Richard Kidd

TO CHANGE THE WORLD, we need a movement. This movement must be made up of millions of people and thousands of organizations. These organizations must build and push the movement forward. How do we get to this point? We have to start with leadership.

As a union organizer, I train workers to lead their shop floor and industry wide struggles. In the case of my union, we call the leaders in the shops "committee members." These folks organize for fights with bosses, deal with issues on the shop floor, and negotiate contracts.

Every June for the last five years there has been a major citywide rally on behalf of all of the members of my union. For my part, I was responsible for organizing workers at one of the major food service companies in Chicago. All the workers of this company are part of the union. For the big citywide action on Michigan Avenue in 2007, only 12 out of 650 workers showed up. Not even half of the com-

The union committee did the day-to-day work of running the union. There were no qualifications for membership in the committee. Everyone who wanted to be on the committee was welcome; no one was ever turned away. If you joined the committee, you were not given any clear expectations. The committee was comprised of twentyfive volunteers who were neither the most respected nor trusted workers in the shop. And they were the ones expected to move the union forward?! The organization of the union was catch as catch can. It was a weak union, and that's definitely not what we needed

Twenty-five individuals that did not have the ability to mobilize their co-workers, did not have any responsibility, and did not have the skills or the knowledge to win issues on the shop floor, produced a weak union.

One year later, the same march takes place, and workers from the same shop come out to Michigan Avenue. This time, 155 workers came

This was made possible by a strong and fighting union. This union has a committee that pushes co-workers to fight; a committee that both carries out the daily functions of the union and believes in a long-term class-based political program; a committee with members trained to become better leaders, who can target and recruit new committee people. The union needed committee members who would constantly challenge each other to be stronger and better organizers. In other words, *leadership* was needed.

We can build a successful movement by developing leadership skills and leaders who can be held accountable. The worker-led organizing committee shrunk to twenty, with some workers from the first committee, and some were new members. The philosophy and expectations of the committee members changed. Committee members

agreed to a minimum set of requirements: they had to have the respect of the group, and the desire to lead their co-workers. Each committee member agreed to take responsibility for organizing a group, to attend meetings, to recruit more leaders, to get training, and to do the work of building a movement. Those that did not agree and those that did not live up to the responsibility got off the committee. The committee was changing from a hodgepodge group of volunteers to a body ready for leadership.

I recently sat on a panel at the "Platypus Readers and Writers Forum." The discussion was supposed to focus on how the Platypus Review could become a better newspaper. But, the panelists and the audience were interest in having a different conversation. The forum moved in the direction of the age-old debate between "theory" and "practice," or between "thought" and "action." After three hours we all agreed that both were necessary in a radical movement for social change.

Everyone on the left has heard and said it before. We are all wrong. The problem today is not about theory, the "right line," or militant action. The problem is one of leadership. The question should be: how do we get more people to accept our theories and to take part in our actions, so we can build enough momentum to be able to actually accomplish the goals of our movement?

It is impossible to build real organization, to direct our actions, thoughts, and goals into a single vision, in a Left when "leader" and "leadership" are treated as dirty words. Those in leadership roles (official or unofficial) even in large organizations—are treated with disdain, disgust, even as enemies

On the Left today, the concept of leadership is synonymous with authoritarianism, dictatorship, oppression, and control. This antipathy towards leadership has stalled our efforts: we waste time working to limit the power of our own organizations, instead of figuring out how to use the power of our organizations against the current system. As a result, constant infighting and petty personality disputes destroy our ability to achieve our actual goals.

This negative vision of leadership has produced broad acceptance of "diversity of tactics," "anti-authoritarianism," "consensus decision making." These and a host of other leftist ideas were a rejection of the centralized leadership and bureaucratic structures of the left before

Students for a Democratic Society, founded with exactly these concepts in mind, once had 100,000 members nationwide. In 1969, it gave way to the Weatherman Faction, which in turn became the Weather Underground. The potential for a strong organization was lost; the radicals that could have led SDS ended as a few dozen people iso-



lated from any broader movement. This story has become far too common throughout the history of the left.

Today, the movement has no structure and no power. Because of the ever-shrinking and splintered organizations, it's impossible to think beyond our own small circle of friends or "affinity groups." Some Chicagoans who participated in the 2008 Republican National Convention reported that during the planning for blocking traffic, certain affinity groups couldn't even commit to the rest of the organization to hold certain intersections, in case they "felt like going somewhere else." This has become the norm, the views of every small group is of equal importance, and every person within that group is allowed to opt in or out at anytime

Activists no longer view their roles as leaders of a movement, nor consider themselves responsible to organizations. Individuals are not expected to, nor desire to, recruit others into organizations or activities. Recruitment and training are not priorities. Discipline and planning are limited to one-off actions, not long-term organizational plans. Individualism has run amok, and the outcome is libertinism, not political power for the masses of humanity.

This sentiment is not just anti-leadership, it is anti-organization, and ultimately it is anti-power. This is not due to a political theory, either; it is merely the product of our own internal fear. In the face of constant defeat, the vast majority of the left, regardless of label, has adopted this

anti-power ideology. We have complacently accepted our own situation, resigned ourselves to symbolic protest and resistance, and accepted our minority status. We are being held back by our own fear of being right, of being wrong, of winning, of losing, of anything. We are afraid of looking over the edge, seeing the abyss before us, and having to leap. We are more afraid still of leading others off that cliff into creating a new world. We are terrified of the responsibilities and burdens of that leadership.

This must change. We must learn to be leaders.

This is not the leadership of unaccountable government leaders, top-down and based on patronage or the power of the law. Nor is it the self-appointed ideological leadership of communist parties. The position of leaders in a real emancipatory movement must come solely from one factor: the ability of the leaders to lead those involved in the organization into a struggle for liberation and power. Taking responsibility and leadership is the ultimate act of believing in your politics. It is the ultimate act of believing in yourself. You must create the new or it will never come. And we are more afraid of the new than what we know.

### Timothy's Path to Leadership

I will never forget meeting Timothy, one of the first members of the new committee in my union. He was on the prior committee and had worked there for seven years. Like so many of us, Timothy felt his life was out of his

"Leadership" continues on page 4

The Platypus Review STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Taking stock of the multifaceted universe of positions and goals that constitute Left politics today, we are left with the disquieting suspicion that perhaps a deeper commonality underlies this apparent variety: what exists today is built on the desiccated remains of what was once felt to be possible

In order to make sense of the present, we find it necessary to disentangle the vast accumulation of positions on the Left, and to evaluate their saliency for an emancipatory politics of the present. Doing this work implies a reconsideration of what we mean by "the Left"

This task necessarily begins from what we see as a prevalent feature of the Left today: a general disenchantment with the present state of progressive politics. We feel that this disenchantment cannot be cast off by sheer will, by "carrying on the fight," but must be addressed and itself made an object of critique. Thus we begin with what immediately confronts us.

