Inside the Mind of the Tea Party

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RADICAL BUS DRIVERS UNITE

By John Tarleton

In 1996, Staten Island bus riders began to encounter clipboard-toting students who asked them to help with a cause they couldn’t refuse: lowering their own fares. Hired by the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 726, which represents Staten Island bus drivers, the students signed up thousands of bus riders who became the backbone of a movement that successfully pushed Governor George Pataki and Mayor Rudy Giuliani to have the MTA buy bigger express buses and use the cost savings to reduce fares. Once enacted, this quickly caused ridership to soar and led to the hiring of hundreds of additional bus drivers.

Now, Local 726’s former president President Larry Hanley will look to take that same kind of grassroots organizing fervor across the country after winning an insurgent campaign to take the helm of the 180,000-member national ATU at a time when mass transit is getting hammered by budget cuts and layoffs.

“The real battles in coming years are going to be won by organizing the public, not by litigating before a judge, not by begging Congress,” Hanley told Labor Notes shortly before being elected on Oct. 1 at the ATU Convention. “We have to convince people that green jobs matter, and that transit is the greenest job you’re going to find.”

Hanley helped found the Keep America Moving coalition in February. Leaders from 60 transit worker locals from across the country convened in New York to plan an aggressive fightback strategy that the then-leadership of ATU was not willing to act on. John Samuelsen, president of Transit Workers Union Local 100, strongly supported the initiative. TWU Local 100 represents the bulk of transit workers in New York City and has also been seeking to build alliances with community organizations to stave off service cuts and layoffs.

Supporters of mass transit have tried without success to interest President Obama (who won handily in urban areas two years ago) in providing more operating support for mass transit at a time when state and local budgets are cratering. Mass transit advocates have been stymied in Congress where the highway lobby receives the vast majority of federal transportation dollars as rural and suburban representatives outnumber urban ones. Congress has also left unchanged a 1998 law that requires cities with populations above 200,000 to use their federal funds only for capital expenses and not for operations.

On Oct. 13, Hanley convened a meeting of representatives from major transit and labor groups to begin preparing a nationwide outreach program to mass transit passengers. According to the union’s website, the first step envisioned was to bring ATU activists from key cities to a series of “boot camps” in the Washington, D.C., area where they would be trained in community organizing so they could use those skills back home to create local coalitions to pressure legislators to support mass transit. Coalitions like the one that succeeded in Staten Island.

For more information, see baumerlevy.com and nabor.org.

— J.T.

Defending Public Education

On Oct. 7 thousands of people throughout 32 states, including California, Illinois and New York, participated in the National Day of Action to Defend Public Education. The demonstrations drew attention to budget cuts and tuition hikes at public universities throughout the country. There were several actions were held at CUNY campuses in New York City, including demonstrations at Brooklyn College, the City College of New York and Queens College. There was also a rally in Harlem where CUNY students were joined by Harlem hospital workers, as well as union and tenant activists, to bring attention to widespread attacks against the public sector.

— Sakura Kelley

Beyond Bullying

Hundreds of people gathered in Washington Square Park on Oct. 3 to honor the memory of five queer youths who died in a recent string of suicides caused by homophobic bullying and harassment.

Text and photo by Sakura Kelley
Ready for a Freedom Party?

By John Tarleton

When New York State Democrats gathered at their nominating convention in May, they chose an all-white ticket of statewide candidates headed by a standard-bearer, Andrew Cuomo, who has put forward a program that would balance the state’s $9 billion-plus budget deficit at the expense of working-class people.

The Cuomo coronation continues, but he will be joined on the fall ballot by outspoken critics of the Democrats, every negative social indicator you can think of at the expense of working-class people.

The Independent’s John Tarleton recently spoke with Barron about the nascent Black- and Latino-led party and why he is running for governor on its line.

JOHN TARLETON: You have made race a central focus of your campaign. Why?

CHARLES BARRON: Everything — unemployment, inadequate healthcare, mistreatment, police terror — comes out of racism and classism, because elites want to maintain control over the wealth. We have to confront race and keep it on the front burner, because when we deal with race and see it as a structural and institutional problem, that’s how we’re going to address the real issues in our communities.

JT: How would you describe the relationship between the Democratic Party and Blacks and Latinos?

CB: It’s a master-slave relationship. Let’s face it, we have a Democratic president, a Democratic U.S. Senate, a Democratic House of Representatives, a Democratic Governor of New York, a Democratic State Senate, a Democratic State Assembly and a Democratic City Council. Yet, despite the empowerment of the Democrats, every negative social indicator you can think of is the worst in Black and Latino communities.

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The Democrats have taken our votes for granted, the Republican’s have ignored us and a lot of the white, left, progressive groups have used us. They may run a candidate here and there but when it comes to our real urban issues they’re not there for us, either. That’s why we have to have this Freedom Party.

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JT: You joined the Black Panther Party when you were 18 years old and more than 40 years later still refer to yourself as a “Black Panther in spirit.” What did you learn from the Panthers that has helped you?

