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EDITORIAL PERSPECTIVES

ONCE AGAIN ON REFORM, REVOLUTION AND SOCIALISM

As this is being written (March 2010), news arrives that the U. S. House of Representatives has just (barely) passed the Health Care bill — *without* a public option. The Left Forum has just concluded its annual conference, the largest ever, in New York, and running through many sessions and conversations there was the question: what position should socialists take on this legislation? The breakdown into yeas and nays seems to be based on random distribution of personality types, and personal preference. Is the victory over Republican intransigence — which threatens to blossom into a *de facto coup d'état* — more important than registering opposition to the failure of the Democrats to uphold even their own limited recognition of the increasingly desperate plight of working people (both poor and near-poor)? Everyone in this debate — on the left, at any rate — agrees that we are at the very beginning of a long road to health security in the United States; the difference lies in what choices at present best position us for the struggles to come.

And, into this mix comes announcement of this year's Daniel Singer Prize competition. A \$2500 annual prize is awarded for the best essay on a theme announced by the Daniel Singer Millennium Prize Foundation, and the Foundation asks us to popularize this announcement. (Daniel Singer, who died in December 2000, was an outstanding French writer and lecturer, and a major presence in the Left Forum's predecessor organization, the Socialist Scholars Conference.) Unfortunately, and as happens often when people ask *Science & Society* to publicize forthcoming events, the event threatens to precede the announcement. The deadline for submissions to the essay competition was July 31, 2010; you may be reading this in October, after the deadline but at least before the announcement of this year's winner in December. For future reference, check out danielsingerfdn.com, which asks us to encourage people, especially younger folks, to participate and submit essays (up to 5000 words) for consideration.

What does all this have to do with health care? Well, this year's essay question is:

Given the devastating effects of the present crisis on working people, what proposals for radical reform can be raised which are both practical to the vast majority while moving us towards the goal of socialism?

This is the long-standing "reform/revolution" problematic. Despite the spectre of *déjà vu*, it may be worthwhile revisiting it, using the prize competition question as our basis. On close reading, it opens multiple conceptual cans of worms.

"Given the devastating effects . . . on working people . . ." Do we detect a hint here of the idea that *devastation* as such is consciousness-raising? In the case of revolutionary transitions in which one exploiting class takes power from another, the challenging class can mobilize the devastation-induced rage of the subaltern masses as a weapon against the *ancien regime*. When revolutionary agency resides with the exploited masses themselves, however, things are different: the struggle must *empower* the working-class majority, prepare that majority to shoulder the immense burdens of running the institutions and structures of society, while *simultaneously* transforming those institutions and structures. If this is right, then we must conclude that *it is the response to devastation, not the devastation itself, that matters*. The response is much more empowering in action — and therefore much more consciousness-raising — than the crisis that provoked it.

". . . practical to the vast majority . . ." What seems "practical" at any moment in time is what is bounded by existing paradigms! So the "public option" was "impractical": it was placed out of bounds by the ideological guardians of the *status quo*. This is *hegemony*, in Gramsci's sense: the limits to action decreed by the agencies of the ruling class are made to seem inevitable, natural. It is precisely the *practice* of the vast majority that can — potentially — alter what seems *practical* to that majority. The task of struggle for "temporary improvement" (see the testimony of Marx, quoted below) is to *expand* the horizon of the "possible" — to overthrow the constraints on what appears as "practical."

". . . moving us toward the goal of socialism . . ." Again, an (admittedly very close) reading suggests a conception of socialism as an exterior projection, a "system" that *replaces* capitalism from the outside, and is therefore formed in consciousness as a "goal." Now communism (as the generic term for the mode of production that transcends capitalism, along with all class-antagonistic modes of production) does take shape as a vision, or goal; this is the moment within Marxist theory that draws upon the treasure-trove of utopian thought. The dominant moment, however, is the one that estab-

lishes the socialist–communist tradition associated with Marx and Engels as *scientific* — in an appropriate non-*scientistic* sense of that term. The key insight is that socialism is the culmination of forces developing *within* capitalism; in the present case, most essentially the capacities, experiences, struggles and evolving consciousness of the working class, emerging as part of the *system of class relations* that defines capitalism. If this (too) is right, then socialism *is* the social–economic democracy that arises in the practice and consciousness of the working-class struggle and is, simultaneously, part of the laws of motion of capitalism. The *goal* is not a timeless abstraction; it is itself shaped and reconfigured and fleshed out within the movement of the exploited. This movement is revolutionary, because it can only realize itself in the ultimate overthrow of capitalism, creating the historic moment in time at which socialism–communism emerges as a unique, transcendent stage in social evolution.