The editorial board of *The Platypus Review* is motivated by a sense that the very concepts of the "political" and the "Left" have become so inclusive as to be meaningless. The Review seeks to be a forum among a variety of tendencies and approaches to these categories of thought and action—not out of a concern with inclusion for its own sake, but rather to provoke productive disagreement and to open shared goals as sites of contestation. In this way, the recriminations and accusations arising from political disputes of the past might be elevated to an ongoing critique that seeks to clarify its object

The editorial board wishes to provide an ongoing public forum wherein questioning and reconsidering one's own convictions is not seen as a weakness, but as part of the necessary work of building a revolutionary politics. We hope to create and sustain a space for interrogating and clarifying the variety of positions and orientations currently represented on the political Left, in which questions may be raised and discussions pursued that do not find a place within existing Left discourses, locally or Internationally. As long as submissions exhibit a genuine commitment to this project, all kinds of content will be considered for publication.

Submission guidelines

Articles can range in length from 750-1,200 words. We will consider longer pieces but prefer that they be submitted

Please send article submissions and any inquiries about this project to: platypus1917webzine@yahoogroups.com

Staff Senior Editor lan Morrison

Editors: Greg Gabrellas Pamela Nogales Laurie Rojas Soren Whited

Designer: Laurie Rojas

> Copy Editors: Jeremy Cohan

Webzine Editor:

The Platypus Review is funded by: The University of Chicago Student Government School of the Art Institute of Chicago Student Government

The Platypus Affiliated Society

# The Platypus Review

Issue #9 | December 2008

1 Obama and Clinton "Third Way" politics and the "Left" Chris Cutrone

2 The necessity of leadership Richard Kidd

2 History's forgotten dreams and nightmares Jeff Koons at Versailles Laurie Rojas

3 Living Marxism James Hartfield

4 Red-baiting and ideology: the new SDS EXCHANGE: Richard Rubin and Laurie Rojas

www.platypus1917.org/theplatypusreview

## History's forgotten dreams and nightmares

Jeff Koons at Versailles

LET'S BEGIN WITH PETER SCHJELDAHL in the June issue of the New Yorker: "There is something nightmarish

In a recent exhibition at The Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago (MCA), Jeff Koons received a well-attended mid-career survey of his work. Surrounded by two-storyhigh white walls, the twenty-eight years of Koons's art surveyed in the exhibit didn't present anything to disturb our peaceful slumber. Even the rather lurid 1991 photograph of *Ilona's asshole*, does not give us much pause.

Across the Atlantic, however, Koons's work has caused a national controversy in France. Seventeen of his sculptures are currently installed at the Château de Versailles, the residence and political headquarters of the absolutist French monarchy for over a century. The playful juxtapositions of unquestionably post-modern works of art with King Louis XVI's rococo style rooms demand a historical consideration of — and controversy over — socio-political and artistic developments between the time of Louis XVI's reign at Versailles and that of Koons's work.

Some responses to the exhibition have met its seeming provocation with stiff opposition. Although the opulence of Koons's sculptures makes them seem well-suited for display in Versailles rooms, the exhibition outraged nationalist and conservative groups. After unsuccessful efforts to cancel the exhibition, over two-dozen members of the "National Union of Writers of France" showed up and protested at Versailles on opening day. The chairman of the group publicly declared the exhibition to be "truly sullying of the most sacred aspects of our heritage and identity," and "an outrage to Marie Antoinette." This kind of historical nostalgia — or better, amnesia — is representative of the Right's desire to entirely forget and deny the social transformations that proceeded from the French Revolution. For the Right, the ghost of the Revolution appears again, after so many attempts at an exorcism, with Koons leading the séance.

In Jeff Koons at Versailles, the sculptures are conspicuously selected for display in Les appartements du Roi (King's apartments) and Les appartements de la Reine (Queen's apartments). As the sepulcher of the French monarchy's works of art, Versailles, with its 2000 acres is one of the worlds most visited historic monuments (nearly 5 million visitors a year). With an emphasis on the history of the French Revolution, visitors are reminded by Versailles tour guides of what Versailles once was: the headquarters of a now outdated form of political life that dominated Europe for over five centuries. In Chicago, MCA visitors were more inclined to consider Koons's work for their contemporary relevance and vitality, as already

well-established within the canon of art. The exhibition at Versailles, however, is an invitation to contemplate correspondences between the history—of art and society— represented by the odd coupling of Versailles rooms A series of tongue-in-cheek gestures abound through-

out the installations: a marble self-portrait bust of Koons stands in the same room that houses baroque and rococo style statues, respectively, of Louis XIV and Louis XVI; a plexiglass encased display of vacuum cleaners accompanies the portraits of the royal women, and stands in front of a Marie Antoinette painting in the queens antechamber Michael Jackson and Bubbles (1988), a decorative rococolike sculpture with shades of white and gold, in the middle of the Venus Salon, accompanies dark marble walls and columns of the 1660s, busts of Roman Emperors, and a seven-foot tall painting of the Sun King.

When contemplating Balloon Dog (1999-2000), one can imagine it being modeled after a "Toys R Us" inflatable collectible enlarged to the size of a classical equestrian sculpture. This purple "Trojan horse," as Koons himself nicknamed it, provocatively sits in the Hercules Drawing Room, the same room that was used for receptions of the representatives of the Estates-General in 1789. Of course, the convening of the Estates-General in 1789 paved the way to the revolt of the Third Estate, and the revolutionary actions that put an end to the French Monarchy. What conclusions do visitors make when they see Koons's chromium stainless steel Balloon Dog in the Salon d'Hercules as their tour guide relays that fateful moment? Those representatives of the third Estate — can we imagine how



In the Queen's apartment, next to the bed last occupied by Marie Antoinette, and where the would-be inheritors of the throne were born, stands Koons's Large Vase of

Flowers (1991), a polychrome wood spring bouquet. The garish middle-class aesthetics of the flowers clashes with the flower-covered decor of the rooms. The oversized flowers, however, allow you to study the peculiarities of the sculpture's forms. When seen from up-close the flowers have grotesque details, genitals with STD-like lumps and ass-hole like shapes. An awkward, hyper-sentimental gesture for the queen who spent seven years without being able to consummate her marriage to Louis XVI.

In the same tradition of Duchamp and Warhol, Jeff Koons excels in being both an iconographic and an iconoclastic artist. Like Duchamp, Koons manages to remove—and transform—the function of ordinary objects. Like Warhol, he succeeds in producing objects-de-art out of the immense reservoir of cultural images. Duchamp, it has been said, wanted "to put art back in the service of the mind" in response to the predominance of "retinal" art of the turn of the 20th century. The work of Jeff Koons can be considered a synthesis of these two artistic tendencies, unraveling the relationship that "retinal" art—which seeks to cause visual pleasure—might have to art that seeks to nourish the brain.

Rabbit (1986), a stainless steel, all reflecting bunny, standing on a marble pedestal, located at Le Salon de l'Abondance for curiosities and rarities, becomes a different sculpture than when sitting within the white walls of the MCA. In an empty gallery space all that Rabbit reflects is the subject watching it. In the white-walled gallery, Koons's use of mundane, banal, or immediately recognizable —kitschy— cultural imagery is an "easy" mechanism used to reel in the viewing subject.

