear power plants could be the first steps leading to the desire to create greater control over choices in technology and economic and environmental risks. Although scattered takeovers have taken place during the past decade, the new wave of public power organizing now emerging has been long predicted.

In 1933, William Prendergast, comptroller of the city of New York, wrote, “The contest today over the future disposition of the electric industry is between regulation and public ownership. The future will see the electric industry controlled by such regulation, I hope—or will see it publicly owned and operated.” More than fifty years later, the failure of regulation and the warning signs of catastrophes such as Chernobyl and threats of a “second coming” in the United States indicate that the outcome of the fights for public control will hold the key to the future of the electric industry and determine much of the environmental and economic future of communities in the coming decades.
A TOWN BORN OF THE ATOM

Fifteen years ago the town of Pripyat was not marked on the map of the Ukraine. It grew up around the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, the republic's first, which began operation in 1977. . . The town, which was named after the river along which it was built, is made up mostly of young people. The average age is 26. Pripyat's residents are not disturbed by the fact that they can see the nuclear power units from the windows of their apartments. The units resemble a ship with white super-structures on deck. Radiating from the ship are openwork pylons of power transmission lines. . .

The odds of a meltdown are one in 10,000 years. The plants have safe and reliable controls that are protected from any breakdown with three safety lines. . . The environment is also securely protected. Hermetically sealed buildings, closed cycles for technological processes with radioactive agents. . . Nuclear plants are ecologically much cleaner than thermal plants that burn huge quantities of fossil fuel.

Boris Chernov, 29, a steam turbine operator, moved to Pripyat after graduating from a power engineering institute.

"I wasn't afraid to take a job at a nuclear power plant. There is more emotion in fear of nuclear power plants than real danger. I work in white overalls. The air is clean and fresh; it's filtered most carefully. My workplace is checked by the radiation control service. If there is even the slightest deviation from the norm, the sensors will set off an alarm on the central radiation control panel."

Pyotr Bondarenko, a shift superintendent in the department of labor protection and safety review. . . maintains that working at the station is safer than driving a car. . .

Galina Sychovyanskaya moved here with her husband, a builder, five years ago. Since then the Sychovyanskayas have had two sons.

"The town council has given us a good apartment; my husband has a well-paid and interesting job. We don't even notice that we live close to a nuclear power plant."

According to the mayor, Valdimir Voloshko, the town hasn't escaped problems altogether. . . "Pripyat is currently experiencing a baby boom. We've built scores of daycare centers and nursery schools and more are on the way. . . Motor transport is also a headache. We don't want the cars to squeeze out the people. We believe the town of Pripyat should be as safe and clean as the power plant."

*excerpted from* Soviet Life, February, 1986
FOOTNOTES


8. Ibid.

9. A full account of the role that public power agencies play in meeting the nation's electrical needs is found in Rudolph & Ridley, Power Struggle.

Grates constructed by Harvard University to block access to "free heat." Crimson photo
NO HAVEN FOR HOMELESS IN A HEARTLESS ECONOMY

Michael Fabricant and Michael Kelly

Mitch Snyder, activist for the homeless and member of the Community for Creative Non-Violence in Washington, D.C. once spent the winter months living on the street. During the nights he slept on a heat grating. From this vantage point he observed:

the streets became the province of the vast army of the homeless. Scores of street dwellers would file past our corner every night... we could watch the bent and the broken — mostly elderly — people wandering, marching to and from nowhere. They trembled in the cold, surrounded by heated, lighted, guarded and empty government buildings.

Snyder’s observations reflect a growing national recognition of the homelessness problem, which now affects an expanding number of citizens.

A National Disgrace

While the problem’s magnitude and gravity are being accepted, many disagree about how to adequately meet both the short and long term needs of the homeless. The predomi-
nant response reduces homelessness' complex social, political and economic causes to moral formulations fashioned centuries ago. The physical and emotional deterioration of homelessness has been described by many who are sincerely concerned about the problem as a moral affront in a land as affluent as the United States. The immediate, and for many, long term responses to this situation have been to create shelters, thereby recreating the "gift relationship" of services which defines the worthy poor or homeless as passive, grateful and spiritually saintlike.2

This perspective has emphasized the responsibility of private individuals and church groups. In effect, religious groups are expected to develop shelters and thus establish a "partnership" with the public sector. Private individuals have likewise been asked to accept homeless people into their homes. This pressure has emerged in part from the frustration of public officials who have seen the number of shelters expand geometrically while the demand and need for more facilities continues unabated. Yet, even more so, these private solutions can be traced to the presumption that individuals must make personal and moral sacrifices to successfully combat homelessness.

This article will sketch the relationship between homelessness, and the political and economic landscape. It will reveal the problem's magnitude from our perspectives as both academics and activists in this field. We will observe life in the shelters. Then, we'll describe how the geometric expansion of homelessness derives from the current fiscal crisis. We will explore the role of shelters in reducing the "social wage" gains of the past 50 years. Finally, we will consider the range of responses required to address the crisis of homelessness.

An Escalating Affliction

Up to 3 million people now live without a home in the United States, mostly in our cities. In cities like New York, it is difficult to comprehend the scope of the homeless problem, with its more than 60,000 homeless riding the subways or seeking refuge in the train and bus stations at night.3 The cold restroom floor in Penn Station becomes a bed for some 50 women. Others stay in phone booths or blend into the dark recesses of the stations. Many catch a few hours of sleep in the waiting room until rousted by the rap of a policeman's night stick against their chair. Some of the more ingenious homeless New Yorkers get needed rest and pass the night safely by camouflaging themselves on city streets where large amounts of garbage have been placed for disposal: they crawl into cardboard boxes or cover themselves with plastic trashcan liners.

In 1981, a Chicago newspaper reported that 50 homeless people had been buried in the city's Potter's Field in January, after silently freezing to death. A year later, the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless estimated 25,000 homeless wandered the city. Charles Ford, the Director of Emergency Services said: "We have the feeling that the numbers are increasing... We are finding more and more people who live on the street involuntarily — young people, who in ordinary times would be able to find jobs, and more women and children."4 By December 1982 every shelter in Chicago was filled to capacity and turning away 30-50 people per night.

Other cities of America's "heartland" have shared this experience. Detroit, with its massive unemployment, had over 27,000 homeless people in November 1984 — a 300 percent increase from 1982. The U.S. Conference of Mayors reported that up to 1,000 people were living in cars, trailers, tents, or campgrounds in Tulsa while another 200-300 people lived under city bridges. In 1981-1982, 1,000 people in Milwaukee lost their homes.5

In recent years, the prospering and temperate Sunbelt cities have been inundated with unemployed workers from the Northeast. Yet in Dallas, Phoenix and Los Angeles, for example, they have found an extremely tight job market, high rents and a much lower level of entitlement than in their old homes.

The Union Rescue Mission of Los Angeles, the world's largest private mission, recently (for the first time in over 90 years) turned people away because all the 350 beds and 350 chairs were filled. Elsewhere, during the winter of 1983, Seattle turned away 4,000 families (roughly 16,000 people) who applied for shelter. And in Flagstaff, Arizona, many
homeless families have been camping out in the National Forest which borders the city.6

The New Victims

The homeless population has changed dramatically in appearance as well as quantity. Between 1945 and 1970 urban hobos, mostly older, alcoholic men, were the major skid row inhabitants. Since then, small but growing numbers of women have appeared. By the mid-1970's many younger black and Hispanic men, unemployed and lacking job skills, began using urban shelters and flophouses. Many had drug or alcohol problems. In New York City up to one third of them were veterans, mostly of the Vietnam War.7

At the same time, discharged mentally impaired patients became more prominent on the streets following deinstitutionalization. Those supporting this policy claimed that recent advances in psychopharmacology and treatment had now made community living feasible for institutionalized mental patients. New "wonder drugs," especially phenothiazines, were to supplant incarceration. Community-based treatment models became the new road towards "recovery" and social reintegration.

Deinstitutionalization, as it was employed, resulted more from fiscal than from therapeutic concerns.8 To begin with, the state mental hospital census doubled between 1950 and 1970. Housing and treating this influx required an incredible amount of money. Existing facilities were outdated and dilapidated. The unionization of state workers had further increased costs. According to one estimate, deinstitutionalization may have saved state governments as much as 5.4 billion in expenditures between 1965 and 1974.9

Meanwhile, the price paid in human misery has been monumental. Vital services, community supports and follow-up treatments were not adequately developed. Many of the 400,000 people discharged from mental hospitals between 1950 and 1980 were forced to fend for themselves. Temporarily, some maintained a marginal existence in low-income housing, but by the mid-1970's this too disappeared. Other than the street, the only alternatives left were adult homes or shelters. In these newly emerg-

ing "deviant ghettos," one is likely to find neither compassion nor therapeutic treatments, but usually at best, some form of repressive tolerance on the outer fringes of society.

The fiscal crisis, with its accompanying economic hardship, creates the need for increased mental health services among those most sorely afflicted.10 Yet, strict admission criteria have eliminated even this alternative for many.

The high rates of inflation and unemployment during the recession of 1980-1982 produced yet another wave of homeless people. Massive layoffs and plant closings in 1983 produced situations in cities like Detroit, where in 1982 close to 20,000 workers per month lost their unemployment benefits. In 1983 Illinois had a 13.9 percent unemployment rate or 759,000 unemployed citizens, and also had the nation's highest rate of home foreclosures (1.6 percent). Shelters in Chicago, Detroit and elsewhere cited "the loss of a job" as a primary reason for homelessness.11

The inability of younger blacks or Hispanics to enter the labor market has also contributed to the homelessness explosion. Their unemployment rate (over 50 percent) is the highest in the nation. Unable to find jobs or affordable housing, many young black and Hispanic men are crowded out of their family's apartment. In 1980, virtually no people under the age of twenty-one stayed in New York City municipal shelters. By 1985, they comprised 7 percent of the total shelter population. Recent estimates showed approximately 22,000 homeless youth in New York City, the single largest subgroup of homeless.

Finally, homeless families are the newest and, perhaps, most frightening wave of homelessness. Headed mostly by women, living on AFDC, they represent the fastest growing group of homeless.12

The Government Strikes Back

To this grievous problem, the government response has sometimes been nightmarish. In Fort Lauderdale, a city councilman urged the spraying of trash with poison to cut off the "vermin's" food supply.13 In Phoenix, and President Reagan's home city of Santa Bar-
bazaar, anti-homeless ordinances prohibit sitting, sleeping, or lying down in public areas such as parks, and consider trash-bin refuse as public property. Hence, foraging for food is a criminal act. At the Federal level, a Department of Housing and Urban Development Survey concluded that there were but 200,000-300,000 homeless nationwide. Despite its numerous methodological flaws which considerably underestimate the problem, this survey has nonetheless been used to minimize government action. For example, HUD’s recommendation against new, temporary shelters has seriously inhibited efforts for more significant change.

Obviously, the need for safe, decent shelter greatly outstrips the number of slots available. Recent estimates show only 330 shelter beds in Detroit, for a homeless population of 27,000. Chicago has approximately 1,000 beds for 20,000-25,000. In Connecticut, the second richest state, the less than 950 shelter beds far underserve its 10,000 homeless men, women and children. One shelter in Hartford turned away more than 3,500 applicants in a recent 12-month period. Shelters also fail to meet the differing needs of homeless people. Alcoholics, the unemployed, the elderly and former mental patients are all lumped into one space. Sanitary conditions are often poor. Bathroom and shower facilities are woefully inadequate given the crowded conditions. Some municipal shelters like the one in Washington, D.C. feature myriad abuses, including random beatings of homeless people by vicious security guards. Given these conditions, many homeless people have apparently “preferred the rats and the cold to contending with the segregation of the public shelters.”