CB: It showed me that we can win. Even though the Panther Party is not around, we won in the sense that we raised the consciousness of a generation to the level of revolution. It gave me an ideological and a philosophical base for struggle so you don’t get lost once you get involved in the system — because none of us are going escape some kind of involvement in capitalism.

JT: Are you surprised that the economic crash of 2008 has been followed not by the emergence of a mass movement that questions capitalism, but instead by the Tea Party?

CB: The contradictions on Wall Street are still here, and the contradictions with America having all of this wealth and poverty at the same time — all this wealth and we don’t feed all of our children, all of this wealth and we have indigent people on reservations — those contradictions are still glaring. And the Freedom Party is going to highlight those contradictions so that people will light the spark for a movement that will radically alter the political landscape of America.

For more information, see freedoomparty.us.com.

A Guide to the Third Party Candidates

By Steven Wishnia

Our choice in this year’s gubernatorial election is between two main candidates: Democrat Andrew Cuomo, who promises to freeze state workers’ pay and “reform” (cut) their pensions, rules out raising taxes on New York’s 63 billionaires and has one paragraph about housing costs, and a 12-page platform. Or Republican Carl Paladino, a bigoted billionaire who made a fortune renting real estate to state representatives, a Democratic Governor of New York, a Democratic State Senate, a Democratic State Assembly and a Democratic City Council. Yet, despite the empowerment of the Democrats, every negative social indicator you can think of is the worst in Black and Latino communities.

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JT: And this is why you want a party that’s Black and Latino led?

CB: Led by Blacks and Latinos but open to all, open to everyone to join. The interests of the progressive white community will be our interests as well.

Historically, we’ve joined white-led parties. When we first came out of slavery we joined the party of Lincoln. In 1932, we joined the party of Franklin D. Roosevelt, saying he had a New Deal. There wasn’t any deal for us but we joined him anyway. We’ve also joined white left parties, where white males dominate the leadership. Why not have a Black- and Latino-led party that’s going to be progressive on the issues, fight for structural change, look out for all of the working-class families in the state?

JT: As governor, what would you focus on?

CB: The big issue we have to deal with is the redistribution of wealth and income. Another issue is land control — whoever controls the land also controls development within our communities.

JT: What will the Freedom Party do after Nov. 2?

CB: We’ll have our first convention in 2011 and begin to build our platform, structure our party and organizing out to other places across the country, including New Jersey, Connecticut, Washington, D.C., Atlanta and Mississippi. So we’re looking to make it a national party and structure it here locally, in this state.

BLACK PANTHER IN SPIRIT: Brooklyn City Councilmember Charles Barron is running for governor. Photo: LADY OF THE NIGHT

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A Mosque Grows in Brooklyn

By Alex Kane

When a mosque and Islamic community center in Sheepshead Bay were formally proposed in the summer of 2009, the estimated 200 Muslim families living in the south Brooklyn neighborhood greeted the news happily. For many years, they’ve had to travel to mosques in Bensonhurst, Canarsie and Bay Ridge.

But the proposed project at 2812 Voorhies Ave., which was approved Oct. 13 by the city Department of Buildings, is now facing a storm of opposition, some of it from outside the community. The main opposition group, a group of local residents called Bay People Inc., has mobilized since last winter over concerns about increased traffic, parking problems, noise and property values.

Bay People and other opponents also have an agenda aligned with anti-Muslim groups and individuals that have been stoking opposition to mosques around the city and country. On its website, Bay People states that “the neighborhood residents are mostly of Italian/Russian/Jewish/Italian descent and will not benefit from having a mosque and a Muslim community center.”

In addition, the group is opposed to the Muslim American Society’s (MAS) affiliation with the project, claiming that MAS is associated with the Muslim Brotherhood and has links to radical Islam and terrorism. (Rep. Michael McMahon, who represents parts of Brooklyn and Staten Island, asked for an FBI probe into MAS, which concluded that there was “no indication whatsoever that the Muslim American Society is affiliated with any organization that threatens our national security,” according to the Staten Island Advance.)

MAS is working with the Sheepshead Bay Muslim community to back the mosque and center, which will have English as a second language and computer classes and workforce development programs. Those closely involved with the project say the facility will be on providing local Muslim youth with a positive place to go, but that it will be open to anyone.

“We think the community board has no formal say in the project,” said Doug Hatt, a member of the New York City Coalition to Stop Islamophobia, has been organizing support for the proposed mosque and the Muslim and Arab communities. PHOTO: SAKURA KELLEY

NO TEA FOR PROPOSED MOSQUE: John Press, above, the head of the Brooklyn Tea Party, has been protesting the proposed mosque, calling Islam a “hostile political doctrine.” PHOTO: SAKURA KELLEY

STOP ISLAMOPHOBIA: Elaine Brower, left, a member of the New York City Coalition to Stop Islamophobia, has been organizing support for the proposed mosque and the Muslim and Arab communities. PHOTO: SAKURA KELLEY

“We recognize the importance of the ‘clash of civilizations,’ and the Muslim American Society is a proponent of Sharia law. We believe that Sharia law is antithetical to Western freedoms,” said Press. He doesn’t live in Sheepshead Bay, but he said that “a few” Tea Party members do.