When Rabbit reflects a room in Versailles, contemplating it becomes more complex. For it forcefully introduces a third element, the historical. This kind of aesthetic experience triggers both a kind of personal and sociopolitical recognition. As Schiller argued in his *Letters on the* Aesthetic Education of Man, art ought to contain a physical quality that can directly relate to "our sensual condition," our reason, and our will. Only an aesthetic experience, argues Schiller, is able to cultivate the totality of our sensuous and intellectual abilities

Unlike Duchamp's or Warhol's work, Koons's work can be admired for its technical precision, and labor-intensive industrial characteristics; some of Koons's sculptures can take up to a decade to complete, which is comparable to the craftsmanship necessary to complete many of the permanent works in Versailles. As visitors exit the Queen's apartments, they encounter a 3,500 pound stainless steel magenta/gold "Hanging Heart" sold for a record-setting \$23.6 million in 2007. The high chromium stainless steel



surface of the 9-foot tall "Hanging Heart" is coated in more than ten layers of paint, and took over 6,000 man in memory of Marie Antoinette? Or was it taken trium-

hours to make. This mammoth heart-shaped pendant is the most ambivalent of all Koons's gestures. Is the heart phantly from her breast? Are we to mourn her death, or

All these juxtapositions seem to lead us back to one question: what is the significance of the French Revolution today? How do we understand Versailles, the Rights of Man, the elimination of the French Monarchy, the beheading of the King and Queen?

The Koons exhibit illustrates that our present is still haunted by the still-present spectre of the French Revolution in our lives. The ideals of the Enlightenment, now 200-300 years old, which so profoundly influenced the American and French Revolutions, are undoubtedly expressed in the work of Jacques Louis David, for example. In the same manner, Koons's work also represents a particular point of view regarding the historical trajectory of humanity. What is so nightmarish, then, about Koons's work (along with postmodern thought more generally), what

tion, including time and location.

-emroini anom for mor.Cl&lauqybalq.www fiziv weekly film screenings and coffee breaks. Please Platypus Boston, Chicago, and NYC also host

Mitchell then and now" (2000) Lynne Segal, "Psychoanalysis and Politics: Juliet of Lenin: an interview on the woman question" Clara Zetkin and V. I. Lenin, "My Recollections Mitchell, reply to Quintin Hoare (1967) revolution" (1967)

Quintin Hoare, "On Mitchell's 'Women: the longest

"Capitalism and Gay Identity" [1966] [revised version: Women's Estate [1971]] Juliet Mitchell, "Women: the Longest Revolution" January 18, 2009: Gender, sexuality and revolution

Spartacist League, "Soul Power or Workers Bayard Rustin, "The Blacks and the Unions" Bayard Rustin, "The Failure of Black Separatism"

Power: The Rise and Fall of the League of Revolu-

future of the civil rights movement" (1965) Bayard Rustin, "From Protest to Politics: the January 4, 2009: Civil Rights - Black Power

Harold Cruse, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual Adolph Reed, "Paths to Critical Theory" (1984) December 14, 2008: Civil Rights - Black Power for location contact: platypus1917@comcast.net

Paul Street (Author of Barack Obama and the Future of American Politics) Charles Post (Solidarity) Stephen Duncombe (editor of the Cultural Resistance Reader)

Marxist reading group: 1960s paths not taken

300 moor 100 Washington Square East Silver Center New York University

SAIC, U Chicago, NYU, MIT

Chris Cutrone (Platypus)

Saturday, December 6th 2008 The Future of the Left under Obama

Progress or Regress? New York Platypus Forum PLATYPUS EVENTS CALENDAR "Obama" continues on page 4

Kather than the illusions in Obama — either positive or tellectuals have a responsibility to help facilitate this struggle. responsibility, to struggle for socialism — and that Leftist inhas, at the levels of both individual-personal and collective A Marxian approach would argue that the working class kind or of the supposedly more radical lifestyle-choice variety. do — whether they be liberals of the moralizing "conservative" responsibility but would pose it very differently than liberals the capitalist nation-state. Nor would it disclaim personal nor would it invest collective responsibility in the form of neither devolve social responsibility onto individual persons to that of individual persons. A Marxian approach would of the governmental responsibility — of the capitalist state

An authentic Marxian Left would not oppose the politics - reformist, non-class struggle — workers movement. from the 1960s to the present has been the decimation of the for emancipatory politics. For the most significant change an entirely different and potentially more effective framework this (apparently) perennial struggle so as to be able to adopt W. Bush — or do we need instead to interrogate the terms of have occurred from Reagan through Bill Clinton to George ought to place our hopes in reversing policy changes that battles of the 1960s era are still pertinent — whether we

The question is whether the terms of such political

National Labor Relations Board) in the mid-20th Century. cies into which these groups were integrated (such as the of labor organizations and the state policies and agenproperly clarify the relation between the reformist politics and the paternalism of liberal reformism, they failed to between the roots of neoconservatism of Moynihan et al. others in the 1960s rightly pointed to the essential affinity Society expansions of the 1930s New Deal. While Reed and amelioration, and sought to disenchant the 1960s Great culture of poverty" pathology beyond the possibility of state national action," which infamously identified a supposed 1965 Moynihan Report, "The Negro Family: the case for to proceed as if the main enemy was the rhetoric of the Obama. But the question remains whether today we ought Of course Reed is right to criticize such rhetoric by

ills and "privatizes" them instead. disclaiming public (governmental) responsibility for social personal responsibility falls in with the neoliberal politics of mentary about black "dead-beat dads"), Obama's rhetoric of 'cut his nuts off" after Obama made a Fathers' Day com-Jackson, Sr., who in off-air comments expressed a desire to Americans. For Reed (as for Jeremiah Wright, and Jesse sonal responsibility" regarding the problems facing black the election, has excoriated Obama for his rhetoric of "pervariety of writings and statements in other media prior to To take one prominent example, Adolph Reed, in a

opposition of individual to collective freedom. ity, or between libertarian and authoritarian politics — the in this can be summarized by the divisions the "Left" acback the tide of neoliberal changes. The problems inherent trapped in an essentially conservative pose, trying to hold in the 1960s. Indeed, the "Left" since the 1960s has been and the subsequent failure to renew emancipatory politics phenomenon in and through the Popular Front of the 1930s Century, after the collapse of the Left into a conservative Left" and "Right" as they were established in the mid-20th has augured are askew of the mainstream conceptions of 20th Century, has not been met. The changes this politics crisis of the Keynesian-Fordist state in the latter part of the terms of both the Old and New Left, emerging from the The challenge "Third Way" politics has offered to the

tics repressed possibilities for social emancipation. epic, it contained and expressed, but rather how such poliof the mid-20th Century was not the struggles, however age of politics. What was most important about the politics allies that followed, collectively remade the world in its imduring WWII, despite the Cold War against the USSR and its Europe and with FDR's Democratic Party in the 1930s and social democracy in the Popular Front against fascism in The alliance of such "Marxism" with liberalism and

transformation of Marxism into a reformist ideology. the 1930s, the period of the Stalinization of Marxism — the zation of the working class as a social force with its roots in Right starting in the 1970s was facilitated by the demobili-"wen" is yd (.X.U eht in the Democratic Party (and Labour in the Democratic Party) present. The displacement of the reformism associated with the 1970s and has carried through the '80s and '90s to the lapse of such Keynesian-Fordist reformist politics began in of the socialist movement of the early 20th Century. The coldepoliticizing labor struggles and eviscerating the remnants involved tying the workers' movement to state policies, The "social democratic" politics of the mid-20th Century