In New York City, municipal shelters have repeatedly failed to meet basic health and safety standards. Overcrowding, unsanitary conditions and the menacing atmosphere of shelters discourage many of the most vulnerable homeless from seeking assistance. In effect, many elderly and mentally ill people hazard the street rather than risk a night at a shelter. Scores of homeless people in New York City reported violence in the public shelters. Two researchers noted that “for most men we talked to, mention of the shelter conjured up... an
ever present threat of violence. It is the violence which is the strongest deterrent to men who once there, vow never to return. . . .”

The present growth in homelessness began during the 1970’s, which were also marked by the most acute economic crisis since the 1930’s. Investment decisions, private savings and weekly paychecks suffered from double digit inflation. The nation also lost 30 million jobs during this period. By 1976 plant shutdowns had wiped out 39 percent of the jobs that existed in 1969 or an average of about 3.2 million jobs destroyed each year. While approximately 110 jobs were created for every 100 jobs that were destroyed, this ratio still represents a sharp reduction in job creation compared to the 1950’s and 1960’s. A striking increase in the unemployment rate also occurred, soaring from 5 percent in 1970 to approximately 10 percent in 1981.

These trends also helped depress wages for most workers. Those displaced from mill, auto or steel jobs were usually forced into lower paying, unstable work. The middle level jobs represented by the old manufacturing line have rapidly disappeared, making job transition especially difficult for displaced workers. In effect, the educational and financial supports necessary to enable large numbers of displaced workers to move to jobs offering similar pay do not exist. And the overwhelming majority of new jobs are low paying and unstable. Consequently, at best, only a small fraction of displaced workers can be absorbed at the upper end of the wage pyramid.

Undercutting the Social Wage

The reduction of wages is not accidental but rather part of the dynamics of capitalism. This same process unfolded in earlier periods of economic crisis. As E.P. Thompson has noted:

The first half of the 19th century must be seen as a period of chronic underemployment, in which the skilled trades are like islands threatened on every side by technological innovation and by the inrush of unskilled or juvenile labor. . . . We must bear in mind the insecurity of many skills in a period of rapid technical innovation and of weak trade unions. . . . In a number of trades . . . noted as both organized and highly paid in 1812 there was a serious deterioration in the status and living conditions over the next 30 years.24

Declining living standards were also experienced by the unemployed during this period; and in 1834, the Doctrine of Less Eligibility was applied to the unemployed, keeping relief grants below the wages of the lowest paid laborer.25 Therefore, the wage reductions during this period coincided with lower relief grants. Substantial reductions in relief benefits between 1820 and 1840 placed many families below subsistence income levels.26

These historic circumstances have contemporary parallels. The “social wage” (of welfare-state benefits), increasingly available to chronically unemployed and dislocated workers since 1930, has been redefined by the present fiscal crisis. The accompanying reduction in marketplace wages has led to today’s intensified poverty and homelessness.

Recent reports by journalists, academics, advocates and the government underscore the dramatic reduction of entitlement benefits and services. Between 1980 and 1981 an intense drive emerged to make across-the-board cuts in all social welfare programs. Overall, cash welfare benefits declined by 17 percent.27 One million people were eliminated from Food Stamp coverage.28 Ninety percent of the working, AFDC families had their benefits reduced or eliminated. Finally, the value of general assistance payments has declined substantially. While these trends did not begin during
Reagan’s presidency, they have been dramatically intensified by this administration.

As cash benefits have eroded, both private and public sector housing investment decisions have also changed. The Federal government effectively withdrew from the public housing market. In 1979 over 40,000 units of conventional public housing were completed; by 1982 the number had dropped to 25,000 units. In 1979 there were 23,860 new starts for the elderly and handicapped; in 1983 only 14,112 units were funded. During fiscal year 1985 the Reagan administration arranged to fund only 12,500 new units of subsidized housing, 10,000 for the elderly and handicapped, 2,500 for Native Americans.29

The central city renovations characterizing many U.S. cities have made matters worse. In New York, tax abatements gave incentives to convert low income housing to luxury apartment buildings. Between 1975 and 1981 approximately 35,000 units of low income housing were lost.30 New York City offers the most dramatic example of these market forces. Cities such as Chicago, Cleveland, Phoenix, Newark, San Francisco, Denver and Chicago also report substantial losses in their low-income housing stock to downtown renovation or luxury housing development. These trends partly respond to the changing economic structure which has allowed some elite professionals and entrepreneurs to benefit from a polarized job market which has hurt most workers. The increased demand for urban housing from relatively affluent people has pushed many low-income individuals and families out of the formal housing market.31

The consequent increase in urban rents leaves poor people particularly vulnerable. Increasingly, general assistance and AFDC payments are simply insufficient to meet the new urban rent levels throughout the country. As has been noted: “...the amount of public assistance a recipient was allotted for rent — whether as a separate shelter allowance or as part of a flat grant, ranged from 20 percent to 60 percent of local fair market rent.”32

When basic rent allowances are insufficient to meet prevailing rents, then grants have more symbolic than real value. Entitlements that increasingly fail to meet basic survival needs (such as permanent housing) most dramatically indicate the growing inadequacy of today’s “social wage.”

**Devastating Effects**

The gap between benefits and prevailing rents has obvious consequences. Many cities report dramatic increases in eviction rates, disproportionately affecting low-income citizens. In New York City, where a half million eviction actions were initiated from a total stock of two million rental units, approximately half involved people receiving public assistance.33

Many people have reacted by moving in with friends or relatives, thus increasing the density of their living space. In New York City alone over 230,000 families are doubled and trebled up. If but 3 percent of these families are made homeless during 1986 the number of homeless families will nearly double.34

As usual, women and people of color have been disproportionately affected.35 Because they are even less likely to have “primary sector” jobs, their wages are lower in the first place. And housing discrimination based on racism and on prejudice against single women
with children predates the fiscal crisis. Single mothers rightly fear that their children will be taken away to foster care if they cannot find housing, while blacks and Hispanics may be victims of racially motivated violence within shelters or on the streets. In short, economic hard times and capitalist restructuring combine with social wage cuts to increase the plight of women and minorities and to further reduce their already inadequate options.

Clearly, we have entered a period of economic resocialization. In effect, the whole labor force is being resocialized to new and lower wages while benefits are cut to show the poorest that an even more reduced living standard awaits them outside the marketplace or within the welfare system. Reductions in entitlement and spending have both freed resources for alternative investments and substantially diminished the living standard of the poor. These forces have combined to create a new subclass of poor: the homeless.

But for such shifts to succeed, entitlement recipients must also be resocialized. The welfare rights philosophy of the 1960’s and 1970’s, which argued that all citizens are entitled to an adequate living standard and affordable housing, is being replaced by an attitude that recreates nineteenth century definitions of entitlement. Temporary shelters and soup lines for the homeless are replacing housing and an adequate food allowance as prevailing public policies. In effect, the state’s legitimizing role is being reconstructed and translated into policies that reflect nineteenth Century structural and social relationships.

**From Workhouses to Homeless Shelters**

Without long range planning or services, contemporary shelters resemble the nineteenth century response to structural unemployment and homelessness — the workhouse. Workhouses were “prison-like” dwellings which deterred all but the most desperate. The young and the old, the mentally and physically infirm, able-bodied men, women, and children were brought into the same building. Some of these buildings “were old, decaying, filthy, badly ventilated with poor sanitation and during periods of economic decline, they rapidly became overcrowded.”

In 1892, George Lansbury described the inmate treatment at the Popular Union as such that “everything possible was done to inflict mental and moral degradation. . . Sick and aged, mentally deficient, lunatics, babies and children, able-bodied and tramps all herded together in one huge range of buildings. Officers . . . looked upon these people as nuisances and treated them accordingly.” Compare such descriptions to those of a current New York City men’s shelter, which described residents as “lost a collection of souls as I could have imagined. Old and young, scarred and smooth, stinking and clean,crippled and hale, drunk and sober, ranting and still, part of another world and part of this one. . .”

Lansbury further indicated how individuals were deprived of any sense of dignity. While waiting to be served food (a process sometimes taking an hour) he and others were driven through a series of “cattle chutes” while a guard with a bullhorn endlessly insulted them for being too slow. “There is simply no situation I’ve seen that is so devoid of any graces at all, so tense at every moment, or so empty of hope.”

At the turn of the century, there were nine refusals of the workhouse for every one acceptance. In the menacing atmosphere of contemporary shelters, where violent flare-ups are commonplace, many more are turned away, and others choose to chance the streets.

The workhouse also used enforced labor, which was often as mindless and boring as it was physically taxing. Some of the work was so demanding that even in the early 1900’s many vagrants chose prison to the workhouse. To date, the absence of a work requirement in most shelters separates the current resident from his or her nineteenth century counterpart; but this final parallel already seems on the way. For example, in August 1982, the Sacramento, California Board of Supervisors changed its benefits from cash grants to food and shelter. Recipients had to reside at the Bannon Street Shelter and in return, work seven days per month for the county. A year later, the State Supreme Court ordered the county to provide applicants with a choice of cash or in-kind entitlement.

A recent Wall Street Journal editorial argued
for a work requirement in exchange for shelter at New York City facilities. It also charged that by upgrading shelter conditions, the city was luring many who were “not really homeless” into the shelters. \(^2\) New York City has, in fact, embarked on a “work experience” program whereby 2,546 shelter residents presently perform twenty hours of work per week in return for $12.50. Their tasks include the cleaning of subway platforms and toilets and maintaining city parks. The city boasts that its Work Experience Program “makes people feel better about themselves” while teaching them good work skills. \(^3\) The degrading shelter conditions effectively threaten and pacify contemporary workers as much as the nineteenth century workhouse.

Rollback in Welfare Policy

During an earlier period of economic crisis, the 1930’s, the social wage, or base entitlement of workers, was redefined. In contrast to the erosion of benefits and economic rights in the current period, the Great Depression began an expansion of social insurance programs and a gradual increase in the social wage. Advances in defining economic entitlements continued, albeit gradually (as compared, for instance, to many Western European countries), during the post-war boom.
Many economists and historians have shown that the advance in the social wage during the 1930's was not an historic aberration. These improvements occurred because various groups of workers and/or citizens organized and pressed their demands for economic benefits. Social movements across a wide spectrum pressured the state to take a primary responsibility for assuring its citizens a certain minimum living standard, transcending church and private agencies that were expected to assume this social function in the past. Between 1934 and 1936 this conflict peaked and various reforms resulted which increased social insurance benefits and coverage. In effect, the intensified class conflict of this period forced both economic and wage concessions. The states also increased their investment in programs designed to help preserve social harmony.

The subsequent fifty-year expansion of the social wage has strengthened the position of many workers. Government benefits have cushioned many groups of workers from the market's instability. Unemployment insurance, disability benefits, AFDC and other entitlements have guaranteed those temporarily and chronically out of the labor force a minimum living standard. During the 1970's entitlement benefits, particularly unemployment insurance, even enabled many citizens to temporarily resist taking jobs for reduced wages. Part of the strategy necessary for workers to resist long-term wage reductions is to protect and expand the social wage benefits that have evolved during this period.

The homeless crisis reflects the unravelling of many of the advances of the last fifty years. Shelters and soup lines do not offer those presently homeless, or those who risk falling through the "safety net" to the streets, a basis for recreating their lives. At best, these services only temporarily halt the physical, emotional and intellectual deterioration of the homeless person. If the needs of the homeless, chronically unemployed or temporarily unemployed are to be met, then economic entitlement must be expanded or advanced, not diminished. This expansion or redefinition must begin with the economic right of citizens to housing and a job at a livable wage. Jobs and housing must be pursued jointly and not separately: splitting the two will only further fragment individuals and groups, and thus make them more amenable to economic resocialization.