“... radical reform ...” The problem, as we begin to see, is not so much with “radical” as with “reform.” “Reform” takes an object: it is reform of a *system*. What is our conception of this system? If the utopian moment becomes overextended, the system appears as something exterior to the working-class struggle itself: it is “their” system, and we (presumably) “want no part of it.” But, in the light of the scientific moment, we *are* part of it. The system *is* the unresolvable antagonism between classes, and its core state is the *balance of class forces*: the entire complex of relations — economic, political, cultural, ideological — that constitute the power of the capitalist class to extract surplus value, and the power of the working class to resist and moderate that extraction. We think of efforts on the part of the working class to alter the balance of forces¹ in its favor as “reforms.” How should we relate to those efforts? That, of course, is what the debate is about. Marx, it seems, was unequivocal on this point:

... the very development of modern industry must progressively turn the scale in favour of the capitalist against the working man. ... Such being the tendency of *things* in this system, is this saying that the working class ought to renounce their resistance against the encroachments of capital, and abandon their attempts at making the best of the occasional chances for their temporary improvement? If they did, they would be degraded to one level mass of broken wretches past salvation. ... By cowardly giving way in their everyday conflict with capital, they would certainly disqualify themselves for the initiating of any larger movement.²

1 “Balance of forces” is equivalent to “correlation of forces,” or “relation of forces.” “Balance” should not be read as implying any sort of automatic countervailing of the respective powers on the two sides, let alone an equilibrium between them.

2 *Wages, Price and Profit*, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works in Three Volumes*, Vol. II, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1973, p. 75.

Marx is addressing the issue in the context of trade union policy, but we may, I think, see it more broadly, in the contestation between classes that takes place at various social and political sites, including but not limited to the workplace.

Would genuine health-care security — reliable access to medical treatment for all workers and their families, in all stages of life, without regard to capacity to pay, citizenship status, pre-existing conditions — have an impact on the balance of class forces? Is it (or its absence) part of that balance? In light of the foregoing, this is of course a silly question. The answer is shown by the clear class understanding among the Republican Party in the United States: dominant circles within the ruling class (perhaps not the ruling class in its entirety; there are always enlightened outliers) will go to the mat on this issue, not merely because they don't want to pay for health-care reform, but because they understand its positive impact on the general social condition of the working population and the consequences of that condition for ongoing and future challenges to their power/wealth/privilege, in all spheres. When the right (both the "respectable" Republicans and "crazies" such as Rush Limbaugh and Glenn Beck; the two camps are organically linked) sees health-care "reform" as a threat to "freedom" and Obama as a "Marxist," they mean *their* (ruling-class) freedom, and "Marxist" in an ultimate sense, and — guess what? — they are correct!

In trade union contract negotiations, a distinction is drawn between "money items" and "non-money items"; the latter are issues such as the right of the union to post notices within workplaces, requirements on management to consult with the union concerning workplace conditions, and so forth. From the standpoint of the overall balance of class forces within the workplace (a component of the larger balance), we must aver: *there is no such thing as a non-money item*: anything that matters affects the overall outcome, the rate of surplus value extraction. Now, in the context of the larger issue of "reform" — changing the balance in favor of working people — I suggest a controversial extension of this principle: *There is no such thing as a non-radical reform*.