in its defense as it had been previously in its attack. 1970s-80s. In this the post-'60s "Left" has been as mistaken 1960s, but then attempting to stave off its collapse in the attacking the authoritarian liberalism of JFK and LBJ in the responded to this conservatization ambivalently, however, ist "social-democratic" image after WWII. The "New" Left as the postcolonial "developing" states in a Keynesian-Fordreforms — and the remaking of Europe and Japan as well "Old" Left had jumped on the bandwagon of FDR's New Deal behind that, the reformism of the Left of the 1930s. The the problematic politics of the 1960s "New" Left, and Behind this lies a deeper confusion that informed

been progressive and not regressive in terms of social a "progressive" outcome — that Keynesian Fordism had neoliberal Right's efforts can be simply reversed with Keynesian-Fordist state, and so have thought that the they have never made proper sense of the crisis of the ever further; and the "Left" more despairingly because gogically drive their conservative-reactionary politics lution": the Right cynically because they wish to demacourse of the past generation, since the "Reagan Revotransformation of politics that has taken place over the Marxist"!). But both attacks neglect the fundamental Right attacks Obama for being a closet "socialist" (or Centrist or Right-wing, a neoliberal in blackface, the

While the "Left" attacks Obama for being too — What if the "Third Way" politicians were correct? deeper and more effective political transformation. the "radical Center" expressed the possibility of a this trend by traditional "social-democratic" politics, the Keynesian-Fordist state and the resistance against around the Reagan and Thatcher neoliberal assault on pared to the prior political polarizations that developed The idea of such "Third Way" politics is that, com-

ously found expression in Tony Blair's "New" Labour the triumph of "Third Way" politics that contemporaneelection in 1992. Clinton's election was seen as part of ship Council (DLC) expressed by Clinton and Gore's the "new" Democratic Party of the Democratic Leader-"Centrism," the trajectory he appears to continue from This critique of Obama, as of Clinton, denounces his common comparison made of Obama is to Bill Clinton.

FOR THE "LEFT" THAT IS CRITICAL of him, the most



"Third Way" politics and the "Left"

Obama and Clinton

"Koons" continues on page 4

Issue #9 / December 2008

## Living Marxism

James Hartfield

ONE OF THE STRANGER SIGHTS in today's banking crisis is the sudden popularity of Karl Marx. The Manifesto is flying off the shelves, and business execs are boning up on Marx's crisis theory in much the same way that they used to lap up Sun Tzu's Art of War, or parrot Heraclitus' saying that there is nothing permanent but change.

Today's economic dislocation, though, does not correspond to the crisis of overaccumulation that Marx explained in the third volume of his book Capital. Marx's analytical reconstruction of capitalism was made at a time of great forward momentum in industrialization, made under the discipline of what he called the 'capitalist mode

Abbreviating his argument, we could say that Marx anticipates that as capital accumulates, non-productive investment in 'dead labour' (technology, raw materials, plant and so on) tends to crowd out investment in 'living labour'. But 'living labour' is the only source of new value. When capitalists replace workers by machines they kill the goose that lays the golden egg. The consequence is a crisis of overaccumulation as the investment in capital leads to falling profit rates, which in turn results in a contraction of investment, and then a recession and the destruction of

Capital, Volume III was of interest to me and my comrades in Britain in the 1980s, since we (rightly, I think) saw the economic crisis that had begun in the 1970s as a crisis arising out of overaccumulation, along the lines that Marx had set out. All around us, capitalism was clearly in crisis. But Marx's explanation was such a threatening proposition that all intellectual work was dedicated to showing that on the contrary, capitalism was the only viable way of organizing production. Nowadays there is more of a tendency to exaggerate the crisis tendencies, and the collapse of capitalism is announced on a regular basis since the 1988 recession, or the 1998 difficulties in East Asia and Russia, the dot.com collapse in 2001, and so on.

People forget, though, that it was guite exceptional back in the 1970s and 1980s even for those who called themselves Marxists to insist on the rightness of Marx's theory of overaccumulation. In fact, the 'Marxists' for the most part used up a lot of time trying to show that Marx was wrong about overaccumulation, or even that he never said (or meant) what he wrote in the third volume of

The Labour Party identified with state spending to improve working people's lives —and their own status as brokers, delivering popular consent up to the capitalists— so they were more committed to capitalism's survival than its collapse. The Labour Party then was quite a propaganda machine: it pumped out scores of books and pamphlets setting out plans for restructuring capitalism on socialist lines, like the Alternative Economic Strategy. The 'official' Communists were committed to an alliance between the

trade unions and small business, against parasitic (often meaning foreign) capital. Their journal Marxism Today was so embarrassed by its title that they put a picture of Marx being pelted with tomatoes and rotten eggs on the front. The International Socialists had committed themselves

to the point that state spending (in particular, arms spending) would offset the dwindling of productive labour as a share of capitalist investment (see International Socialism 11, Winter 1981) - though any fool could see that state spending was a drain on profits, not a boost to them. Those who defended Marx's theory of overaccumulation were treated as dissidents. Marxist crisis theory in those days was about as easy to find as the local Al Qaida representative. There were a few people back then who did champion

Marx's theory. There was Paul Mattick, who came from Germany as a young acolyte of Rosa Luxemburg's to work among the anarchists and socialists in Chicago. His book Marx and Keynes, as his son recalls, was mostly ignored in 1969 when it was published. To read Henryk Grossman's Law of Accumulation and Breakdown of the Capitalist System, a restatement of Marx's theory of crisis in those days, you had to get a hold of a grubby document, run off on a Roneo printer, that Jairus Banaji had translated in the seventies. In 1992, Tony Kennedy tidied it up for publication by Pluto Press. I did some of the copyediting on that, back when we were both working on the journal Living Marxism. Anyway, you can imagine how a title called Living Marxism went down in 1992, just as 'Communism' was collapsing in the East. People were about as interested in overthrowing capitalism as they were in contracting AIDS.

So, you might think that I would be glad to hear that Marxism was making a comeback. But unfortunately, not only has what Marx had to teach us been largely misunderstood, but his own theory of overaccumulation, right as it was in his time, and even in the 1970s, is not a very good guide to understand what is happening today.

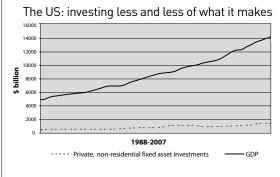
I have to smile a little to myself when I see all of the Trotskyist sects organizing meetings on the crisis. The one thing that they all seem to agree (just as they denied it when it was true) is that Marx has explained that the 'rising organic composition of capital' – the way that investment in dead labour crowds out investment in living labour means that the ratio of profit to total capital invested must fall (Marx's celebrated law of the Tendency of the Rate of Profit to Fall, or 'TRPF' to the mechanically minded).

The International Socialist's Chris Harman is a bit like the Ancient Mariner in Coleridge's poem: he is condemned to recount (badly) the theory of the overaccumulation of capital over and over again, as punishment for having insisted that it was not happening when it was. The only trouble is that he is telling us that it is happening, when it

Of course, it is true that companies are all posting

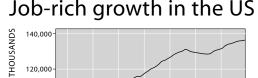
profit warnings. If we look at the returns on US business, they are lower than they were in the 1960s. But, in itself, a decline in profit margins does not prove that capital has overaccumulated.