Obviously, this kind of change will not come from liberal government policymakers or legislators. To the contrary, without forceful resistance there will be an ongoing, intensified drive to reduce the social wage. As in earlier historic periods, pressure must come from laborers, the unemployed and those most fundamentally affected by the economic crisis. Only such pressure can preserve and extend the present boundaries of the social wage and link it to broader economic issues.

Ultimately, the more general economic crisis has triggered both marketplace and social wage reductions. Consequently, any strategy against poverty and the reduction of the social wage must also confront broader economic issues, such as the relationship between deindustrialization and housing shortages. Thus, struggles in deregulated industries (such as transportation) and primary manufacturing industries (like steel and autos) must be connected to social wage fight backs. The social wage struggles of the poor can also move from daily survival issues to long-term needs, such as when working class groups in New Jersey threatened by housing displacement (due to gentrification and layoffs) joined homeless groups to have much of the state surplus earmarked for housing relief ($900 million).

Embedded in this type of strategy are educational goals designed to clarify myths about deindustrialization. For instance, many state legislators wanted to use this surplus as a corporate tax break to prevent the flight of industry from New Jersey. Yet similar tax breaks granted during the previous decade had actually coincided with an accelerated flight of capital from this area. In effect, many of the people involved in this campaign learned that the investment of state surpluses in the private economy had hurt their short and long term interests. This strengthened their resolve to channel the surplus to programs that directly benefit working class and poor people.

We cannot develop in the abstract a blueprint of the many strategies for addressing homelessness, social wage reductions or more generally, the economic crisis. Certain prerequisites have
been identified: (1) developing critical linkages in campaigns between the interests of the working class (gentrification) and the poor (homelessness) (2) maximizing the opportunities for educating participants about the myths of deindustrialization, the housing crisis, etc. and (3) heightening class tensions when surplus value is not appropriated to advance the interests of working class or poor people. Clearly, specific organizations must be created to actualize these strategic possibilities. Only then can a progressive, rational agenda emerge which will seriously address homelessness, and more fundamentally, the economic crisis.

FOOTNOTES

5. Ibid.
7. Soldiers of Misfortune: Homeless Veterans in New York City, (Research and Liaison Unit, Office of the Comptroller City of New York, November, 1982).
9. Ibid.

Michael Kelly is a social worker and supervisor of the Apartment Project of the Bowery Residents’ Committee in New York. Michael Fabricant is an associate professor at Hunter College in New York and is on the board of the National Coalition for the Homeless. He has written on housing and homelessness and is the author of "Working Under the Safety Net: Empowerment, Service Work and Advocacy in the 1980s," to be published by Sage Publishers in 1987.

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The Editors
STUDENTS AND UNIVERSITY DIVESTMENT
Is There a Movement in the Wings?

William Hoynes

We have heard much in the past two years about the campus divestment movement as the basis of a new, broader student movement. By the Spring of 1985, students and non-students alike proclaimed the arrival of a new radical student movement. The issue of apartheid in general, and university divestment in particular, seemed to have awakened a generation often thought to be disinterested, selfish and politically apathetic.

While the divestment movement has grown on several campuses, however, an organized student movement has not. Rather than simply cheering isolated acts or cynically dismissing the student movement for its bourgeois background, radical activists must now grapple with why it has not developed as many of us hoped it would.

While circumstances have varied on different campuses, several general characteristics have permeated the divestment movement. Most notable is the lack of a radical worldview among the organizers. Apartheid has become an issue which forces us to take a stand; we cannot stand in the middle and diplomatically persuade the white minority regime in South Africa to relinquish power. Thus, many students have been lured by a sense of moral obligation. Yet despite this student commitment, an uneven relationship has emerged between their political analysis and their militance, both in rhetoric and deed.
Many activists predicted the development of a radical student movement because the level of student militance had suggested a political sophistication which has since proved illusory. Due to media images of the sit-ins and confrontations with police from the late 1960s, today’s students became immediately militant without developing a complementary radical perspective. Despite a core of students with a sophisticated and non-sectarian political analysis, the anti-organizational bent and well-founded distrust of structural hierarchy within the movement has prevented many capable strategists from taking significant leadership roles. Instead, an unorganized group of students has emerged which is interested in militant action but not in political education.

Much of the momentum from the 1985 anti-apartheid activism has been lost precisely because of this lack of political education. Consequently, campus divestment activists have not developed an analysis which sees the issue of apartheid within a broader political context. An understanding that a fundamental altering of institutional power relations—both nationally and internationally—is necessary for any broad social change has yet to emerge as a significant theme of the divestment movement. Lacking such a radical perspective, the movement has been unable to sustain itself in the face of internal strife, outside infiltration, university repression, and Democratic Party lip-service supporting anti-apartheid protestors.

The most devastating blow to a new radical student movement may come from universities making significant steps toward meeting protesters’ demands. Since divestment has been portrayed on campus mostly as a moral issue unconnected to domestic and international power relationships, university administrators have been able to defuse the divestment campaign and prevent it from becoming a radical student movement.

**Undercutting the movement: Cooptation**

Columbia University, the first university to capture national media attention with its three-week divestment sit-in in April 1985, may have set a precedent. Administrators realized they could project a positive image and make a wise business move, as well as restore the student body’s faith in administrative authority, by doing exactly what the students demanded: divesting all the university’s stock from companies doing business in South Africa. Not only did Columbia use this to show the university’s high moral standards, but it also convinced many students that responsible (not reckless) student activism rather than public relations and business considerations precipitated the divestment decision. The once newsworthy student movement at Columbia was largely decimated: corporations emerged as socially responsible, rather than profit-hungry.

**Diversion**

Dartmouth University has set another precedent, resulting more from media coverage than administrative reaction. A small divestment movement existed at Dartmouth, when an unlikely series of events hurled it into the national limelight. A gang of right-wing students, on a midnight trek, destroyed a symbolic shantytown and suddenly divestment
became a central issue among Dartmouth students.

Yet divestment may not have been the major concern after all, since the debate at Dartmouth primarily emphasized the behavior of the right-wing students. As disciplinary procedures against them dragged on, apartheid and divestment were largely obfuscated. The media portrayed Dartmouth as a bastion of campus activism. Rather than focus on radical student agitation for divestment, though, it stressed university disciplinary proceedings. This led many national publications, from the *New York Times* to *Rolling Stone*, to imply, if not openly suggest, that the Dartmouth administration was willing to accept—even condone—radical activism on campus, yet at the same time punish conservatives. Thus the media created another myth, by portraying the university as a liberal-left institution, rather than as a multi-million dollar corporation comprising part of America’s ruling class.

**Repression**

Whereas the Dartmouth and Columbia administrations seemed to pacify student ac-
tivists, those administrations blatantly hostile to demonstrators have met increasing resistance. At the University of California at Berkeley, for example, a hard line against divestment activists helped students focus on UC’s corporate structure and explore the relationship between apartheid and imperialism.

After a 4:00 AM police riot in April 1986, which put more than a dozen protestors in the hospital and almost one hundred more in jail, the UC Chancellor shifted media and campus attention from apartheid, divestment, and university repression to “irresponsible” student violence. When it was revealed that half those arrested were not students, but Bay Area residents, the local media and UC administration had a field day blaming violent “professional agitators.” The April riot in Berkeley hardened activists against the administration, producing a call to students to defend themselves against the repressive university. Yet poor campus organization made it impossible for activists to rebut false charges that outside provocateurs incited the riot; rather than drawing more students into the movement, the violence apparently alienated students on its fringes. Now that UC has announced that it will

*Catherine Alport photo, IKON, special issue, *Art Against Apartheid.*
begin a process of total divestment upon orders from the Governor, only time will tell whether the decision, predictably made when school was not in session, will devastate the movement as it has at Columbia.

University Strategy

The divestment movement as it is now constituted is not fundamentally opposed to the desires of corporate and university leaders. As the South Africa situation becomes more unstable, divestment becomes an increasingly sensible business decision. University administrators realize that they need only bide their time until US corporations pull out of South Africa to avoid losing everything when a new regime comes to power. Administrators do what they can to pacify the divestment movement, without rejecting divestment outright—as they would for a more stable US-backed dictatorship such as Pinochet's Chile—because they know that South African divestment is a realistic possibility.

Thus, Tufts University President Jean Mayer says he fears that indecisiveness toward divestment could develop a "rift between a large part of our youth and our government" (New York Times, 7/9/86). Mayer obscures the real rift: between students and university administrators, himself included. He has been shrewd enough, however, to join 94 other college presidents in sending Congress a letter calling for sanctions to "demonstrate the depth and sincerity of this country's disapproval of apartheid" (Boston Globe, 7/10/86). The institutions represented in the letter read like a checklist of campuses with significant activism.

University administrators have made their strategy well known. They will try to shift the focus away from their own ties to repression, and hide behind the debate about US policy toward South Africa. When it seems favorable to divest, as it was at Columbia in 1985 and the University of California in 1986, universities will do so as a smart business decision, hoping that students will forget about their conflict with the university and go back to their books.

The Other Student Movement

A variety of administrative tactics have
helped isolate or defuse the growing student movement. Yet isolation might be overcome; students might regroup, begin to build coalitions with other progressive groups, and develop into a more genuinely radical movement—not solely for divestment. In many cases student activists have successfully developed alliances with local progressive political leaders, most notably Mel King in Boston and Mayor Gus Newport in Berkeley.

Despite media insistence that only divestment concerns today's generation of "responsible" student activists, radical activity has continued around a number of issues. Many students know that a radical student movement must focus on the connection between South African apartheid and broader questions about United States economic and military hegemony.

For example, students in New Haven and Boston supported striking clerical workers at Yale in 1984-85. As the strike dragged on, an uncharacteristically close relationship emerged between students and strikers. At UC Berkeley, students have organized to get ROTC off campus (the ROTC building was burned down in spring 1985), and to expose military ties with the university and ROTC's blatant misogyny and homophobia on campus. At the University of Wisconsin at Madison, activists have publicized those faculty members doing defense research, targeting those doing SDI research in particular. Scheduled appearances by Henry Kissinger were cancelled in Boston and Florida in 1984 due to student demonstrations, and appearances in New York, Texas and California produced large student protests. Similar greetings have awaited Casper Weinberger and George Shultz when visiting university campuses.

The most dramatic activity, unreported even by the alternative media, has been the wave of protests, blockades, vigils and citizen's arrests on university campuses against CIA recruitment in the past two years. Following a successful blockade at Tufts University in October 1984, students at more than thirty campuses held similar actions—from Brown University, to the University of Iowa, to Hunter College, to the University of Colorado. While divestment activity has captured the spotlight, action against the CIA has continued. Students have publicized the CIA's role in places such as Nicaragua, Angola, and Chile, and have challenged the CIA as an unaccountable and repressive secret police force.

Thus we have two student movements. One, widely reported by the media, has pressured universities to divest from companies doing business in South Africa. The other, with little exposure even on the Left, has organized against the militarization of society, with divestment as only one of its concerns.

Yet the radical sector of the student movement is not unproblematic. Potential exists for a form of radicalization which leads students to act against power relations at the university level only, and not connect them to national or international issues. Activists must be careful not to become an elite, insular movement
without any relevance to the world outside the campus. Questions of race and gender also remain within the student movement. Although black student and community participation at the Columbia divestment sit-in was encouraging, in general, few coalitions between white and black student groups have emerged. Students must also be sensitive to questions of gender, to develop both male and female leadership and to prevent militancy from becoming synonymous with machismo.