There have also been demonstrations to support the proposed project. On Sept. 26, dueling rallies lined both sides of Voorhies Avenue.

“We arrived, and we thought we went back to the ’50s. There were signs all over people’s houses [reading] ‘Muslims go home,’” said Elaine Brower of Staten Island, a member of the New York City Coalition to Stop Islamophobia. “If people don’t stand up against it in unity and show support for Muslims and Arabs in this country, it’s only going to get worse.”

Despite the virulence, Allowey Ahmed, the owner of the property at 2812 Voorhies Ave., is moving forward with the plans. Ahmed, a Yemeni-American and longtime Brooklyn resident, estimated that more than $1 million in funds will need to be raised. He hopes construction will begin in the next few months.

“What is right is going to prevail,” said Ahmed. “We believe we are on the right track, because we believe we are sending a good and positive message.”

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“We think the opposition stems from anti-Muslim bigotry. Parking problems will not increase because most families live within walking distance and the early-morning call to prayer won’t be broadcast outside, they say. Theda Scavo, the chair of Community Board 15, which serves Sheepshead Bay, dismissed concerns over traffic problems, saying that in New York City, ‘traffic is everywhere.’

The community board has no formal say over the project, although it has held hearings about it. “They have every right to build it,” said Scavo.

Opponents of the mosque have leveled anti-Muslim accusations during a series of heated protests, including a June 27 rally where one Sheepshead Bay resident threatened to “bomb the mosque” if it’s built, according to the Brooklyn Eagle. John Press, the head of the Brooklyn Tea Party, which demonstrated alongside Bay People on Sept. 26, calls Islam a “hostile political doctrine.”

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The Neverending War Story

By Tom Engelhardt

Because the United States does not look like a militarized country, it's hard for Americans to grasp that Washington, D.C., is a war capital, that the United States is a war state, that it garrisons much of the planet and that the nation lives as if it is to be at war somewhere (usually, in fact, in many places) at any moment.

Similarly, we’ve become used to the idea that, when force doesn’t work, our response, as in Afghanistan, is to recalibrate and apply some alternate version of the same under a new or rebranded name — the hot one now being “counterinsurgency,” or COIN — in a marginally different manner. When it comes to war, as well as preparations for war, more is now generally the order of the day.

This wasn’t always the case. The early republic that the most hawkish conservatives love to cite was a land whose leaders looked with suspicion on the very idea of a standing army. They would have viewed our hundreds of global garrisons, our vast network of spies, agents, Special Forces teams, surveillance operatives, interrogators, rent-a-guns and mercenary corporations — as well as our staggering Pentagon budget and the constant future-war gaming and planning that accompanies it — with genuine horror.

The question is: What kind of a world do we inhabit when, at a time of mass unemployment, the American taxpayer is financing the $220 million Iraqi water project in Baghdad, which has 15 bus routes, two fire stations, two water treatment plants, two sewage-treatment plants, two power plants, a water bottling plant and the requisite set of fast food and retail outlets, as well as air traffic levels sometimes compared to those at Chicago’s O’Hare International?

What kind of world are we living in when a plan to withdraw most U.S. troops from Iraq leads the Pentagon to issue new contracts of almost a billion dollars to increase the number of private security contractors in that country?

What do you make of a world in which the U.S. military has robotic assassins in the skies over its war zones, 24/7, and the “pllots” who control them from thousands of miles away are ready on a moment’s notice to launch missiles — “Hellfire” missiles at that — into Pashtun peasant villages in the wild, mountainous borderlands of Pakistan and Afghanistan?

What does it mean when, for our security and future safety, the Pentagon funds the wildest ideas imaginable for developing high-tech weapons systems? Take, for example, Boeing’s advanced coordinated system of handheld drones, robots, sensors, and other battlefield surveillance equipment slated for seven army brigades within the next two years at a cost of $2 billion and for the full army by 2025; or the Next Generation Bomber, an advanced “platform” slated to be upgraded for 2018; or a truly futuristic bomber, “a suborbital semi-spacecraft able to move at hypersonic speed along the edge of the atmosphere,” for 2035? What does it mean about our world when those people in our government peering deepest into a future-war monopoly position — in this case, in things that go boom in the night.

War is now the American way, even if peace is what most Americans experience while their proxies fight in distant lands. Any serious alternative to war is increasingly inconceivable.

In Orwellian terms then, war is indeed peace in the United States — and peace is war. “Newspeak,” as George Orwell imagined it, was an ever more constricted form of English that would, sooner or later, make “all other modes of thought impossible.” It was intended, he wrote in an appendix to his novel, “that when Newspeak had been adopted once and for all and Newspeak forgotten, a heretical thought should be literally unthinkable.”

WHAT IS VICTORY?

When it comes to war (and peace), we live in a world of American Newspeak in which alternatives to a state of war are not only ever more unacceptable, but ever harder to imagine. It is now our permanent situation, it has also been sundered from a set of words that once accompanied it. It lacks, for instance, “victory.” The smashing “victory” over Saddam Hussein in the First Gulf War only led to a stop-and-start conflict now almost two decades old that has proved a catastrophe.