Think about the problem. Marx saw profit falling not as an absolute sum, but as a ratio to the total capital investment. The rate of profit fell because the share of investment in surplus-generating labour ('variable capital') declined relative to non-surplus generating 'constant capital' (machinery, raw materials, plant). Is that what has been happening in the run up to today's banking crisis? No.



On the contrary: Investment in machinery is very low. What we saw in the period 1985-2005 was a prolonged period of extensive, not intensive growth. That is to say that far from putting more money into machinery and less into labour, the tendency was rather the other way around. That was a period of what the International Monetary Fund called 'job-rich growth'. Or to put it another way, growth was labour-intensive, not capital-intensive. Between 1996 and 2006, the world labour force grew by 421 million jobs, from just under 3.6 billion to just over 4 billion (Key Indicators of the Labour Movement, International Labour Organization).

'Job-rich growth' was a worldwide phenomenon. Between 1988 and 2008 US payroll employment grew from 104 million to 138 million, much more than the growth in the natural population. Europe saw similar growth. That expansion was met by immigration, and by the recruitment of previously-excluded women and minorities into the workforce. Then we were talking about full employment, not unemployment.



At the same time, investment in new technologies was, against most people's perception, very low (see Edgerton, The Shock of the Old, Oxford University Press, 2006). In Britain, amazingly, the average productivity of labour actually fell, as a larger proportion of the workforce moved over into more labour-intensive and less capital-intensive jobs, service sector jobs, with lower levels of technological investment: changing sheets in hotels, or flipping burgers rather than assembling cars.

As far as the culture, or perhaps the ideology, of the times goes, this retreat from industry is supported by all kinds of environmentalist, or 'small-is-beautiful' ideas, as well as ideas about a leisure society, that is redressing the 'work-life balance' in favour of human relations.

The East is a bit different. There, production has certainly expanded. That is good for capitalism —and in the long run it is good for working people in the West and in China, too. There is a lot of resentment in Europe and America about China's success, and some of that is dressed up in the bogus terms of concern for labour rights or for the environment. Such criticisms seize on details which, however justified, are really just used as excuses to rubbish China's growth, out of jealousy, not to put too fine

China's growth, and the growth in Vietnam, Malaysia and Korea that preceded it, has been very important not just because it put some vigour back into capitalism, filling Wal-Mart's shelves (their industrial capitalism supporting our consumer capitalism, so to speak), but also because it has enhanced all of our lives.

But what China's growth did **not** do was significantly to increase the productivity of industrial labour by displacing workers with machines, leading to overaccumulation. Even though many peasants did lose their livelihoods, for the most part the story of China's growth is of a further extension of capital accumulation across the east, by the creation of new points of production, recruiting a new labour force, not of an intensification of capitalism with industrialization forcing labour out. Indeed, the world's industrial workforce has massively expanded, as capital has spread out across the globe, incorporating those formerly under-invested regions of the world ruled by the Stalinists.

To understand the sea-change in capitalism that occurred around 1985-1995 you cannot look at 'objective' economic categories in isolation from the subjective factor. The condition for capitalism's extensive growth in the preceding period was the worldwide and historic defeat of the old, left wing-led, opposition. Both in the labour movement (and Socialist Parties) of the developed world, and in the Nationalist and Stalinist governments and movements of the Second and Third World, the left wing opposition to capitalism was definitively beaten.

There were lots of local factors in the defeat, the disintegration of Third World nationalism in the face of capital investment from the West, the failure of the Stalinist societies to meet the competition of the West either in arms or consumer goods, the trade unions' inability to defend their members interests, and the radical left's fatal hesitancy whenever the danger that they might actually take power appeared on the horizon (one might think here of the '68 events, and the street militancy of the seventies that followed, when 'new' leftists dared to think of revolu-

"Marxism" continues below

## Red-baiting and ideology: the new SDS

legitimize their discontent.

EXCHANGE: Richard Rubin and Laurie Rojas

To the editors of the Platypus Review:

I am not now, nor have I ever been, either a Maoist or sympathetic to Maoism. I am also not a member of SDS. I was outraged however, by the blatant red-baiting of Rachel Haut in a recent Platypus Review interview and disturbed that it seems to have gone unchallenged by PR. Rachel Haut was guoted as saying: "To say that the Maoists can be part of the ideological debate would mean to condone them being in this organization, which is something I don't do. In the New York City SDS I have spoken numerous times with SDSers who are not Maoists about having the Maoists or certain kinds of anarchists in our organization, because both sides hurt us. If we want to build a democratic society, and we want to be relevant, both of these opposing forces are working against us. There are varying degrees of anarchism, definitely, as well as varying degrees of social-

ism. But, I think ideas that conflict with our vision and our goals need to be clearly defined and excluded before we can actually start talking about our ideological differences formally as a national organization.'

Essentially, what Rachel Haut is saying that first one needs to exclude people whom one disagrees with, so that after the organization has been ideologically purified, one can "actually start talking about ideological differences" when there aren't any anymore. This is an attitude worthy of a Red Guard during the Cultural Revolution!

Aside from general considerations of democratic principle, such an attitude is extremely dangerous to those who consider themselves leftists. I am reminded of a famous old radical cartoon I once saw. A cop is beating up a striking worker, who protests "But I am an anti-Communist", to which the cop replies "Anti-communist, shmanti-communist. I don't care what kind of communist you are."

-Richard Rubin, October 2008

### Laurie Rojas responds.

Rachel Haut's comments during the interview printed in September 2008 Issue of the Platypus Review did not express my views, or those of the editors of the Platypus Review. I should have made this explicit at the time. Haut's red-baiting went unchallenged during the interview, and that should not have been the case.

• • •

I disagreed with Haut when she said, "I think it is inappropriate to have conversations about ideological differences when we still have Maoists in the organization." As the interviewer, however, I (wrongly) thought it indecorous to challenge her position at that point.

Beyond this, I continued the conversation because it

made manifest a profound and worrisome behavior I had encountered in SDS during my participation in the 2008 National Convention: the promulgation of whisper campaigns against individuals that appear to have defined ideological positions, coupled with an unspoken agreement to avoid ideological conversations. The first two days of the convention were plaqued by disputes about the decision-making process that had clearly ideological undertones, but were never expressed as such; instead, there were numerous interruptions that chastised the decision-making process as "undemocratic" — a vague blanket term that anybody, no matter what side of the argument they were on, used to

Furthermore, I did not directly challenge Haut's redbaiting because at the time I considered it an anachronistic, ill-informed gesture used simply to avoid a political conversation about the long-term goals of SDS. Haut's red-baiting had no concrete grounding, and was fully devoid of actual relevance to political practice in the present; it was mostly justified by the historical reputation of Maoists. It was never made clear why Maoists would pose such a grave threat to SDS. What is then, the real "danger" posed by a Maoist, or any "red," today? The only explanation given was: "[Maoist] ideology is in direct opposition to building a democratic society." "Democracy," although vaguely understood, is the only goal all SDSers can agree on. Yet it is also the main weapon some use to show contempt for other members of the group.