Still, it is possible to work through these problems; and if a radical student movement is going to emerge from the recent divestment activity it will have to come to terms with them. In any event, the student movement is at a critical juncture, and events over the coming school year may point in which direction it will move.

A Real Student Movement?

The most fundamental question for radical student activists is whether a victorious campus divestment movement is compatible with a radical student movement. If universities decide to divest, activists should be proud of their efforts. But they should also know that large-scale university divestment may strike a fatal blow to a growing radical student movement.

Student activists must continue pressuring for total divestment, but also remember that divestment or even the end of South African apartheid are only the beginning of the liberation of peoples around the world—not only in Africa, Asia and Latin America, but also here in the United States. With luck, the campus divestment movement will by the Spring of 1987 have transformed itself into a multi-issue student movement making connections between imperialism abroad and racism, sexism, classism and militarism at home. Only then will a radical student movement have emerged.

William Hoynes, a PhD student in sociology at Boston College, was a student activist in Boston from 1983 to 1985. He has just returned from a year in Berkeley, and is a member of Radical America’s editorial collective.

President Bok instructs deans.

“Buy low, sell high!”
Harvard University's 350th Birthday celebration in September 1986 could have been mistaken for a Hollywood spectacular: a cost of $1.5 million, a cast of "Who's Who" among the rich and famous, and eight years in the making. It was announced breathlessly that during Harvard's Big Week there would be gliding floats and a laser show by the banks of the Charles River. Harvard had also arranged over 100 symposia and a "reunion" concert featuring Tom Rush, Joan Baez, and Bonnie Raitt. Britain's Prince Charles was slated for an open-air talk in Harvard Yard, to be followed the next day by Secretary of State George Schultz addressing the issue of "Our Changing World."

Undaunted by the glitz, a coalition of progressives began putting together a hastily organized $500-funded alternative to this self-love gala by the nation's "premier" institution of higher-learning. We began in mid-June, unified by Harvard's staunch opposition to divestment of stocks of companies doing business in South Africa. We challenged the university's covert support of both apartheid and Reagan's policy of "constructive engagement," a stance consistent with Harvard's history of in-depth contributions to U.S. domination in the Third World. At first there were about ten Harvard students and alumni, all of whom had fought for divestment. They were joined by a group of non-student, anti-
apartheid activists, as well as a number of Harvard union workers and some progressive community organizers who have battled Harvard’s expansion into the multi-racial working class neighborhoods that surround the university. We named ourselves the 350th Divestment Coalition. Our poster logo read “Harvard parties. South Africa burns. Divest Now!”

Day One. While Harvard lawyers made threatening calls to the City’s Manager, two progressive city councilors pushed through a decision to grant us a permit to set up our headquarters on the Cambridge Commons—only a block away from Harvard Yard. On Tuesday, we erected a huge tent (it could seat a crowd of 200) and called a press conference. Speakers included a passionate 1937 Harvard alumnus who had fought Harvard’s investments in Hitler’s Germany; the President of the progressive Hotel and Restaurant Workers Union, which represented a number of University employees; Saundra Graham, a black woman city councilor, who had for years led tenant struggles and had highlighted Harvard tokenism toward the black/brown community contiguous to its borders. The tent was open-air. From it, we could engage the curious and coordinate new recruits.

Day Two. Early evening, on our Commons, we convened an alternative Community Gathering—two hours before Harvard’s Riverfest was to begin. About 500 people joined in speech and song. Girls Nite Out, a local women’s band, dynamoed Otis/Aretha’s “Respect” and Bim Skala Bim skad’ and the Harvard Clerical and Technical Workers Union’s a cappella group, the Pipettes swang our spirits high and put our feet very solidly on the ground. And then as sun set, the 350th Divestment Coalition began its march from the Cambridge Commons through Harvard Square and onto the banks of the Charles.

“What Are We Celebrating?”

Candles in hand, we filled up the Square’s narrow streets. Our chants of “Heh, heh, ho, ho, Those Bloody Stocks Have Got to Go” and “Schulitz/Bok Get the Word, This is Not Johannesburg,” ricocheted off brick buildings. We hoisted our six foot banners and, as we arrived, the chilled riversiders beamed with curiosity. We marched down river, across a foot bridge, and back up again. Candlelights flickered as the chants continued. We hung our “Harvard Parties” banner over the side of a major bridge, while a police motorboat nervously circled below. Five hours after our rally began, the divesters “dispersed into the crowd,” according to the Boston Globe. Its ludicrous account had us eagerly “waiting for the birthday party to begin.”

Meanwhile all day and night, leafletting began in earnest—over 10,000 distributed in 4 days. One of our most effective leaflets headlined “Harvard has 410 million dollars invested in companies doing business in South Africa and owns $1.7 billion in Cambridge real estate. On Harvard’s 350th Birthday, what are we celebrating?” It paralleled Harvard’s abuses as a landlord and landgrabber and the South African regime’s oppression of its black and coloured majority. Everyone who leafleted was struck by how supportive many people were and how engaged they were by the leaflet’s text.

Day 3. We had deliberately created the impression that the Coalition was at rest, except for leafletting and firming up logistics for a picket the next day. Prince Charles gave his
speech in the morning and then the symposia commenced. In the evening, Harvard offered a dinner-dance at the newly constructed Charles Hotel.

It was a tough match for the Divesters to compete with such goings on. All the Harvard-run events had been sold out months ago and most were for alumni only. (Each day, buses brought the ticketed alumni from Boston and Cambridge's finest hotels. They had no need for lunch boxes or brown bags since catered buffets dotted the campus. This pampering was not pure sentimentalism on Harvard's part. Its prices for attendance at the festivities were 'first class' and heaps of 350th mementoes had been manufactured to deepen and extend the alumni's largesse.)

But, a surprise occurred. While the announced and exclusive dinner-dance was held for the 'regular' guests, a very hush-hush banquet was to be hosted by Harvard's President Derek Bok for 300 of Harvard's 'most generous' brethren, charity-freaks like David Rockefeller and Sheik Yamani. Drinks and appetizers were served at dusk in a Harvard art museum, to be followed by a brief stroll to Memorial Hall for a special feast.

At 7:30 pm with only a handful of cops present sixty unusually "well-dressed" divestors sat down tightly in front of the three doors leading into the banquet and chants about apartheid filled the night air. The tipsy and tuxedoed guests were, at first, befuddled by the obstructing sitdown. Once they caught on, some of them became defiant. On TV reports that night, one of the banqueters, a New York financier, commented acidly, "This will not change one bit what is happening in South Africa!" Injuries mounted on insult. We chanted raucously, "No Divest—No Digest." Some students and hotel workers who had been hired to serve the dinner came out, donned red armbands and sat down with us.

The "No Divest, No Digest" Blues

According to the Boston Globe, Bok immediately took command. (In 1969, Harvard had once asked its police to deoccupy an anti-War building takeover, and the ensuing police "riot" had caused a major press black-eye and mobilized both students and townies.) Eventually, a Harvard emissary came out to meet with us and offered five minutes to address the audience the next day in the Yard, if we ended the sit-in quickly. We decided that a "public service" spot, which could be viewed as a demonstration of Harvard's tolerance, was not what we had in mind. We rejected the offer. Our 1937 alumni articulated our sole counter-demand: that President Bok come out to announce that Harvard would divest its racist stocks. This was evidently unacceptable to those who rule Harvard, and since we and they were unable to come to a meeting of the minds
—despite our “frank, direct and open discussions”—an impasse was reached. Forty five minutes later, Harvard cancelled the dinner and we were print and TV news in a big way. According to the Boston Globe, Harvard’s publicity spokesperson (ever nimble) announced that the food for the terminated feast had been graciously “donated to Shelter Inc., an institution for the homeless.” And pennies from heaven, indeed: “The menu was to have been soup, beef tenderloin, bean and tomato salad and fresh figs and raspberries for dessert.” In its lead on the sit-in, the Globe stated Effects of dinner cancellation are still unclear. Seems some alumni felt Bok had caved in and there was concern that their “generosity—in a fiscal way—might diminish. A hotel worker—who had been a divestment leafletter in his off hours—told us that at about 11 pm 15 tuxedoed VIP guests returned and loudly, a bit incoherently, and unsuccessfully demanded the reopening of the hotel’s fanciest restaurant.

Day 4. George Schultz came to address Harvard. We had a legal picket of about 400 on the sidewalk outside Harvard Yard. Attending to us was the SWAT team—evidently the sit-in had provoked more intense “security” plans. Further, once the audience had been swept into the Yard, well before the speeches, Harvard police locked the gates of each and every entrance to the Yard. The Secretary was going to be secure—now that the “best and brightest” were on our case. Unfortunately, the Coalition had already become a bit of a hot number, so TV cameras installed on top of buildings in Harvard Square were beaming on us.

“I Can See Clearly Now”

Meanwhile the Globe’s reporter was observing cynically to one of our members that “picketing is ‘old hat,’” and “if you had 5000 here maybe that might be a bit of a story.” Suddenly (as the Globe’s next day article would note) a yellow airplane trailing the message, ‘U.S./Harvard out of South Africa. Sanctions-Divest Now,’ appeared in the sky at about 10:30 am and made eight circuits of Harvard Yard... (Mass.) Gov. Dukakis’ voice was barely audible when (the) noisy plane... circled overhead.” The headline read Demonstrators Take to Land, Sky to Protest Harvard’s Investments in South Africa. Our picket and our plane was given as much air time
on TV news as Shultz’ appearance. At one point, we shifted quickly to get within yards of Shultz and Weinberger on their way from the Yard to a luncheon. The TV captured a reporter yelling to a fast moving and bristling Weinberger, “What did you think of the plane?” Cap was in no mood to give us a review. But we were not deprived completely of “feedback” from “the State.” An A.P. photographer caught a close up of Shultz and Harvard’s “chief marshal” as they sat upon the stage and looked up spotting the plane. “Aerial Protest” capped the photo—which appeared in the Washington Post and papers in Alberquerque, Philadelphia, Germany, Japan and elsewhere. Shultz appears angry and a bit anxious. Harvard’s marshal looks in need of a major tranquilizer. The low-budget Divestment Coalition had taken on and eclipsed some of Harvard’s “international” celebration.

Aftermath. After the action, Coalition members came together and began to discuss what we had done. In a go-around, all expressed exhilaration. Everyone was struck with the creativity we had displayed. Even a week before our first rally, many admitted they could not anticipate our ensuing success or the effort and coordination that the protest would produce.

From my perspective as a community anti-apartheid activist, there were tangible gains from the Coalition’s effort. For months, anti-apartheid activists on and off campus had been largely two separate, disconnected efforts. We had our rallies, they had theirs. When Mobilization for Survival contacted the New England Divestment Student Coalition to ask how we could connect, no one on the other end could come up with a suggestion. We had left the matter there. In the winter, at a meeting of local activists, a man spoke of how since the successful drive to stop the selling of Krugerands, “the movement” had come to a “dead halt” —no one mentioned that shanty towns had been popping up on campuses all over New England. So now, because of the protesting and celebrating of the 350th Divestment Coalition, we indeed have a real shot at building a student/community anti-apartheid alliance.

Impressions and Reflections

As a friendly politician put it: “They were big. You were small. And you won.” The press
loves pictures, and we should too. That funky, cartoonish airplane carrying our words was a sheer joy. As it turns out, we didn’t need what we couldn’t have—5000 picketers on a workday morning. But a plane—with a feisty pilot, burning to get to the Yard, (or else he’d lose his pay)—caught the eye and contested Harvard’s and Shultz’ moment in a way that warmed the hearts of many.

* * * * *

Was our success attributable largely to luck or was it idiosyncratic? Contingent upon a massive captive audience and media? Dependent upon the relative timidity with which an elite university responds to “uncivil” opposition?