Achieving victory no longer seems to matter. War U.S.-style is now conceptually unending, as are preparations for it. When George W. Bush proclaimed a Global War on Terror, conceived as a “generational struggle” like the Cold War, he caught a certain U.S. reality. In a sense, the ongoing war system can’t absorb victory. Any such endpoint might indeed prove to be a kind of defeat.

No longer has war anything to do with the taking of territory either, or even with direct conquest. War is increasingly a state of being, not a process with a beginning, an end and an actual geography.

Similarly drained of its traditional meaning has been the word “security” — though it has moved from a state of being (secure) to an eternal, immensely profitable process whose endpoint is unachievable. If we ever decided we were either secure enough, or more willing to live without the unreachable idea of total security, the American way of war and the national security state would lose much of their meaning. In other words, in our world, security is insecurity.

And “peace” itself? Simply put, there’s no money in it. Of the nearly trillion dollars the United States invests in war and war-related activities, nothing goes to peace. No money, no effort, no thought. The very idea that there might be peaceful alternatives to endless war is so discredited that it’s left to utopians, bleeding hearts and feathered doves. As in Orwell’s Newspeak, while “peace” remains with us, it’s largely been shorn of its possibilities.

What a world might be like in which we began to seriously scale down the U.S. global mission, close those hundreds of bases — as of 2010, there were almost 400 of them, macro to micro, in Afghanistan alone — and bring our military home is beyond imagining.

To discuss such obviously absurd possibilities makes you an apostate to America’s true religion and addiction, which is fears. How ever much it might seem that most of us are peaceably watching our screens or iPhones, we Americans are also — always — marching as to war. We may not all bother to attend the church of our new religion, but we all take part. In this sense, we live peaceably in a state of war.
FEAR AND LOATHING WITH THE TEA PARTY

BY ABBY SCHER

LAS VEGAS — I recently received a slick email showing South Asian immigrants at a parade praying on Madison Avenue. It came with the breathless statement that Muslims have taken over America for Allah, making the false claim that every Friday in Manhattan, worshippers flow out of packed mosques in two different locations and pray in the streets.

Outright misinformation like this is rife in the Tea Party movement, and builds off misinformation found on stalwart rightist websites like Townhall.com and WorldNetDaily.com and promoted by FOX news personality Glenn Beck. Sometimes, like this email, it seems to be produced by dedicated freelance troublemakers — popular propagandists.

In late July, I encountered a year-old piece of misinformation from a local couple who were rushing to attend the Americans for Prosperity campaign rally against Nevada Sen. Harry Reid and other Democrats. Owners of a pottery studio, Bob and Dot Donaghy moved to Nevada 15 years ago during boom times and now were concerned that “Nevada’s bubbling conservative scene was a snapshot that validates anti-federal government, anti-tax activists in their belief that they are being ripped off. The reality is that Nevada, to remain the lowest-taxed state in the union, doesn’t sign up for the options offered by Medicaid and other federal programs that would bring in more money to the state coffers but require matching funds.

Bob Donaghy went on to say, “We’re not socialist-type people and [Reid] is. It’s really about fiscal responsibility, protecting our constitutional rights. The government needs to pay as we go, not put our children in debt. The Republicans, like the Democrats, have reached the point where they are entrenched politicians. Once they start receiving money over the years from lobbyists, they are no longer thinking about what’s best for the United States.”

A lot of people would agree with him. But then he started talking about Detroit, and the misinformation came into play. “You know Reid and Obama took over the auto industry — Chrysler and General Motors. If a dealership donated to the Democratic Party, they kept it. If a dealer donated to the Republican Party, they closed it. It’s backed up by multiple sources.”

And he’s right — about the sources that is. Right-wing bloggers led by Doug Ross pushed this idea in May 2009, and Phyllis Schlafly picked up on it in her Townhall column. It was quickly debunked, even by the conservative Heritage Foundation. But the story won’t die because it encapsulates all the Tea Party fears of a socialist government that runs roughshod over small-businesspeople like car dealers and the Tea Party activist himself. They think government is destroying the U.S. economy with its big spending and favoritism.

It felt like everyone I interviewed in Nevada’s bubbling conservative scene was a warlike conservative campaigner of the economic crisis and the grasping needs of government.

Women said they were fighting for their children’s future by leading the charge against deficits. One person called Medicare and Social Security “a Ponzi scheme” that will collapse without even being dismantled. Many dismissed as “socialist” or class warfare the Keynesian idea that government must invest in the economy and jobs when the private sector is stuck. Embracing trickle-down economics like a life jacket, they saw cutting taxes as the only way to soothe the churning waters. And those who disagreed with them were un-American or, for some, dangerous internal enemies who are destroying America.