This does *not* mean that reforms — from installing a traffic light at a corner where children cross on the way to school, to an increase in the minimum wage, guaranteed employment, or a public option extending health care services to 32 million people now completely excluded from them — are inherently or necessarily revolutionizing. It *does* mean that *every* reform has implications for the class balance of forces, and must and will be combated by the ruling class (yes, even the traffic light); that *every* reform must therefore be defended, and extended, and linked with other reforms, and with the movements backing other reforms. This process provides the working class with political and organizational experience, with the oppor-

tunity and necessity to overcome divisions and separations — in a word, with an ongoing laboratory for developing the skills and capacities needed to eventually take over the reins entirely. This, in turn, is the real foundation for advances in consciousness. It is the ultimate school for socialism. Note that this perspective does not say: “*Unfortunately*, workers are *only* ready for reforms; they are not (yet) ready for revolution.” Instead, it says: “Workers need and desire reforms, and this is a *good* thing, because unless we/they build the struggles and movements for reforms, they/we will *never* be ready for revolution.”

But should we make distinctions between “radical” reforms and (presumably) “non-radical” ones? Are we to pick and choose among the needs and demands that arise spontaneously in workplaces and in working-class communities? Who is to be told that *their* needs don’t meet *our* test? The worst we could do is succumb to the ultimate arrogance of trying to fool people, by advancing “reform” proposals that (we somehow think) the “system” cannot deliver. Talk about “disqualify(ing our)selves for the initiating of any larger movement”! If we have learned anything from the negative lessons of the 20th century, it is that the left must, as a matter of central principle, occupy the moral high ground, and this depends clearly on our *not* cherry-picking “strategically” selected projects to “teach” people — about a “system” of which they are not seen as a part.

It must be said: those who fear reforms and reform movements on the grounds that people might become distracted from the “real” path of revolution, or that they might be “co-opted” into the “system,” are essentially saying that they do *not* believe that class interests within capitalism are irreconcilable! Put another way, these fearful folk actually think capitalism *can* solve the day-to-day problems of existence of the working class, and therefore want to keep that from happening.

If we do give principled support to all reform movements and currents, we still have the task of doing this in a revolutionary way, and there is no simple formula that can guarantee that. The health care legislation provides examples of the challenges; I cite here only the insidious tax on so-called “Cadillac” union plans, clearly designed to divide the working-class and frustrate further progress toward universal coverage and quality of health care. Working-class empowerment, as long as capitalist production relations are dominant, and indeed for some time after, is inseparable from class struggle, and those who share that perspective are in a position to identify the pressure points in the current stage of the struggle and mobilize the most broad-based campaigns to address them in the next round.

“What proposals . . . can be raised . . .” (quoting one last time from the Singer Prize question). Instead, let’s become part of the various real currents

from which *all* proposals originate, and work with those currents to find ways of winning, deepening, extending, building. Out of that experience, revolutionary leadership will arise. It most likely will not be who we expect it to be! In the words of the wise old spiritual song: "Everybody talkin' 'bout Heaven ain't goin' there . . ."

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IN THIS ISSUE

We begin with an intriguing study by historian Jerry Harris: "The Center Cannot Hold: The Struggle for Reform in the Communist Party, 1957–58."³ Harris uses a hitherto-untapped archive of correspondence, focused around the Chicago-based CP leader, Ben Fine, to reveal a strong *center* trend, usually ignored or eclipsed in the usual accounts of left–right contestation between the Foster and Gates camps, respectively. This center, according to Harris, maintained an integral Marxist politics, while also recognizing the need to develop critical and independent positions on the basis of the unique history and culture of the United States. In the event, the center was unable to withstand the withering criticism from the left of "revisionism" as the "main danger," and became unfairly identified with the "liquidationism" of the right (which indeed dissolved itself and disappeared, as the left predicted it would). Harris' presentation of the richness and untidiness of the debate, as it intersected with often tragic and difficult personal histories, is intriguing, as always in view of contemplation of "what might have been."

We are pleased to present a contribution from China. Dr. Wei Xiaoping is a resident scholar at the Chinese Academy of Social Science (CASS) in Beijing. Her field is the early development of the philosophy of Marx and Engels, and in this paper ("Rethinking Historical Materialism: The New Edition of *The German Ideology*") she examines the relation of being and consciousness, identifying a distinction between social and natural dimensions of human existence, activity and thought. A tension is revealed between the active and co-creative role of thought in Marx's early writings (especially the Paris Manuscripts) and formulations, in both *The German Ideology* and the 1859 "Preface," that posit ontological priority for being over con-

3 The meaning of the title will be clear in context, although any reference to William Butler Yeats may or may not be intended, and any parallel with the organizing slogan of this year's Left Forum is entirely coincidental!

sciousness. Using the new MEGA² edition of *The German Ideology*, Wei sorts out the separate development of the thinking of Engels and Marx, and shows how differences in their formulations enrich our attempts to move forward with the foundation concepts of historical materialist theory.