These factors were entwined with our achievement, but were not the most critical ingredients. Timeliness and creativity also stood us well. A university is an “easy” terrain, but, as history indicates, exploiting the academy’s contradictions is a challenging puzzle. Harvard’s puffed-up partying attracted a huge audience and the international press, but our efforts could have been drowned out and made invisible by the Gala’s glitz. We could have come off—and felt—like dour moralists who don’t know how to relax and have fun. Certainly, Harvard had spent big bucks to insure that it
could totally control the proceedings. (The university was so confident that in the spring it summarily rejected a request that one symposium look at the issue of divestment.) Harvard had nothing to fear from Boston’s lead newspaper—the Boston Globe. It is wedded to Harvard with zealously passion. On the weekend before the bash, the Globe treated its readers to an entire magazine devoted to Harvard’s 350th. The Globe initially buried news about the divestment protest, until pressured by TV coverage and international and national newspapers’ printing of a wire service report on the march to the River. Our breaking through to TV and print media was one measure of our inventiveness.

Harvard has generally responded “softly” to student protest in recent times, coopting it with yards of patience and tempting crumbs. It has not been as “moderate” when confronted with the involvement of community activists, especially when they connect with its students (or workers). This winter, when a march of 300 people—largely non-students—headed from a local Shell station towards a mall in Harvard Square, the Yard was locked and police were highly visible.

It was a wonderful break that Harvard cancelled its posh dinner, but to attribute this to luck or to Harvard’s foibles would be shortsighted. Arrests would have been a more available option, if our security about the sit-in had not been so tight. That we knew of the soiree—the press didn’t—speaks to just one example of how campus workers enriched the Coalition. The students had insights into Bok’s style—his inflated pride in his capacity to “mediate.” Divestors predicted correctly that the sit-in would not be dismantled aggressively.

Our Coalition joined town with gown. This union greatly enhanced the coalition. Students and alumni entered after a year long battle with Harvard over divestment, that included a shantytown and winning an election of a pro-divestment member to the university’s Board of Trustees. Neighborhood organizers brought with them a decade of resistance to Harvard’s expansionism into their neighborhoods. Anti-intervention activists brought a concern that the protest concretely reach beyond Harvard to Shultz/the State, that we “deconstruct” Reagan’s “engagement” with the South African regime.

Diversity was not, by itself, enough. Although distrust hampered early meetings, coalition members did not dismiss each other. Those bent on combativeness did not try to demote the singing/celebrating on the Commons. The civil disobedience was not primed as the preeminent event, the acid test to commitment or effectiveness. The community organizers knew how to shape and distribute a leaflet that would engage working class residents, and everyone supported the link between Harvard’s neighborhood-busting and its willingness to make a buck on apartheid. The anti-intervention activists respected the divestment focus—the spark that had lit us all—and were not perceived as “outsiders,” but rather as resourceful contributors to the protest.

This respect between coalition members was critical to stamina and strategy. As one member later put it: “We were like a hoard of mosquitoes. Wherever Harvard turned, it got stung.” By the end, it must have felt to the Birthday big-wigs like the height of black fly season on a muggy New England afternoon.

Often, we must react to their aggression and terror. It was refreshing—and replicable—to expose the elite’s self-congratulatory “cultural” entertainment. The TV interviews and images of Harvard’s outraged alumni elite—their fulminations about a missed dinner, their hollow aside about concern for South African blacks, their tasteless donation to the homeless—offered a vivid profile of what it is to be a “fat cat.”

The Coalition targetted well, in a terrain that gave us some leverage, with an array of tactics that offered different challenges and satisfac-
tions. We wanted very much to win.

These are hard times, and it is difficult indeed for progressive political efforts to “win.” But, opportunities still exist. Our isolation—our demoralization—can push us into a politics that is mechanical and sacrificial. We can get cornered into endlessly picketing cold skyscrapers, getting arrested a lot, marching and chanting in urban malls where our energy and effort largely evaporate. Winning must remain an integral dimension of how we exercise and frame our politics.

We have learned a lot from culture and even from the periodic retreats that Reaganism forces us into. We know how to parcel and juggle time; we know when we are exhausting ourselves; we know what can be “correct” but horrifically dull; we know how to be demonishly funny. In our kitchens and living rooms and office coffee breaks, we verbally barb and lampoon and strip bare Reaganism—its savage mean-spiritedness, its self-glorification, its downright dumbness. We should bring that spirit out of our closets.

Ken Schlosser is a member of Mobilization for Survival and works with Mobe’s South Africa Taskforce. He is an editor of Radical America.

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Readers should not be put off by the grandiose title of Gabriel Kolko’s latest book. Focused on the “balance of forces,” Kolko provides a physics more than an anatomy of the Vietnam war, but the examination of the victory of the Vietnamese Revolution is impressive in its detachment and rigor. Elucidating the “modern historical experience,” he argues for the importance of “will and choice in history” (554) and at the same time analyzes with an unsurpassed density what it means for revolutionaries to work amidst circumstances not of their own choosing. “The longest epic of human struggle in the twentieth century” (21) was an attempt by the Vietnamese to achieve freedom, not in the vulgar sense of doing what they pleased, but by realizing their true capabilities in a world of limits.

On the other side, the United States Government squandered an autonomy that appeared to flow from considerable resources. Policymakers endowed with a surfeit of material goods saw little reason to worry about the impact of US intervention on the Vietnamese people, an orientation that was shared with leaders of the Republic of Vietnam (RVN). Capable of vast destruction, these allies could not achieve the mastery that would have resulted from eradication of the revolutionary movement. Imagining themselves to be choosing, they ignored, right up the moment US helicopters fled Saigon, their enslavement to circumstances.

*Anatomy of a War* is the best book available on the subject. Kolko presents a three-
cornered analysis, in which the RVN is accorded a position of equality to the US and the Vietnamese Communist Party. This parity is not warranted by its real power, but the device helps demonstrate that the Saigon regime was an opponent the revolutionaries were bound to outlast and an albatross that Washington could not transform into a viable state. Kolko keeps asking why each of the adversaries behaved as it did. What is the logic behind mistakes committed by the Vietnamese Communists and the source of their resilience in defeat? What are the causes of more damaging misconceptions and wrong turns among US policymakers? What explains the RVN’s fatal inflexibility? The result is three distinct histories, each of which is substantial enough to stand on its own. The book’s discussion of the US aspect is useful; its narrative of Communism in Vietnam offers unique strengths; and its treatment of the RVN is by far the best available. The knitting together of these strands yields a comprehensive, dialectical account of the “War.”

Anatomy of a War begins slowly (its treatment of the period before 1960 offers few surprises), the text is very long and written in an awkward prose, and the huge scholarly apparatus may be difficult even for specialists to decipher. Still, it deserves a wide audience. The Vietnamese Revolution affirmed the importance of collective struggle, but this achievement was not as simple as it first appeared. Collapsing distinctions between activist and academic concerns, Kolko shows that the guerrillas came to perceive reality with a scholarly acuity. Freedom is related to desire only indirectly, he suggests. It comes in partial, unstable forms, and then only to those who analyze the world with all the self-discipline they can muster. Of course “lessons” of the Vietnam War must be applied in Central America and elsewhere, but this history is not an open book either to US leaders or to those opposing their designs. To understand the situation on these battlefields as well as our own capacity to influence events, we need an analysis of the balance of forces that approaches in complexity what Kolko has achieved.

Trials of the Vietnamese Communist Party

Kolko shows that the success of Vietnamese Communism depended on its grasp of certain key issues. The Party saw that control over the land was a decisive question, one which, if resolved correctly, would mobilize the peasant majority. It understood the link between pro-Western forces in Vietnam and their sponsors in France and the United States and prepared for the foreign intervention that was sure to follow from any attack on the Saigon regime. It diagnosed the Sino-Soviet split and learned how to turn this fissure within the socialist camp to its own advantage. Kolko’s development of these and other familiar themes shows once again that architects of the Vietnamese Revolution have invariably been intelligent.

But Anatomy of a War goes further to demonstrate that this leadership was never able to achieve a total comprehension of events and that its successes were the result not only of shrewdness, but also of constancy in the wake of miscalculations and defeats. The Party’s baptism of fire came in 1930-31 when it joined peasant revolts against French colonialism. Government repression of these uprisings and others in 1940 virtually destroyed the organization and left survivors with an “obsession not to fight prematurely” (43). As a result, when

In the August 1945 Revolution, a French outpost is overrun near Ben Tre, southern Vietnam.
Japanese authority in Indochina collapsed at the end of World War II, they hesitated to act. Believing that an Allied landing was a precondition for success, they were caught off guard by the mobilization of “millions of euphoric people,” forming “a virtually unarmed insurrectionary force” (37), that delivered power into their hands and made possible formation of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV).

The Party was wrong again about the Geneva Accords in 1954. Perhaps expecting an ineffectual Saigon Regime in the mold of previous regimes, “it had not imagined that a ruthless, catalytic power would emerge in the south” (102). In particular, President Diem’s attempt to reconstitute landlord authority in the countryside came as a surprise, and the DRV was at first unwilling and unable to lead popular resistance against it. Swinging to the opposite pole, Hanoi leaders may have overestimated RVN strength in the late 1950s, until “a radical poor-peasant movement” (105) bent on rising up against Diem and the landlords forced them to sanction armed struggle and the National Liberation Front (NLF). Once this new insurrectionary phase was underway, the Party did not think likely any massive introduction of US combat forces into the war, so that in 1964 it was “physically unprepared for sudden escalation” (154).

The Tet Offensive was clouded by even more costly illusions, especially insofar as its planners thought that a “general insurrection and offensive” would take place. Deceived by a faulty sense of history, General Westmoreland concentrated US forces at Khe Sanh because he was convinced that the guerrillas were trying to replay their great victory at Dienbienphu 14 years earlier. He was wrong, of course, but the Party’s real point of reference, the “indelible model” (37) it drew from the past, was also flawed. Overlooking differences between the exhausted Japan of 1945 and the still dangerous United States of 1968, it vainly hoped the August Revolution that put Hanoi in revolutionary hands could be repeated in the streets of Saigon.

After Tet, US leaders could not bring themselves to admit defeat, but were compelled to withdraw combat forces and scale down military spending in Vietnam—steps that made defeat inevitable. In that respect the Offensive was a turning point in the war, justifying the decision of those who launched it. But immediate post-mortems within the Party were somber. Losses during Tet “knocked the breath out of the Communist military and political organization” (333) and assured that skepticism regarding its urban prospects would now second the Party’s long-standing caution vis-a-vis the rural revolution.

This posture was still evident after the Paris Agreements of January 1973, when Hanoi too modestly assumed that victory was not in the offing and that it would have to rely on the “Third Force” to help end the War (458). Impressed by the sophisticated weaponry coming from its socialist-bloc allies, communist leaders uncharacteristically became enamored of a “technocratic and technological vision of war” and overlooked evidence concerning “morale and politics,” domains in which the RVN was
losing ground most tellingly. “Events were not transcending the Party’s plans and imagination” (478-479). Party leaders seized their opportunity in spring 1975 and brought the War to an abrupt close, but victory found them without an “economic plan or even a staff capable of formulating one for the south” and little prepared to deal with the complex political situation after the collapse of the Thieu government” (537). The difficulty was compounded by their obstinacy in counting on US reconstruction aid, a bit of “wishful thinking” that persisted until 1977 (447). Once again, the Party had “misunderstood the total social dynamics of the conflict” (538).