Continued on page 12

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UNDERSTANDING THE RIGHT

The Tea Party of No

ARUN GUPTA

Those and other Tea Party-backed candidates ran against both parties for all sorts of progressive legislation and even progressive policies. They were the embodiment of the New Right, the modern expression of Barry Goldwater’s vision. Goldwater’s vision of a morally turbulent society that must be saved from within by decisively conservative Republican administrations. This vision is one of the ideas that both motivate and energize the Tea Party. It is also the idea that Goldwater’s Thinking was to take over the Republican Party in the late 1960s and early 1970s. A contemporary of Goldwater, former Senator George Wallace, swept the Deep South in the 1968 presidential election campaign as a conservative populist. He represented the right wing of that new movement and its ideas. Until recent years, this right wing has been the dominant wing in the Republican Party. The Tea Party has been the manifestation of this wing. The party that has taken over the Republican Party in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

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The Tea Party of No

ARUN GUPTA

That and other Tea Party-backed candidates ran against both parties for all sorts of progressive legislation and even progressive policies. They were the embodiment of the New Right, the modern expression of Barry Goldwater’s vision. Goldwater’s vision of a morally turbulent society that must be saved from within by decisively conservative Republican administrations. This vision is one of the ideas that both motivate and energize the Tea Party. It is also the idea that Goldwater’s Thinking was to take over the Republican Party in the late 1960s and early 1970s. A contemporary of Goldwater, former Senator George Wallace, swept the Deep South in the 1968 presidential election campaign as a conservative populist. He represented the right wing of that new movement and its ideas. Until recent years, this right wing has been the dominant wing in the Republican Party. The Tea Party has been the manifestation of this wing. The party that has taken over the Republican Party in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

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Viagra for an Impotent America

By Peter Bratsis

The emergence of the Tea Party movement is the most significant development in U.S. politics since the election of Obama. Although right-wing parties are on the rise throughout the West, in Sweden, France, Italy and elsewhere, the speed and scale of the growth of the Tea Party has been extraordinary. Commentators and analysts such as Paul Krugman have downplayed this troubling development by labeling it an “Astroturf” movement—one conceived and financed by corporate interests. Even if it is true that the Tea Party is organized and supported through corporate wealth and pumped through Fox News and other likeminded apparatuses, this in no way takes away from the scale and depth of support that actually exist for it and its values. Indeed, populist movements inherently involve an alliance of some fraction of the dominant classes with a significant portion of the dominated classes. In truth, we face the sobering reality that capitalism’s latest crisis—complete with bank failures, corporate bailouts, rising unemployment, and declining wages—has aided the right, not the left. How can we explain the capacity of the right to benefit from and redirect the bitterness and discontent that derives from capitalism’s own failures?

The Tea Party movement should be understood as a political response to the crisis. While it was spurred into existence by the current economic malaise, any attempt to understand the Tea Party purely in economic terms is bound to fail. Take two of the chief concerns: reducing taxes and the federal debt. Leaders and followers alike rail about cutting taxes, but the super-rich will benefit the most, not Joe the Plumber. Reducing taxes and deficits concurrently will mean kneecapping government and crippling Medicare and Social Security, which are lifelines to those over 50 years old—the demographic heart of this new movement. Indeed, middle classes clamoring for a decrease in public spending and services is the opposite of what one would expect.

In fact, the Tea Party eschews economicistic, self-interested behavior when it comes to political life. Party supporters think that things have gone awry precisely because Americans are driven by the nihilistic pursuit of self-interest. For them, a growing permissiveness and abandonment of core principles plagues the United States. The movement trades in the language and images of freeloaders, and criminal immigrants, self-serving and spendthrift politicians, drug-addicted and lazy welfare recipients, unprincipled and oversexed liberals, seditionists, lazy welfare recipients, and so on. In all cases, it is the inability of such groups to overcome their own particularity, their own self-interest and desires, that functions as the key problem.

This simple principle allows Tea Partyers to understand their own personal misery and lack of satisfaction as well as the perceived decline of U.S. political and economic prowess. If greedy bankers and labor unions, corrupt and servile politicians, and free-rider law-breaking immigrants behaved in a more disciplined and principled manner, then we would finally be able to enjoy our own lives and the United States could go back to its former greatness. The Tea Party is attempting to renew U.S. potency through the rediscovery of the capacity to put off pleasure, to not be a slave to selfish drives. It is an attempt at revolution in the same sense that the “founding fathers” would have understood the term, as going back to the original state of things, or, more precisely, going back to some mythical version of the original state of things.

By evoking the Boston Tea Party, the movement is both referencing the national
founding and celebrating patriotic pleasure and sacrifice, the satisfaction achieved from smashing barrels of tea and risking arrest for the benefit of the nation. The resurgence of militias and the repeated references to guns and violence in Tea Party discourse, such as Sarah Palin’s “Don’t retreat, reload,” are directly related to this desire to regain the phallus, our potency and capacity for satisfaction. Palin often reminds us of the virtues of being a pit bull with lipstick, of defending and serving the family even when it might be difficult or costly (such as deciding to give birth to and raise a child with learning difficulties). Even Christine O’Donnell’s moralizing against masturbation makes sense in this context: being able to resist sexual urges and getting to work on time are displaced one’s children, waking up every morning and getting to work on time are displaced onto their political identities. The passion that Tea Party supporters display is a result of this displacement. They are defending these satisfactions from perceived threats that are imaginary.