I hoped the interview would be treated as symptomatic of tendencies in the Left today whose public manifestation would help clarify our situation. In other words, I let Haut's opinions stand because they were in some way representative of problems and dangers facing the young Left today. especially in the new SDS. As an "umbrella organization," SDS has attracted members with a wide spectrum of opinions. But because ideological conversations about the political goals of the organization have not been a central part of SDS - mostly due to the fear of splits - its members end up grouping themselves into social cliques. Fragmentation occurs under the auspices of petty interpersonal disagreements instead of political disputes with practical and political consequences. The larger problem, however, is that the majority of peo-

ple in SDS can only organize actions in frustrated reaction to the deplorable situations in which they find themselves. They can only protest their helplessness, and have no clear idea of how their actions relate to long-term goals of gaining political power to effect real social transformation.

The absence of concrete political aims produces a politics of "acting out," an unreflective and compulsive desire for "agitation." With this orientation, the new SDS does not stray far from its predecessor, the original SDS. Activism-for-its-own-sake is an indication that the organization

"refuses to reflect on its own impotence," as Adorno once said of the student activism in the 60's. The concepts of "revolution" and "democracy" are abstract ideas in SDS whose emptiness leaves them useful only as bludgeons for crushing dissent.

The counterposing of thought and action, the kneejerk anti-intellectualism, the taboos behind political ideas, and the impulse to resist indiscriminately hierarchy and leadership, has left SDS powerless. But worse than that, because of this deep political dilemma, many members are insecure and quick to accuse others for not being "with the movement." The perverse tendency to "purge" is a result of fear, a dearth of ideas, and the unwillingness to discuss the meaning and direction of the group. When things are not going well—blame the "foreign elements."

The bitter truth about Wright's cartoon is that all kinds of Marxists are still cast under the same blinding light. It would do us well to remember: everybody has an ideology. Being anti-ideology is one of the oldest ideologies in the book. The question is why should those who are believed to have defined ideological positions invoke a desire to squelch, to expel, to purge? This anti-ideology sentiment, an anachronistic residue

of the anti-Stalinism of the 60's, is more pervasive — if less explicit — today, without any "anti-anti-communism" clause to block its path. The irony is that in a post-USSR world, the Stalinophobes unknowingly become practicing Stalinists. If one considers the pathologies created by political powerlessness and the unwillingness to engage with ideas, red-baiting can be understood as a naturalized form of ideological purging; real authoritarianism masked as "the defense of democracy." IP

Koons, continued from page 3

comes into relief in the palace, is its ambivalence toward modern society — seeking to neither criticize it nor celebrate it, merely using it as content.

But at the same time the Versailles exhibit exemplifies how we cannot deny the modern subject's judgment. As self-conscious "moderns", we must proceed to make a judgment, not only about Marie Antoinette's fate and the French Revolution, but also about our present. Considering the economic conditions, the social transfor-

mations, and the technological advances that have made such an exhibition possible, what judgment do we make about the progression — or regression — of the project set in motion by the French Revolution? What can the Versailles installations of Jeff Koons's work illuminate about Modern Art's historical development, about the history between Jacques Louis David and Koons, and thus the modern history of humanity? Thinking through these questions is central to understanding the

the emergence of the modern. Koons's work, when comfortably sitting in the Versailles rooms, eclipses everything in between now and then; it eclipses the French Revolution, it eclipses Delacroix, Manet, Picasso, Pollock and Rothko, either by clumsily ignoring it, or by consciously denying the rise and development of Modernism. What is so nightmarish, perhaps, is that if his work really does treat the enlightenment project as irrelevant, its purported ambivalence is, in a way, no different than the right-wing French nationalists

extent to which we face today, in art and society, continuity

with or change from the political ideals that brought about

In the last paragraph of Hal Foster's introduction to The Anti-Aesthetic he characterizes our historical moment as one that treats the project of modernity, along with the "adventures of the aesthetic," and the "critique of the world as it is," as an outdated utopian dream: "we have to consider that this aesthetic space too has eclipsed — or rather, that its criticality is largely illusory (and so instrumental)." Instead, "in the face of a culture of reaction on all sides, a practice of resistance is needed." But, this not need be the case. For thinking about Koons's work reminds us that that would mean relinquishing history from the hands of humanity.

protest of his work outside of Versailles

The alternative would be to agree with Zhou Enlai, the first premier of the People's Republic of China, who in the 1950s visited France and was asked about the impact of the French Revolution, and said, "it's too early to tell." IP

### Marxism. continued from above

tion, but retreated into guerilla tactics, or cultural politics, rather than challenge the hold of the 'old' left over the

The challenge was to make the working class the subject of history, not just an object of capital accumulation. But as bravely as people fought, and as many were the advances made, the decisive challenge failed; the working class did not take control, and in the long retreat that followed the working class subject was forced out of history. A crisis of confidence – defeatism – was the dominant mood on the left.

The defeat of the working class subject was the condition for the extensive growth of capitalism we have been living through, and its bias to low-productivity toil over high-productivity industry. In the west, the defeat of the unions held wages down, making it cheaper to recruit more workers than to buy more machines. Unlike the high-wage post-war boom years, employers had no incentive to replace workers by machines (in Marx's terms, the organic composition of capital was not rising). In the east, combative nationalism fell away, making it much easier for capitalists to recruit armies of new workers into greenfield

This was what I looked at in my book, The 'Death of the Subject' Explained (2002), which is for the most part a criticism of the postmodern philosophy that was popular at the time. There is something a bit suspect about dodging off into the realm of philosophy to discuss a real problem. Who is The Subject, wearing his grandiose capital letters as if it was some higher being than you and me? In other times we might have called 'the retreat from subjectivity' the 'struggle for working class leadership', only now there is no such struggle. The question was whether the working class would become an active agent shaping history.

The concept of subjectivity irritates some people I know because it seems classless. But that is itself a sign of the times: there is no clarification of the competing interests of the different classes. As the historian E.P. Thomson explained, the working class is not an objective factor alone, for it only has a real existence in so far as it defines itself in the struggle against capital. As the working class internalized the defeats of the period, Society lost its most dynamic influence. Paraphrasing Marx, Adorno said, apathy, too, is a material force when it grips the masses.

What is more, the crisis of confidence that had its origins on the left was met with a mirroring, mutually conditioning collapse of confidence on the right. That was why the End of the Cold War did not just penalize the left wing actors. Bush Sr became the first President not to win a second term because his continuation of Reaganomics was not equal to the moment. In Britain the Conservative Party staggered on through the 1990s before giving way to the era of anti-ideological politics, and its magician Tony

The age of anti-politics was better at saying what it was against than saying what it was for. It was against extremism, and against racism; it was against militarism, so much so that it would, with a heavy heart of course, send the troops in to get rid of the weapons of mass destruction; it was anti-sexist, and basically devoid of any strong feeling whatsoever. All of the weird trends of our time: the infantilisation of the public, the dumbing-down of the public discourse, the excessively fragile, victim-centred outlook that seeks to take all of the conflict out of life and love, all of these are in the end a manifestation of that singular retreat from Subjectivity which dominates our age. Unfortunately, even the radical left rode to town on a tiger of anti-politics. The dominant motif of the anti-war movement was its activism, and hostility to politics. The left is happiest appealing for help for the victims, oblivious to the fact that in doing so it is consolidating the defeat of political agency from below and enhancing state power over us at every turn. But, more important even than the retreat from politi-

cal agency, was the capitalists' retreat from industrial production. This is a better way to understand the economic difficulties that contemporary capitalism faces, than rehearsing Marx's overaccumulation theory.