Given all these mistakes, one might reasonably ask how the Vietnamese could possibly have won. Kolko shows that in many cases their errors were bound up with even more damaging blunders on the other side. Diem did not anticipate that his counter-revolution in the countryside would create “mass discontent and a largely spontaneous prerevolutionary environment for armed struggle and Party growth.” Hanoi assumed a greater shrewdness than he in fact possessed, so that its “misjudgments in one domain were offset by Diem’s in the other” (99). The same might be said of US escalation in 1965, when the Party thought it unlikely “that the United States would invest so much of its power in Vietnam at the expense of other global interests,” a line of reasoning that “was not so much incorrect as too rational” (154). The Tet Offensive, an initiative inspired by the Party’s memorable victory in August 1945 and one that showed the Vietnamese Revolution in all its majesty, constitutes an anomaly in Party history; for the most part, the guerrillas shrank from such Promethean gambles.

Kolko does not provide a definitive portrait of revolutionary leadership. Chapter 4 on “The Internal World of Vietnamese Communism” pictures a heroic, wise, flexible Politburo and sheds little light on the inner workings of the Party, especially at lower levels, a bias that is evident elsewhere in the text as well. But on balance this interpretation of Communism in Vietnam is the most believable that we possess. Rising above sectarian considerations, it pictures Party leaders struggling to master a dynamic of war and revolution whose logic can never be fully uncovered and to protect themselves from a sense of history that must be consulted, but also tends to mislead.

Kolko’s achievement rests not only on printed sources, but also on extended discussions with the Vietnamese. These interviews with the participants are signaled in the footnotes, but are even more evident in the extraordinary richness of Kolko’s commentary on Party decision-making over the years. To be sure, the preface announces that he “fully welcomed the Vietnamese Communist Party’s success over the French and American alternatives to it” (xiv), and it is evident that his interlocutors were already committed to a process of self-criticism. Nonetheless, such discussions must have required more than a little self-discipline on both sides; it is too bad that the author does not say more about these encounters. Kolko’s ability to engage with Party activists and to evaluate their policies so stringently bears witness to political and scholarly integrity of a rare order.

A Hollow Ally

“The single greatest obstacle to our grasping the nature of the war,” Kolko writes, “is the amazing ignorance” among leaders of the US
Government and the Vietnamese Communist Party concerning "the social system in South Vietnam" (xii). Saigon's weakness compared to the other participants in the struggle was critical. So long as "Vietnamization," which was always the necessary end point of US intervention, proved a chimera, the revolutionaries retained a strategic advantage. And so long as the Party was not confronted by a serious internal rival, US efforts were certain to founder.

But why was the Saigon regime so corrupt and ineffective? Imposed from abroad, it never represented a stable constellation of class forces within Vietnam. Both Diem and Thieu held at arms length the Francophile bourgeoisie, and, with nowhere else to turn, these strata later became prominent within the "Third Force." Chinese businessmen who dominated commerce were similarly rebuffed by Diem and remained little rooted in Vietnamese society even under Thieu's more solicitous patronage. The insertion of Saigon officials in the countryside undercut traditional forms of feudal suzerainty, revolutionary confiscations loosened the landlords' grip, and the forced urbanization produced by US/RVN firepower uprooted rich as well as poor villagers. Offering compensation for terrains already seized by the revolutionaries or abandoned because of bombing and shelling, Thieu's "Land to the Tiller" program of 1970 was designed to help large-scale proprietors recoup their losses, but only by incorporating them more fully into the highly unstable urban economy. These opportunists, whose capital and families were sheltered abroad, "never acquired the attributes or psychology of a class ready to assert itself or confident in its own future" (211).

Economic Vietnamization was even more elusive than its military counterpart. US imports created a consumer-based aura of prosperity in the cities, but undercut indigenous industry, while the War disorganized productive activity in the countryside. The result was an economic facade without any underlying substance. US intervention had the further effect of tying Vietnam to the international economy even more tightly than under the French, with grim results in the early 1970s when the world energy crisis produced skyrocketing prices for fertilizers and fuels upon which the RVN now depended. The system also required US personnel to serve as a market and the infusion of billions of dollars in US aid, and when these artificial props were removed, as inevitably occurred with "Vietnamization," the economy was bound to go through a "traumatic decompression" (490). Even before aid cutoffs in the mid 1970s, the RVN was in a "deep depression" (507), according to US advisors, who anticipated that it would require $770 million of annual aid in 1980 and $450 million in 1990 simply to stay afloat (496). "Thieu, for practical purposes, was counting on receiving US and foreign monies forever!" (229).

Kolko affirms that the war-induced transfer of refugees from their rural homes into the RVN-controlled cities hurt the guerrillas, but that it posed an even more ominous dilemma for the Saigon regime. Corrupted by a US-sponsored street culture, "the children of the urban poor to a great extent broke the solidarity of the masses with the Revolution" (205). But they also constituted a "profoundly disturbed human order" and a "fatal economic burden" for their hosts (204, 205). Most of these lumpen elements, "among the most highly oppressed, disoriented, and marginal people in the war" (262), ended up in the ranks of the RVN's armed forces (there was no economy to absorb them in any case). Cynical and narcissistic, they proved no more effective as soldiers than the rural conscripts upon whom Saigon's generals had relied earlier in the War. Low salaries required them to prey on the surrounding population, an "indirect tax" that always blocked government efforts to win the hearts and minds of the people.

A fundamental optimism informs Kolko's treatment of the Saigon regime. It was, he insists, an intangible political entity and was bound to collapse sooner or later, so that mere survival, as opposed to active conquest, insured victory for the Revolution. His emphasis on the social isolation of RVN officials may be overdrawn. I wonder, for example, about his remark that "the somewhat mellower style of the local rich" compared favorably to the "dai-
ly oppression and corruption over the peasantry” authored by Saigon-appointed officials; and that under Diem “the landlords were no less unhappy” than the rural poor (95). Given the considerable continuity between the pro-French and pro-US regimes that he notes in several passages, Kolko may also be exaggerating the degree to which Diem and Thieu spurned the Francophile bourgeoisie. Still, his analysis, by far the most thorough and systematic now available, poses a challenge that other scholars of “Vietnamization” henceforth must meet.

The US: From Desire to Necessity

Taking the reality of US imperialism for granted, Kolko focuses on the psychology of key policy makers. The most compelling “consensus” among them, he argues, was that US resources were unlimited and that its agencies could be granted a “blank check” to eliminate opposition. Fascinated by the domino theory, he demonstrates that it ruled out a proper ordering of priorities. Planners who assumed that they had to stop any “domino” in the world from falling were bound to defend the weakest link in their global system. Preoccupation with US “credibility” betrayed a similar lack of strategic discernment.

In Anatomy of a War, US attachment to this global perspective assumes the proportions of a mania. Information was hardly the problem, though in typical fashion the 13 different US intelligence agencies in Vietnam generated such a mass of captured enemy documents that Pentagon analysts could not keep track of them all. More fundamentally, “truth never influenced policy sufficiently to change it” and “rationality was buried by inherited geopolitical frustrations and conventional class wisdom” (195). “The concern of the system was not truth but rather power” (153), a preference that was tenable only so long as enemies caved in to Washington’s dictates.

This strategic incoherence was reflected in the “limited war” doctrines that the US applied in Vietnam. The tension between controlling
populations and winning them over was never overcome, so that the revolutionaries were left to battle an enemy with firepower, but no political program. The capital-intensive methods that the Pentagon favored and that it passed on to the RVN proved a mixed blessing. Helicopters conferred mobility, but only by sacrificing surprise. Their exposed gas tanks and pilots were easy to hit, fuel consumption was enormous, and each hour in the air required ten hours of maintenance on the ground. Artillery was indiscriminate (here, too, the military and “nation building” aspects of the US approach were at odds), and its bases also had to be protected. The first Marines dispatched to Vietnam were intended to guard US installations at Danang, and Westmoreland’s subsequent decision to employ them in “search and destroy” operations was made without any high-level consideration of its prospects and dangers. In short, each US weapon brought its own contradictions, and gains diminished and costs spiraled when this arsenal was passed on to the RVN.

By 1968, “the collapse of conventional wisdom had proved total, as strategy, sophisticated weapons, and well-groomed politicians and generals seemed irrelevant and pathetic before their resourceful, dogged Vietnamese foe” (367). Limited war was “far too expensive for the domestic and international condition of the U.S. economy” (287). Pentagon estimates indicate that 3,689 fixed-wing aircraft and 4,857 helicopters, valued at over $10 billion, had been lost by the end of 1972 (190). Federal deficits, the gold crisis, and mounting inflation showed that the system had reached its limits. By 1969, as it became clear that the US literally could not afford victory in Vietnam, there were “few hawks left in the business world” (quoted from Business Week, 346).

“Insulated from reality by walls of paper and layers of officials, the United States’ leaders” prior to 1968 “simply could not absorb the fact that they were in a strategically defensive position.” They “could not grasp the magnitude of their nation’s military and political weaknesses in Vietnam” (307). But after the Tet Offensive, the US was compelled “to leave the realm of desire and confront that of necessity” (336).

Nixon and Kissinger began the process of disengagement, but without facing its implications. Kolko denies that they ever became reconciled, even after the Paris Peace Agreement, to a “decent interval” strategy of gradually abandoning the RVN. Invasion of Cambodia in 1970 caught the guerrillas by surprise and complicated their logistical task, but it also overextended RVN forces and opened the way to a
renewed revolutionary presence in the Mekong Delta. Invasion of Laos the next year was a debacle for the Saigon forces and a morale booster for the Communists. Making a virtue of necessity, Nixon gambled all on diplomacy, hoping that detente with the Soviets and normalization of relations with the Chinese would isolate Vietnam. But aid deliveries from the socialist-bloc did not slow appreciably, and the guerrilla offensive of 1972, judged by Kolko “a monumental triumph militarily and politically” (428), cut short the time needed to make Vietnamization work.

Departing from the emphasis found in earlier “revisionist” studies of US foreign policy, Kolko focuses less on the economic and strategic considerations that dictated intervention than on the state of mind among Washington policy makers forced to deal with the frustration of their ambitions. The hubris that undid “the best and the brightest” was not a personal quirk or a mistake, but the expression of an ideological world-view that was incapable of self-correction. Some of the most grotesque pages in Anatomy of a War depict the bellicosity and impotency of Nixon and Kissinger, who continued to tell themselves they were winning even while authoring the steps that made defeat inevitable. Attempting to persuade the Vietnamese that he was a “madman” who would stop at nothing to defeat Communism (343), Nixon evinced a gradiosity of increasingly maniacal proportions. His efforts to appear insane were all too successful!

A Peasant Revolution

Comprehensive to a degree not matched in the literature, Anatomy of a War falls short of being a “total history.” Seeing what he is able to establish with a three-cornered analysis, I could not help wishing (while granting, of course, that the book is already long enough!) that the roles of other actors had been explored with a similar thoroughness. For example, the thoughts and maneuvers of Soviet and Chinese leaders are dealt with only episodically, and the same might be said of the US domestic front. Kolko remarks that “an inchoate, prepolitical hostility toward the system largely along class lines” (172) gave pause in Washington and that the antiwar movement, pictured as an elite university phenomenon, caused a certain amount of “pandemonium” (174), but his development of these themes is cursory. He makes no attempt to analyze the balance of forces confronting US citizens who opposed the War.

The Party-peasant connection, which is at the heart of the Vietnamese Revolution, deserves a somewhat more extended comment. From the beginning, Kolko’s reading, according to which “the Communist Party is also the ‘Revolution’” (xiii), tilts his project toward the former. In certain passages, mass “spontaneity” is juxtaposed to Party “consciousness” (for example, 29), so that the peasantry appears more an instinctual force than as an aggregate of people with their own political thoughts and preferences. Unexamined assumptions within the Party, to the effect that peasants are naturally “individualist” (67) or “addicted to old beliefs and customs” (273) or impelled “to become relatively inefficient owners” (68) are noted without any critical commentary.