Tea Parties are merely expressing their self-hating and the inability to reconcile their selfishness, consumerism and utility-maximizing behaviors with their own self-images of civic and moral responsibility. We are faced with contradictory social demands, to be greedy market-oriented individuals and, concurrently, self-sacrificing patriotic defenders of the common good. Similarly, we are constantly confronted with the discontent, alienation and lack of meaning within modern life and the impossible goal of achieving satisfaction through market life and consumerism. These core contradictions and tensions become externalized and take on the face of the “immigrant” the “liberal” the “politician” or the “Muslim.”

The Tea Party movement has woven together an ingenious populist discourse, drawing upon the displaced sexual energy of many Americans and using that energy and passion to mount an attack on a large and nebulous set of groups and interests that, presumably, lie behind our current crisis. No doubt there is plenty of racism, sexism and xenophobia within the movement. Indeed, it is again acceptable to be openly racist and heterosexist in American politics, which, presumably, lie behind our current crisis.

The Tea Party movement has woven together an ingenious populist discourse, drawing upon the displaced sexual energy of many Americans and using that energy and passion to mount an attack on a large and nebulous set of groups and interests that, presumably, lie behind our current crisis. No doubt there is plenty of racism, sexism and xenophobia within the movement. Indeed, it is again acceptable to be openly racist and heterosexist in American politics, which, presumably, lie behind our current crisis.

The right has capitalized on the current anxieties and systemic failures of liberal capitalism, and it has marshaled this discontent toward a reactionary movement that chases a proto-fascist vision of a society without greed or any other excess. It may not be that Palin and O’Donnell are reading Carl Schmitt, Jacques Lacan, Leo Strauss and Antonio Gramsci, fine-tuning the Tea Party project, but someone likely is. The left needs to take heed. The right has obvious advantages in terms of resources, including media access. But they are also outthinking us.

The left does not have a comparable political project, one that is able to draw upon the libidinal dimension of contemporary life and meld it with a universal political principle, one that is able to negotiate the contradictions inherent to modernity and use that discontent toward the establishment of a revolutionary future. If anything, we only come up with partial repetitions of the Tea Party discourse itself, weak denunciations of corporate greed and market brutality, a limp moralistic message that conforms to the desire for order and the taming of excess.

The left needs to articulate a much more substantive political project, one that goes beyond simple questions of redistributing some wealth and defending civil liberties and rights. A new world may be possible, but does anyone, even on the left, want one? If the Tea Party gives voice to the desire for order and security, where is the desire for purposeful social transformation and revolutionary change?

Peter Bratsis teaches political theory at the University of Salford. He is the author of Everyday Life and the State and an editor of the journal Situations.
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**Party of No**

Continued from page 9

However irrational this position may be, the logical consequences are not: Anything Obama and the Democrats do must be opposed because it is a life-and-death struggle. In opposing the healthcare plan, the right is not just trying to deny services to the underprivileged, it is affirming and protecting free choice. In the family, the sanctity of life, the market, God, country, the Constitution — all arguments trotted out in the last year. At the same time, the Obama administration has not only helped build the Tea Party by aiding Wall Street rather than Main Street. The Republicans have exploited legitimate anxieties over high unemployment, a shrinking economy and onerous taxes by scapegoating the weak and marginal for policies that are structural and historical in nature.

The lesson for Obama and Democrats is not that they went too far to the “left,” it’s that they went too far to the right. Obama had the political capital to push for a “Green New Deal” that could have restructured the transportation and energy sectors and created millions of new jobs. Slashing the bloated military budget while fighting for single-payer healthcare — instead of subsidizing for-profit healthcare with tax dollars — budget deficits could have been constrained while reducing the financial and medical bills for most U.S. households. Implementing such an agenda could have created a mass constituency that would fight for a progressive vision and against the right’s repressive politics.

The right has well-thought-out ideologies, a specific agenda and clearly defined enemies and ruthlessly pursues power to achieve its goals. It’s fighting a Democratic White House and Party that stand for nothing — that is why the “Party of No” will continue to be a winning strategy for Republicans.

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**Fear and Loathing**

Continued from page 7

I heard a Tea Party myth riffing on this theme from an educated professional’s wife. She had a variation of the “Obama is an imposter” line. He’s not a Muslim, he is a Communist. Her proof was a story popularized by Glenn Beck that the Kansas-bred Anglo grandparents who helped raise Obama “belonged to the communist view” because they attended a “little red church” during the 1950s. That’s a Unitarian church near Seattle that Obama’s grandparents and mother briefly attended before moving to Hawaii. The current pastor says the church was tarred because of the “effects of McCarthyism.” Based on little more than that, Beck has called Obama’s grandparents and mother Communists and un-American.

The auto bailouts and healthcare reform are bringing old anti-Communist politics to life as people reach back for a framework that fits their outrage. When Delaware’s Christine O’Donnell calls Obama “anti-American,” as she did on Fox News after winning the primary, is this where it is coming from?