As numerous recent contributions show, the study of the foundations of value theory, for which the core text is still Marx's *Capital*, Vol. I, ch. 1, is still producing new results; while the dangers of scholasticism and textualism cannot be ignored, we are convinced that we still have much to learn from continuing efforts to untangle the rich web of insights found there into the uniquely self-mystifying set of social relations lying at the heart of capitalism. The new contribution to this overall project is the study by Igor Hanzel, "Mistranslations of 'Schein' and 'Erscheinung': The Structure of Chapter 1 of *Capital*, Volume I," which focuses on the different place in the dialectic of the moments of *appearance* and *manifestation*, and the failure of extant translations and commentaries to properly distinguish them. In particular, to see the ways in which Marx's dialectic is an advance over Hegel, one must grasp the interaction of quantitative and qualitative aspects of value, and of the (properly differentiated) sociological and political-economic dimensions of labor. Hanzel's erudite reading and re-presentation contrasts significantly with many existing ones that privilege the qualitative aspects of value over the quantitative aspects, and form (money) over labor (substance).

Rounding out the welcome internationalism of this issue, Russian Marxist economists Aleksandr Buzgalin and Andrey Kolganov, of Moscow State University, present a contribution to the ongoing discussion begun in our July issue, devoted to the theme "Capitalism and Crisis in the 21st Century." Buzgalin and Kolganov offer their view of the current crisis as the concurrence of three elements: the classical crisis mechanism, as described by Marx; specific forms of *overaccumulation* in the recent past; and exhaustion of a technological wave specific to the current recent boom. Their study also highlights the new, and profound, role of the financial sector; they posit a need for comprehensive *socialization of finance* as a near-term requirement for bringing the crisis to an end.

Victor Devinatz, in "Union Solidarity, Collective Struggle and the Caterpillar Labor Dispute, 1991–1998," addresses the argument put forward by Phil McCall ("We Had to Stick Together": Individual Preferences, Collective Struggle, and the Formation of Social Consciousness," *Science & Society*, April 2008). McCall's central point was to use the Caterpillar strikes to question the methodological individualism of Analytical Marxist approaches to collective action, by showing that workers at Caterpillar renounced their self-interest in favor of the needs of the group. Devinatz, while concurring in general with this critique, argues that McCall "unnecessarily dichotomizes the concepts of 'solidarity' and 'individual material well-being'"; instead of

counterposing these aspects, the task is to find ways to integrate them. Moreover, in his view outcomes of strikes and other forms of struggle must be weighed carefully in terms of both positive and negative components; solidarity is important, but it should not become a disembodied end-in-itself.

Finally, Lee-Anne Broadhead and Sean Howard ("Nanotechnology and the Developing Critique of Scientism") revisit scientism (recall the distinction between "scientific" and "scientistic," above), which they see as uncritical faith in the power of science and obliviousness toward its often-unintended side effects and social implications, in the light of certain recent celebrations of micro-electronics as panacea. In the process, they refer to John Jacobs' musings on the "Development of Atomic Energy" (*Science & Society*, Summer 1946), and of course we are always intrigued when connections are established between present concerns and work that appeared in our journal in earlier decades. While this may demonstrate the timeless utility of S&S, we must note that Broadhead and Howard are critical of Jacobs' *scientistic* naivete with regard to atomic energy (the opposite of both their concern with the nano scale and their profound skepticism). The difference, of course, is a difference between two eras. In the early years of S&S, editors, authors and readers alike for the most part had no problem with the conjoining of *science* and *society*, or with the assumption that the former could be applied to the latter and made to serve human needs. Today, we are not so sure. Both attitudes — confidence, and criticality — may serve us well in the future as we contemplate the possibility of a new synthesis.

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