For more than a decade, the capitalist class in the West has been working with an outlook that is hostile to industry. In Britain, as in the US and elsewhere, capitalists found it easier making money by breaking up industries than building them up. There always was a kind of disgust at the real business of industry from the capitalists. They would move their homes away into the country, so that they did not have to smell the stench of the factory.

But today, the capitalists disdain for production is much more explicit. This was the meaning of all the 'Lean Production', or 'small firm' business theory (see Tony Smith, Lean Production: A Capitalist Utopia, 1994). This was the 'post-material' fantasy that I criticized in my booklet Need and Desire in the Postmaterial Economy (1998). What most capitalist ideologues are interested in today is how they can lay claim to 'value streams' (what we used to call 'surplus value') quite independent of any dynamic relation to the production process. That was the meaning of the whole fixation on 'The Brand', a peculiarly fetishised idea of the claim to surplus value on the basis of owning the trademark or license, while contracting out the messy business of actually bottling the coca-cola.

They did put a lot more people to work, though typically that work was not in industry, but in the burgeoning service sector. The domestic service that we thought belonged to a pre-democratic past turned out to be one of the fastest growing sectors. Supermarkets and shopping centers were built, while their products had to be imported. These new jobs were low-skilled, underproductive toil that was

dressed up as post-industrial service sector growth. The great expansion of the financial sector meets this elite distaste for industry. Banking, insurance, stockbroking, futures trading and the mysterious trade in esoteric financial instruments are all businesses that are many removes from manufacturing. Entrepreneurs feel a lot more comfortable weaving money out of thin air than

they do organizing the ugly business of production. The brokers' analyst Alan Smithers explained how Britain's earnings from financial intermediation had superseded those of industry in the nineties. 'Leave that to the Koreans' our Trade and Industry advisor Charles Leadbeater said, we are all in the thin air business (he means intellectual property) these days (Living on Thin Air, 2000). Well, lo and behold! You cannot live on thin air.

In my country, especially (but where Britain leads most delusions follow) the entrepreneurial class dedicates its energies to getting money out of licenses and intellectual property rights over the industry of others. And if they cannot lay claim to cash they have not earned in the developing world in the name of 'intellectual property,' then they have worked out a thousand ways to wring money from the government, demanding revenues from 'public-private finance initiatives' and so on. What they do not do is make

One of the great failings of the left has been that rather than challenge the main trend of capitalism, they have reinforced it. At a time when capitalism has retreated from production, the radicals' main demand is that they retreat further. And here it is the ideology of environmentalism that has done the most damage. The environmentalists think that they are anti-capitalists. But they are not. At best what they are doing is attacking industrial capitalism. But capitalism is in retreat from industry. The environmental movement is only affirming the prejudice of the Institute of Directors that the capitalists are on the right course. I call this new anti-productive capitalism Green Capitalism. They want to make money by deindustrialising. Istvan Meszaros' concept of a 'declining rate of utilisation' under capitalism would have been a useful insight if he had developed it more.

In October I debated green policies with the Institute of Directors in the City of London. It is remarkable how committed to the environment these modern capitalists are. Why should they not be? Banks and other financial institutions have a tiny carbon footprint – because they do not move anything but legal titles of ownership. Imagine a scale of values that puts Banks as the most virtuous and something really useful, like agri-business or manufacturing industries as the most horrid. They might be in freefall, begging trillions from the finance ministers, but the banks can flatter themselves that they are, without doubt the very greenest of industries.

The current economic crisis is not a crisis of capitalist overaccumulation as Marx analysed it. It is a crisis of green capitalism, of the retreat from production. For twenty years, business has been learning the mantra that production is bad and consumption is good, until it has succeeded in leaving the cupboard bare. It is not that industrial technology has crowded out value-creating labour, a process Marx discovered in the Victorian Age and that continued into the twentieth century; rather it is that labour-squandering activities like recycling, alternative energy, land conservation, as well as non-productive businesses, like financial intermediation, consultancies and personal services have crowded productivity out of the economy. Whatever legacy these investments leave for humanity, their contribution to capitalist expansion has

The economic dislocation has international dimensions because the dynamic sectors of production are geographically distant from the centers of consumption – the China to Wal-Mart route that those despised fast-moving lumpy consumer goods travel along. That means that value accumulated in Chinese savings banks must be recycled back to the West in the form of credit, which in turn fuels the evasion of industry in the West.

To put it another way, the current economic failure is not so much the outcome of objective categories of the organic composition of capital. It is a failure of capitalist Subjectivity. That seems to me unavoidably the case. As every commentator notes, the banking collapse was first and foremost a collapse in confidence among banks themselves. That does not mean that it can be wished away by a collective suspension of disbelief. The reason that financial confidence is such a vital issue is that so many capitalists have fled production for finance, giving the finance sector inordinate importance. The Subjective retreat from

production itself becomes an objective factor. The astute financial journalist Daniel Ben-Ami analyzed these changes best in his book Cowardly Capitalism (2001). And Benjamin Hunt's The Timid Corporation, based on some excellent interviews with corporate heads, extends that picture. The defining characteristic of capitalism in the current period, Ben-Ami explained, was loss of confidence. This was why the UK finance sector acceded to new regulations and the oversight of 'top people's pay' reviews, Corporate Social Responsibility audits brought in business consultancies to make the decisions that they

Years of underperformance are a better explanation for the economic challenges we face today than trying to make Marx's theory of capitalist overaccumulation fit the lackluster growth rates of the past two decades. The defeat of the working class was not just a disaster for us; it was generalized into a crisis of humanity itself. The Death of the Subject explains the retreat of capitalism from production. The contemporary economic crisis is a crisis of Green Capitalism, definitive proof that we cannot live on

James Heartfield is a regular contributor to several publications, including spiked-online. His books include *The* Death of The Subject Explained (2002) and Green capitalism: manufacturing scarcity in an age of abundance (2008). He

### Obama, continued from page 1

negative — that associate him simply with the vicissitudes of movement along a spectrum of "Left" and "Right" informed fundamentally by Keynesian-Fordist state policies or their undermining by neoliberalism, a response to the "Third Way" politics Obama represents needs to be formulated that recognizes a historical trajectory that is not reassimilable back into the social politics of the mid-20th Century. For such politics had been settled by the time of Clinton's election in 1992, after the Reagan-Thatcher 'revolution" and the destruction of the Soviet Union. There is a line of continuity between Clinton and Obama, but not one of betrayal of the Left but of historical changes for which the "Left" has been ill-prepared.

The triumph of neoliberalism, as well as of "Third Way" politics of the "radical Center" at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st Centuries cannot be understood properly as a move to the Right that can be reversed by undoing it or by repolarizing politics according to an earlier mode of government policies. They must be seen as part of a deep-rooted historical trajectory that can only be defeated through a new politicization of the working class for socialism, a politics that has been neglected since the early 20th Century.