Lynn Harsh, of the conservative State Policy Institute, said the participants at an Arizona candidates for Prosperity conference in Las Vegas that when they blog, they have to be more careful to verify their sources. “If you are going to create change, it’s got to seem credible and safe,” she said. “And we need to do better there. We need to be a lot smarter.”

But she was speaking at a conference funded by the Koch brothers’ oil fortune where climate-change deniers headlined a workshop. Does Lynn Harsh agree with America First Prosperity that scientists are manufacturing data about human-generated climate change? Or does she keep mum about her disagreement to keep the climate-deniers happy, a trade-off conservatives have made throughout their movement, laying the groundwork for Tea Party myth-making?

In the 2008 presidential race, top conservatives backing John McCain slammed Obama as a socialist and insinuated he was un-American. It was nothing. Sean Hannity and Rush Limbaugh weren’t saying. But by legitimizing the revival of McCarthy-style politics, some establishment Republicans are now finding the rhetoric being turned against them. In Nevada, a coalition of Tea Partiers and Ron Paul supporters took over the Las Vegas-area Clark County Republican Party (CCRP) and the state party structures in a swirl of conspiratorial denunciation against the conservative GOP establishment.

“Most of us who left are indeed fiscal conservatives and ardent supporters of constitutional rights, so the ‘Marxist’ accusation is a reflection of the deep paranoia and delusion within the current CCRP leadership,” said the (very conservative) former CCRP chairman after he stepped down.

One unrepentant Tea Partier replied, “If we have to purge the RINOs (Republicans in Name Only) from power before we purge the fascists in power, so be it.” He is, in the words of historian Richard Hofstadter, “in a spiritual wrestling match with munitions of absolute evil.”

Back in the 1950s, old-style conservatives in the Republican Party felt shut out by the moderates who accepted the New Deal reforms regulating capitalism and providing modest aid for people tossed aside by economic downturns. That the New Deal asserted federal power over the states could mean only a loss of political sovereignty and American liberty. Feeling disenfranchised not just by Washington but parts of their own party, the Republican right nurtured the McCarthy-bred universe of betrayal, suspicion and conspiracy in an effort to win back power. They failed, until the 1960s and the debacle of Barry Goldwater’s presidential campaign.

Many of today’s Tea Partiers inhabit a similar universe but start out with the backing of important party insiders like Indiana Rep. Mike Pence and South Carolina Sen. Jim DeMint, and money-soaked political operatives like the anti-tax Club for Growth and Sal Russo, a former Reagan strategist who leads the Tea Party Express Political Action Committee. Like their McCarthy-era counterparts, the free-marketers ally with conspiracy- and hate-mongering to win back power. Unlike the days of McCarthy, they have a mainstream television news network and internet sites on their side. It is a dirty business. And other than shining them and — articulating a clear, simple vision of our own — we are no savvier about how to stop the fever than our predecessors were in the ‘50s.

Abby Seher is a sociologist and journalist who writes about the U.S. right and economic justice. A version of this article originally appeared in Truthout.
WHY WE SHOULD ALL MOVE TO GERMANY

BY IRINA IVANOVA

Were You Born on the Wrong Continent? How the European Model Can Help You Get a Life

Thomas Geoghegan
New Press, 2010

In the wake of the recession, the plight of the U.S. worker has gone from bad to worse. But not to worry — labor lawyer and author Thomas Geoghegan has the answer. He confirms what we have all suspected in our darkest moments: life is better in Europe, and in Germany, in particular.

While Americans were overworked before the recession, the current financial crisis has hit Americans with the double-whammy of increased hours (for those who still have a job) and a spike in living costs. At 1,804 hours a year, Americans clock in 400 hours more than our German counterparts—that’s the equivalent of 10 extra 40-hour work weeks each year. Our GDP is higher than Germany’s, but only from astronomical spending on private healthcare, childcare and tuition — all of which Germany provides for free, or nearly free, to its citizens.

With his trademark mix of invective and black humor, Geoghegan argues in Were You Born on the Wrong Continent? that European-style social democracy benefits the middle- and upper-middle classes even more than the working class, and that, once Americans come to their senses, we may realize it’s the only way for our own advanced capitalist economy to survive.

The Independent spoke with Geoghegan about why workers are better off in Germany, and why it may not be too late for us.

IRINA IVANOVA: You write that Americans work many more hours than our European counterparts. Why is that?

THOMAS GEOGHEGAN: It’s because there’s no one to tell us it’s okay to go home. Given that there’s no restraint on our employers for firing us for any reason at any time, this puts enormous pressure on us, almost like lab rats, to work harder than the lab rat next to us.

II: Does working more hours at least make Americans more productive?

TG: Since productivity is measured on an hourly basis, it’s almost a given that the more hours you work the less productive you become. And in the United States there are loads of people who should get paid hourly who don’t. If these people were paid by the hour, employers might abandon this system!

Europeans are probably more productive than Americans because Americans tend to undercut their hours and Europeans overcount their hours — there’s a shocking degree to which nobody’s at work on Friday afternoon in Europe.

II: Why Germany? What sets it apart from other European countries, and what makes it a good example for us to follow?