Anatomy of a War does insist on the seeming paradox arising out of “the Revolution’s” attitude toward its most steadfast constituency. “To lead people, the party now [in 1959] had no option but to follow their desires” (103),

Kolko affirms, in a characteristic passage. He is categorical and persuasive in declaring that "the Party's power was based on its ability to play the passive as well as the active role" in society, and his insistence on the "complex and difficult" relations between leaders and masses is satisfyingly unsentimental (248). Still, the text does not affirm with as much emphasis as I would prefer that Vietnamese Communism took form in a country with a long history of agrarian militancy and that "the Revolution" was embodied in rural communities as well as Party organization.

Kolko's account helps bring out what is at stake here, particularly with reference to the Mekong Delta. In that area, the fault line was not between Party and peasantry, but between the regional movement and its chosen communist leadership on the one hand and DRV officials on the other. Delta villagers, Kolko suggests, "were, if anything, more militant than those in the north" (92), a trait reflected in the fact that local cadres tended to be "radicals and leftists on most policy questions" (100), such as land reform and the use of violence against unpopular RVN officials. During the 1930s, Party leaders in the area "often mobilized greater mass support" than their northern counterparts (97), but losses suffered as a result of the Nam Ky insurrection of 1940 and French and British repression in 1946 weakened the movement. Land reform in 1952 reawakened the Delta's social radicalism, and, as fighting elsewhere diverted France, the revolutionaries were able to reemerge. Diem and the US clamped down after 1954, but by forcing Hanoi to sanction armed revolt five years later, southern activists placed themselves in the front ranks of the Revolution, a position they held, in spite of "pacification," to 1968. The combined costs imposed by Tet and the Phoenix Program shook the NLF (the 1969 desertion rate was unprecedented in the Front's history), but signs of resurgence were evident by 1971. At the end of 1974, guerrilla organization was "not far below the 1968 level" (480), and local forces played "a primary role of immense strategic value" during the victorious offensive of the following spring (536).

Having weathered three traumatic interruptions (1940-52, 1954-59, 1968-71), these activists deserve Kolko's commendation for having "behaved as much like revolutionary idealists and heroes as any people have ever been known to do" (247). But Anatomy of a War is no more successful than other recent attempts at accounting for such tenacity. Nothing is explained and perhaps their achievement is even diminished by reference to the "uncontrollable energy" of "the southern Party and masses" (106). "The accumulated residues of the Party's work in the villages over thirty years began to bear fruit," Kolko suggests, with reference to the situation in 1974. "To claim that it had planted a deep radical culture, at least among the poorer peasantry, would not be excessive" (480). But this organic image of "fruit" and "roots," evident in other passages as well, is a metaphor rather than an analysis. Kolko is not a social historian, and his account leaves unclear why the Party found the Delta such fertile terrain. Brilliantly charting the course of the Vietnamese Revolution, he does not succeed in dispelling all of its mysteries.

Appendix: Other Recent Writing on Vietnam
The PBS 13-part documentary series on the Vietnam War produced two books. Intensively promoted and widely praised, Stanley Karnow, Vietnam, A History: The First Complete Account of Vietnam at War (New York, 1983) offers a narrative that ranges from the cliched to the shoddy. See, for example, his treatment of the land reform in the DRV. No reform was necessary, Karnow suggests (the very idea was "insane"), but, "motivated by ideology," Party zealots set out to "liquidate" those they arbitrarily classified as landlords (225). Not surprisingly, the bibliography makes no mention of Gareth Porter, Edwin Moise, or Christine White, whose authoritative work on land reform is more sympathetic to the DRV. Examples of a similar clumsiness (or bad faith) could easily be multiplied. Karnow occasionally cites PBS interviews conducted with the Vietnamese, but for the most part he bogs down in Washington gossip (the book's misleading title is among its more annoying impostures). Surprisingly, given that we are dealing with an important cultural commodity, the text is numbingly dull. David Halberstam has already covered this ground much more wittily and with the venom it deserves in The Best and the Brightest (New York, 1969).

More modest in tone, little noticed by the general public, but superior in scholarship, is Steven Cohen, ed., Vietnam: Anthology and Guide to a Television History (New York, 1983), a paperback intended for classroom use in conjunction with the PBS documentary. With its carefully constructed historical sum-
maries, document selections, annotated bibliographies, glossaries of names and terms, charts and photographs, it can be read independently as an introduction to the War.

George Herring, America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975 (New York, 1986; first edition, 1979) is a widely available paperback that provides a clear introduction to US decision making in Vietnam. Because it sometimes precludes the necessary probing into motives and tactics of policy makers, Herring's "objective" approach can, in seeking balance, create a real confusion. Still, the disdain towards Washington myopia that Herring shares with Kolk comes through ("Kennedy refused, even after the problems with Diem had reached the crisis point, to face the hard questions") (107). And deceit in high places does not escape notice ("McNamara and his military advisers did not knowingly lie about the alleged attacks [in the Tonkin Gulf], but they were obviously in a mood to retaliate and they seem to have selected from the evidence available to them those parts that confirmed what they wanted to believe") (121).

Conceived on a larger scale, argued with lucidity and an insistent moral concern, and benefitting from an extraordinarily tenacious use of Freedom of Information procedures (employed to extract some 10,000 documents!), George McT. Kahin, Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam (New York, 1986; not yet in paperback) also concentrates on Washington. Kahin argues that President Johnson was more dubious about intervention than any of his advisers, with the exception of George Ball, whose arguments against escalation are reviewed in detail. Intervention emphasizes patriotic more than revolutionary aspects of the NLF (there is little here on land reform) and prominently features Buddhist campaigns against the Saigon Regime. The book ends with dispersal of this opposition in 1966. Kahin offers a number of memorable contributions. See, for example, his devastating analysis of big-power politics in 1954, showing that China, though nominally allied with the DRV, adopted at the Geneva Conference a position that was closer than either England or France to the US view.

William Turley, The Second Indochina War: A Short Political and Military History, 1954-1975 (Boulder, 1986) is comparable to the Herring volume in length, and the impending paperback edition will also be well suited for classroom use and for the general public. Less detailed than Herring on the US side, it benefits from a respectful and detailed reading of Vietnamese sources and is refreshingly attentive to the military aspect that tends to get neglected in other accounts of the War.

With respect to the Communist Party of Vietnam, Turley is the editor of an outstanding collection of articles, under the title Vietnamese Communism in Comparative Perspective (Boulder, 1980), which, unfortunately, is available only in an expensive hardback edition. More accessible and a good introduc-

tion (though it stops short of more recent events) is Huynh Kim Khanh, Vietnamese Communism, 1925-1945 (Ithaca, 1982; in paperback).

The role of Vietnamese peasants in "the Revolution" attracted much attention in the 1970s: Jeffery Paige, Agrarian Revolution: Social Movements and Export Agriculture in the Underdeveloped World (New York, 1975); James Scott, The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia (New Haven, 1976); and Samuel Popkin, The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam (Berkeley, 1979). At first glance, this confrontation of competing views seemed to offer much promise, with Paige offering what the uncharitable might call a "vulgar Marxist" reading, Scott writing more in the spirit of the "New Left" (though he only partially takes advantage of the social history that has been inspired by E.P. Thompson's analysis of the "moral economy of the crowd"), and Popkin weighing in with a liberal attempt to interpret the peasants as possessive individualists. Ensuing exchanges tended to heighten schematic aspects of the positions that were never particularly nuanced, and the inconclusive debate has recently tended to run out of steam (though all three of these texts remain available in paperback).

My own favorite starting point, though it is more of a poetic sketch than a sustained analysis, is found in Eric Wolf, Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century (New York, 1969). By far the most knowledgeable commentator in the filed is Ngo Vinh Long, but his major book, Before the Revolution: The Vietnamese Peasants Under the French (Cambridge, Mass., 1973), is out of print. For a recent statement, see Ngo Vinh Long, "Problems of Rural Transformation in Southern Vietnam," Indochina Newsletter, 37 (1986). Long's imprint is evident in some of Kolk's strongest passages concerning the peasant contribution.

David Hunt teaches history at UMass/Boston and has written articles on the Vietnamese and French Revolutions. He is also Co-Director of the William Joiner Center for the Study of War and Social Consequences at UMB. The Center provides support for veterans seeking a college education and encourages teaching and scholarship on the Vietnam War.
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Radical activists in the United States have long had difficulty determining how to respond to the American electoral system. While liberals and conservatives place winning elections at the center of their political strategy, those fundamentally opposed to the social ‘order’ must be more concerned with grassroots strategy. The ground-up approach contrasts starkly with the power-broker model that dominates present political theory and practice. Indeed, the passive and hierarchical nature of most electoral politics has sometimes led the Left in the United States to dismiss this political activity altogether.

Unfortunately, abstention from the voting process is a luxury that we cannot afford. Every few years, elections confront us with key political choices. In responding to these pressures, positive opportunities also arise. Activist groups are in a position to link up demands and use the electoral arena to attract more people to a participatory radical politics. For these reasons, nearly all American leftists eventually participate in the mainstream voting arena. Long-term abstentionism from elections is not a viable political strategy.

At the moment, this process is more likely to take place on a local level—witness the Mel King rainbow campaign in Boston—but electoral activity can sometimes unify and strengthen national activist work as well. The most inspiring recent example of this process has been the emergence of the Green Party in West Germany. In this country, Jesse Jackson’s presidential campaign sometimes exhibited the potential ability to inspire and unify a radical opposition.

This conclusion allows us to confront a fundamental problem in U.S. politics. No political party presently exists in this country that can represent and argue for an anti-racist, democratic socialist-feminist politics.

So how do we begin to construct such a politics within the American electoral arena? Can we ally with dissident black, feminist and labor elements within the two-party system to construct an alternative party from within? Or is it necessary to begin this process by constructing alternatives or ‘third’ political vehicles?

It is this key issue that Eric Chester’s important new book, Socialists and the Ballot Box, addresses. Because of Chester’s clear third party or independent political action perspective, this work is bound to be controversial. It represents a clear challenge to those leftists who have, at one time or another, participated in Democratic Party politics. Chester argues that such activity represents an important step towards the abandonment of radical politics. Socialists and the Ballot Box maintains that even a short-term, tactical participation in the Democratic Party weakens commitments to grassroots politics and can render activists irrelevant when future mass protest politics emerges.

Chester develops this argument in two ways. In the first section of the book, he briefly reviews the perspectives of Marx and Engels on independent political action. The position of founders of Marxist politics are clear: they consistently opposed political participation in liberal, pro-capitalist organizations. This historical summary is of interest, although I doubt that readers will be convinced by it. Marx and Engels were clearly operating in a very different historical environment, one moreover that was removed from the unique practices of bourgeois politics that were emerging in the United States. Rather, the strength of Chester’s book lies in his historical analysis of U.S. electoral politics in the last fifty years.

Chester examines in turn the electoral perspectives of the Communist Party and the Schactmanite wing of American Trotskyism. This last concern will appear obscure to most readers, but the importance of this organization’s contributions to U.S. politics can easily be underestimated. Major senior leaders of Democratic Socialists of America (Michael Harrington and Irving Howe) were brought up in this tradition, and key Workers Party activists (the
A comradely kiss is exchanged in 1920 between Eugene Debs and Seymour Stedman, Socialist candidates for President and Vice-President. The bars in the background are those of the federal penitentiary in Atlanta where Debs was serving a ten year sentence for wartime sedition. The only man ever to run for President from a prison cell, Debs received nearly a million votes.
organizational vehicle of this tendency during the 1940s) still play a major advisory role in the AFL-CIO.