We must learn the lessons of the 20th Century not learned by those who came before us, and not accept the terms by which they rationalized their failures. Obama, as the latest sign of "change" in this on-going trajectory,

underscores this necessity. Like the "Third Way" we should not accept the opposition of individual and collective social responsibility in conceiving our politics. Unlike the "Third Way," we should not affirm the forms of state and civil society in which these different dimensions of social responsibility are mediated in today's late, "post-revolutionary" capitalism. We should rise to the challenge of the necessary double-sided critique that can meet the conservative politics of the "Third Way" in terms of its — and our — own historical moment, and not in the obsolete and, even in their time, mistaken and ineffective terms of a moribund "Left."

Since his election, Obama has made it clear that he wishes to steer clear of outdated polarizations — as well he should, if he wants to be an effective politician. We should not treat this merely as "political" equivocation or obfuscation, but rather as clearing the way to a potential better recognition of social reality. For a long time now, the "Left" has been adept at skirting the issues and accepting, however tacitly, the terms of social politics set by others. For it is as true that "government [of the capitalist nation-state] is not the answer" as it is that neoliberal "free market" reforms have been a farcical debacle — with tremendous costs to humanity. But the historical failure of the Left is what brought us to this impasse of the 20th Century, the 21st Century opportunity of the "Third Way" and its politics of the "radical Center." The vacuum of historical politics has been filled, and we need to address this present effective space for politics and not remain

self-marginalized, in disdain of it.

We cannot continue the preceding "Left's" follies in accepting the terms and attempting to re-fight the battles of the 1960 and the 1930s (and their aftermath), in an endless "rear-guard action," without denying our social reality in its most fundamental respects. Obama has not been a transformative figure in the sense of bringing about a change. Rather, Obama's victory expresses a change that has been already long under way — and about which the 'Left" has remained confused and in denial for far too long, as a result of its abandonment of Marxism.

For a Marxian approach should seek to occupy the vital, radical center of political life, if social emancipation beyond capital is ever to be achieved. Not the intellectual cynicism of "postmodernism" or the despairing utopian politics of an "anarchist" withdrawal from mainstream political life, but an open assault on the on-going conservatizing strategies of depoliticization and the consolidation of power that takes form in ever more socially opaque and

Reversing this can only happen in the context of a reinvigorated workers' movement that would seek to centrally reorganize social life, at a global scale. Today, this must begin with the integrated North American working class, who, occupying the beating heart of the world of capital, has a unique historic responsibility and potentially emancipatory role to play, for whose abdication all of humanity will continue to pay a terrible and escalating price. Addressing the ideological clarification necessary for overcoming this deficit of working class politics will be possible only through Marxian critical theory, carried on by intellectuals trained and dedicated to do this.

As Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919), the great revolutionary Marxist politician of the early 20th Century stated it, during the disintegration of the international Marxist workers' movement in the First World War,

"Socialism is the first popular movement in world history that has set itself the goal of bringing human consciousness, and thereby free will, into play in the social actions of humankind . . . to try to take its history into its own hands; instead of remaining a will-less football, it will take the tiller of social life and become the pilot to the goal of its own history." (The Crisis of German Social Democracy, AKA the Junius pamphlet, 1915)

We need to resume this fight. **IP** 

Leadership, continued from page 2

hands, and just wanted to talk about his problems. His wife was robbed, his daughter had asthma and frequently ended up in the hospital, and he'd been in and out of prison. Timothy wanted to be safe. He wanted to have control over his life. But Timothy had only fought for himself; he had never been challenged to act like a leader and challenge his friends/co-workers to stand up.

It would have been easier for me to just accept the history of this shop, and just say this is what "the workers" wanted. Instead, I chose to challenge him and to push others to do the same. I made him reconsider the role he and his co-workers could play. Along with workers' strength, we talked about his life and what kind of man and father he

Timothy wanted his union to fight, although he wasn't sure what that meant. He did know, however, that only a handful of people in the shop floor would talk about the problems, that nothing ever got fixed, and everyone felt weak for way too long. Timothy agreed to get trained and to challenge his co-workers to organize toward their com-

At a certain point, Timothy decided he was going to lead and organize a new area of the site because the company was cutting people's hours and giving more work to certain "favorite" workers. He got four more committee members to start a petition; they convinced the whole department to sign it and deliver it as a group. The night before the delivery, the committee leaders called their coworker followers to make sure that they would be there. They trusted the leadership's decisions, and, despite their fears, 76 of them gathered to present the petition as a group. Timothy and four other committee members confronted the General Manager with the petition. Within twenty minutes, the Manager agreed to pay them thousands of dollars for the time the company had cut.

### Leadership and the Future of the Left

Finding and developing new leaders at the shop was not easy, but it proved that a strong organization, and a strong movement, is only possible through the development of leadership. Developing leadership for the movement requires creating long term plans for the growth of an organization, recruiting new members, training a new generation of leadership, and planning and carrying out campaigns for short-term victories.

A leader's priority is to widen the base of support, train people to carry out necessary tasks, and immediately give newly recruited people responsibilities. Without training, and short-term goals, the membership will slowly decline and leadership will inevitably fall off. By planning and accomplishing things together members both old and new will learn to trust each other and the power of the leadership. As members go through the ups and downs of campaigns, wins and losses, they will learn the effectiveness of their own organizations and learn to trust in the leadership of those that are taking the bold step of leading people into difficult struggles. Larger goals become attainable, and more people will have been through difficult struggles and will have learned how to fight and win.

Timothy did just that, he became a man that was respected and built an organization that was feared. As he moves forward he will be able to change dozens—and will ultimately lead hundreds—of working class people. This has also allowed Timothy to build a better relationship with his wife and daughter. It taught him restraint, planning, patience and respect. When working class people learn to feel respect in their own lives, and feel power in the places of work and the community, we have advanced the possibility of real transformation.

We must not fail to recruit people into our organizations. We cannot be afraid to directly ask a person to recognize that they have a stake in changing the world, and share our vision of struggle with them. Many people on the left are just waiting for the revolution to come. We cannot just assume that someday the workers of the world are going to flock to our ideas. The revolution will never come by itself. A revolution will only be possible by the

organized actions of the Left. I lead people. I'm proud of leading people. I think leading people is the most important thing I can do in my life. I do not lead everyone. I don't lead people in every area of their lives. I don't lead people to do things against their self-interest. I am not unique in my leadership ability. But I can and will lead people in a social movement.

Each one of you gets to make the same choice I made, the same choice Timothy made. Who do I want to be? What is the better me? As you answer those questions, believe that it is our duty as revolutionaries to make sure other people can answer them as well, and can realize their visions. Everyone wants a better world, but it is up to us to

Two dominant ideas on the left today are used to treat leadership negatively and not as a necessity: "we are all leaders" or "we have no leaders."

The left is wrong and will continue to lose until it recognizes that fact. It is imperative that we learn to take leadership seriously and work to develop it. There is only one thing that should be avoided on the left, and that is losing It is time to do something different. It is time to lead. **IP** 



www.platypus1917.org/theplatypusreview