With respect to the Communist Party, Chester raises a series of important historical arguments. As he notes, the Communist Party adopted the traditional Marxist perspective on electoral politics until 1936. After the beginning of 1936, the Communist Party leadership rapidly began to shift towards support of the Roosevelt wing of the Democratic Party, (although there was a concern not to harm Roosevelt’s election chances by announcing Communist support for his second term). With the election out of the way, the Party entered into a decade-long politics of collaboration with Democratic Party liberals. Only the Hitler-Stalin pact provided a brief respite from this entrist political practice.

Many contemporary radicals view the Popular Front experiment favorably. The CP grew impressively over this period; CIO trade unionism advanced; and the Roosevelt government appeared to be committed to the implementation of more progressive social programs. Indeed, those who today support working within the Democratic Party seem to have in mind recreating the Roosevelt era coalition, although now women and black organizations would have to be added to the old Farmer-Labor alliance.

Chester takes issue with this sympathetic interpretation in two ways. First, he argues that the popularity of the Communist Party did not rest on its electoral perspective, but rather its association with the Soviet Union. At the time, many leftists were inspired by the alternative vision of workers’ power and full employment rationality that the USSR seemed to offer. Until the Hitler-Stalin pact, Communist Party membership grew steadily throughout the decade no matter what the internal political perspective of the CP was. Indeed, the most rapid rate of growth occurred during the most sectarian phase of the Communist Party’s history, the period of dual-unionism and ‘social fascist’ analysis of the early 1930s.

I am not as convinced by these numbers as Chester is. Despite the early rapid growth, it may be that the more respectable, Popular Front perspective did help the C.P. become the large political formation that it was in the late 1930s. Nevertheless, this argument is not his main concern. Instead, Chester wants to stress that the Popular Front represented a turn away from grassroots activism. In a long section on the Communist Party and the United Auto Workers, Chester documents the C.P. leadership’s concern to prevent factory-floor cadre from challenging bureaucratic grievance procedures through wildcat strikes. This pre-war history mirrors the story that Nelson Lichtenstein tells in Labor’s War at Home. The attempt to ally with liberal elements of the Democratic Party instilled a political moderation in the radical leadership.

If anything, Chester’s analysis of the Workers Party and its successor organization of the 1950s, the Independent Socialist League, is even more telling. During the War years, the Workers Party was one of the few organizations that consistently eschewed collaboration with the Roosevelt administration and
argued instead for the formation of a Labor Party. This perspective, however, was based on an apocalyptic economic analysis which suggested that economic collapse would permit the relatively quick formation of a revolutionary party. The connection of this process to the construction of a reformist Social Democratic organization was never made clear. Moreover, the Workers Party leaders explicitly based their independent political action model on the hierarchy-ridden British Labor Party. Political behavior would be controlled by trade union officials, thus preventing the entry of ‘petty bourgeois’ elements into the party.

When the economy did not collapse, Max Schachtman, the Workers Party and ISL’s major figure, began to ally with the Reuther-wing of the United Auto Workers. By the late 1950s, all radical, independent political action perspectives were abandoned, and starting in 1964, this wing of socialist politics began to back Democratic candidates consistently, ranging from Lyndon Johnson in 1964 to Walter Mondale in 1984. Indeed, the only candidate that was not consistently endorsed was George McGovern. (This controversy led to a split in the Socialist Party and the formation of the precursor of DSA, the moderately anti-war Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee, as well as the creation of the pro-imperialist Social Democrats USA).

What are the connections between electoral politics and this lamentable history? Chester argues that working within the Democratic Party, if it is to be serious, requires the forging of alliance with liberal power brokers. This, in turn, leads to a distancing of the activist from his or her social base. Protests of the oppressed are seen as nuisances, and a politics emerges which is as concerned with the forging of hierarchical alliances as it is with building democratic political structures. Thus, the Communist Party, during a key point in the formation of the CIO, actively worked to restrain rank and file strike activity. Thus, the center and right wings of the Schachtmanite tradition adopted electoralism so

Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party supporters sit down on the boardwalk outside the Democratic National Convention, Atlantic City, 1964.
completely that most denounced disruptive anti-war protest as "coercive" and "undemocratic."

Chester makes a compelling case against participation in the Democratic Party. His perspective, however, also requires an argument in favor of the viability of Third Party activism. The political arguments in favor of an independent political strategy are persuasive. If, however, there are insurmountable structural barriers to the creation of a Third Party, then perhaps we should support the occasional anomalous campaigns within the Democratic Party while working for social reform on the outside. This dual strategy probably represents the perspective of most US radicals. Chester argues that the premise of this position is wrong. The character of the US electoral system does not doom the Third Party strategy. He notes the rise of third parties in other countries that elect their officials through a plurality, winner-take-all electoral system. In addition, effective Third Party political challenges still regularly arise in the US on the local and regional levels. These examples suggest that the barriers to Third Party activism result from left-wing demoralization—the tendency to adopt a liberal politics that accepts the basic structures of US capitalism as insurmountable.

The political implications of this work are controversial. Chester would argue against participation in such hybrid creations as the national Rainbow Coalition. If such a movement can be built in such a hierarchy-ridden, pro-capitalist organization as the Democratic Party, the political energy would be better spent creating a smaller, but more democratic and politically coherent Third Party. This book also critiques the traditional Leninist approach to electoral politics. It is clear from Chester’s two historical examples that a commitment to a grassroots-based Third Party conflicts with the Leninist goal of building a democratic centralist revolutionary party. Socialists and the Ballot Box is an appeal to independent activists to take seriously the need to construct a radical Third Party in the United States.

Most of us would welcome the creation of a viable Third party. A limited, but effective, presence in the electoral arena could greatly assist the development of more broadly-based protest action. Chester firmly maintains that the construction of such a politics is possible. As such, Socialists and the Ballot Box is an important challenge.

John Willoughby

John Willoughby is an Associate Professor of Economics at American University, and is a member of the Green Party of New Haven, Connecticut. He is also an activist in the Union for Radical Political Economics.

During the “British Invasion” of 1964, groups like the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Animals, and the Who not only came to dominate US popular music with seemingly fresh sounds and styles from abroad, they also performed a valuable, if contradictory, historical service for their American listeners. Drawing upon musical influences like the blues, country and western, rock ’n’ roll, and especially rhythm and blues, they turned young people in this country on to rich musical traditions which had developed under their very ears and had gone largely unheard. In *Urban Rhythms: Pop Music and Popular Culture*, Iain Chambers performs an analogous service in the literature of popular music.

Chambers writes historically about the intersection of British and American popular culture from the perspective of the British experience. Given the British fascination with American popular culture generally—and black culture in particular—what he feeds back to us, like the music of the sixties invaders, is often a more compelling view of our own history than we ourselves had access to. How different might our cultural sense have been if we had gotten to see John Lee Hooker on American Bandstand the way British kids did on Ready, Steady, Go!? How might our musical tastes have been altered if we had known that the Rolling Stones’ first top 10 hit, “Time Is On My Side,” had been previously recorded by Irma Thomas in Louisiana? Perhaps even more important than the critical distance provided by the British perspective, Chambers has
taken what could have been just another chronological accounting of the vagaries of popular music and delivered an analysis with new aesthetic insights, hitherto unmade connections, and some of the most sensitive writing I have seen on the issues of race and gender.

Chambers clearly locates the roots of British pop, at least from the Beatles onward, in the history of black American music. While he acknowledges the contributions of other cultural elements in a way that preserves their integrity, he retains a sense of proportion that gives credit where credit is due. Distinguishing between the musical influences of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, for example, he notes that the “musical humus” of the Beatles produced a “significant tension between two musical worlds.” Drawing on the sounds of early rhythm and blues, Motown, and the “girl groups,” they explored the “vertical interiors of the song: varying the tone pitch pulse and rhythm,” in the European tradition they concentrated on “linear musical development: a recognisable tune, an attractive melody.” (p. 64) He sees the Stones, by contrast, as appropriating black styles more deeply and more directly in a bid for the crown of an authentic, white-played rhythm and blues.

Ironically, while the Beatles and the Stones and countless other British groups openly acknowledged the debt they owed to black music and actually contributed heavily to a blues revival in this country, one of the effects of their popularity was the increasing marginalization of contemporary black music. The British invasion eventually merged with countercultural currents in the US to yield the umbrella category “progressive rock.” With its claims to “authenticity” and “art” (as opposed to commercialism), progressive rock soon came to dominate critical attention while contemporary black artists—the direct descendants of progressive rock’s formative influences—came to be seen as hopelessly mired in commercial formulas.

The “excess” involved in the Stones’ “musical appropriation,” Chambers continues, also had the effect “of reducing the ironic cast of the blues to a blatant obsession with male sexuality.” (p. 67) At one extreme, the aggressiveness of the Stones may have found its logical extention in the “cock rock” of many heavy metal groups, but the sexual ambiguity of the androgynous Mick Jagger seemed to carry a different message. As later played out in the “chameleon figure of David Bowie,” Chambers sees “the possibility of loosening the sexed male subject from previous, more predictable, moorings.” (p. 113)

In the face of racist commercial imperatives, Chambers views the persistence of soul music, and its
"legitimate offspring" disco, as a testament to the strength of Afro-American music. He is critical of reductive accounts of "monotonous musical output," arguing that even "disco's apparently hypnotic aural simplicity" was the result of "a lengthy distillation, a complex junction of several musical routes." (p. 187) Punk burst on the scene in the mid-1970s, providing an unsuspecting London with a new "folk" devil and diverting critical attention in the US away from the ascending disco culture. In addition to a thoroughgoing analysis of punk's signs, sounds, and styles, Chambers takes the occasion to make connections between music which were widely regarded as polar opposites. He notes, for example, that both punk and disco focused attention back toward "the body: that 'forbidden' zone that tends to be linked with black music." (p. 178)

Similarly, he considers the sexual politics of punk. While he concedes that punk presented itself in "masculine outlines," he cites the emergence of artists like Siouxsie Sue, Poly Styrene, and the Slits as evidence that "a new space for women as active protagonists within the production of the music appeared." (p. 179)

There are places where Chambers presupposes a more intimate knowledge of the British experience than the average US reader is likely to have. But these forays into "Britishness" are important signposts for they remind the reader that the British experience is not the US experience. In America, for example, the arrival of the Beatles was heralded as a revolution in music; in Britain they were immediately absorbed into the category of "family entertainment." In Britain class distinctions are more apparent, subcultures are more clearly delimited, and subcultural styles are often more reflective of working class sensibilities than is the case in the US. A given music or a particular artist is likely to play a different cultural and political role there than here. The Mods, Chambers tells us, were not Beatles fans.

If I have any theoretical disagreements with Chambers, they have to do with his emphasis on the consumption of popular music to the exclusion of its production. Chambers himself acknowledges that "recorded music...links together a massive record industry and its subsidiaries, to various musical choices and cultural uses," but he goes on to argue that, "after the commercial power of the record companies has been recognized, after the persuasive siren's of radio acknowledged, after the recommendations of the musical press noted, it is finally those who buy the records, dance to the rhythms and live to the beat who demonstrate, despite the determined conditions of its production, the wider potential of pop." (p. xii). To the extent that the production prerogatives of the recording industry play a role in determining what gets consumed, the failure to account more thoroughly for the social relations of production, even in a study of consumption, is a serious omission. Beyond that observation, I do not wish to fall into the trap of criticizing Chambers' work for not being something it was not intended to be in the first place. He has given us a remarkable study of the aesthetics of popular music and the process by which listeners confer meaning on their own lives, and as such, Urban Rhythms is unsurpassed in the literature of popular music.

Rebee Garofalo

Rebee Garofalo teaches at UMass/Boston and writes about popular music.

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