TG: Of all the countries on planet Earth, Germany’s the one country that has the most “worker control” of any other place since the collapse of Communism. It’s a capitalist country, but with a much more plausible form of capitalism. Germany is a creditor state, and the world’s biggest exporter — on par with China. Conversely, the United States is a debtor nation, running a huge trade deficit.

II: In what ways does Germany have the most worker control?

TG: First, they have works councils where employees can actually elect their own representatives. The works councils don’t control everything — they don’t control the hours of opening and closing, for example. But they do have to sit on management’s board. Here in the United States we don’t have workers engaged in any sort of management.

Second, they have co-determined boards in big global firms with over 2,000 employees. This means that the employees elect one-half of the board.

And on top of all this, they also have unions.

If you don’t have unions that put economic issues first, you get much more irrationality in the political process — you get Tea Parties, anti-immigration, you start nominating witches to the Senate — you have no way for people outside of the elite to get involved in the political process.

II: Why is there such opposition in the United States to European-style social democracy?

TG: I think America would be a social democracy if we had a government like European social democracies based on the principle of one person, one vote.

But, as you’ve seen during the Obama administration, everything has to go through the Senate, where North Dakota has as much sway as New York. The Senate is set up for irrational, even antidemocratic outcomes. It was set up to protect slavery and enforce Jim Crow, and now it’s set up to keep unions out. Our legal system creates this culture, and then we turn around and say, ‘Well, we have this legal system because we have this culture.’

II: Is there any way for the United States to become more like Germany?

TG: It’s not just about Germany. Take the top 20 industrialized countries in the world. If 19 of them are going in one direction, and the other one heads in another direction, that’s unsustainable.

We’re at a point right now where the majority of citizens in the United States, which is a fundamentally European project, are about to become non-white, and that majority may be the agent to turn the United States — paradoxically — into something more European. Our descendants may be a smarter, more diverse, multilingual crew.

But that’s not a prediction — it’s a hope.
I’m not able to take enough showers to wipe the smell of him off my body” said Jamal Parris of Bishop Eddie Long. In a recent FOX news interview Parris spoke of sex before and after church services, and in his lawsuit alleged being sodomized orally in Long’s private church office.

If true, imagine the scene of a young man kneeling, giving a blowjob to his pastor. Long stuffs his penis through the young man’s lips, heat flushes his face and, overwhelmed, he spasms and floods the bathroom.

Minutes later Long is on the stage of New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Atlanta, as thousands yell and wave in the 10,000-seat megachurch. They have come to hear the Word of God and the pastor opens his arms as if to lift them to Heaven. From backstage Parris watches, scared but proud because this powerful man proved once again that he is special.

Parris, now 23, was 17 at the time and he, along with three other young men — Maurice Robinson, 20, Anthony Flage, 21, and Spencer LeGrande, 22 — have filed charges against Long for sexual coercion. Long is the latest to join the roster of hypocrites from evangelist Ted Haggard, who confessed he was gay, to an act, but an act is made deviant by labeling, and philosopher Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction explained how deviance is not innate but a social construction.

Sigmund Freud wrote about our innate bisexuality, and after thousands of interviews, Alfred Kinsey created his seven-point Kinsey scale to map the diversity of sexuality. Sociologist Howard Becker’s labeling theory showed how deviance is not innate to an act, but an act is made deviant by labeling, and philosopher Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction explained how centers are created by repressing a part of one’s being to the margins.

And the repressed always returns. In Totem and Taboo Freud wrote, “The pleasure of the impulse constantly undergoes displacement in order to escape the blocking which it encounters and seeks to acquire surrogates for the forbidden in the form of substitutive objects and actions.” Does this not describe Pastor Long’s compulsive mentoring of young men?

Long, like many men in authority, sacrificed his sexual truth for power while using his power to prey on boys. When we stop seeing these scandals as personal failures to live up to a law and critique the law itself, a lot of unneeded suffering will stop. It seems that would take a miracle, but since Long believes in miracles let’s imagine one.

While basking in the stage lights, the boy walks up and kisses him. The stunned church is silent. Long grabs the boy’s arms but instead of thrusting him away, embraces and kisses deeper. In the audience, Bibles burst into flame and as the video feed goes global, men see it and begin to kiss as Korans and Torahs and Bibles flash into flames.

At bars, men grope. At mosques and police stations, men tongue each other. Above their heads on the TV is Long kneeling in front of the unzipped boy. The audience of New Birth Church, half-dressed, is necking in the orange light of burning Bible pages floating down around them.

He wasn’t alone, as behind him are unknown others ranging against gays, claiming to speak a truth guaranteed by God or nature. But there is another truth. Instead of religious law being an ideal to live by and failure a sin, what if it is the law that creates the sin? What if we saw the human being as a rainbow, a full, wide spectrum of sexuality? We’d see that whoever says that one specific orientation, position or need is the only valid one is trying to create fear in order to control.

The 18th-century poet William Blake knew this when he wrote in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, “Prisons are built with stones of Law, Brothels with bricks of Religion.”

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The Christian Hole

By Nick Powers

Parris, now 23, was 17 at the time and he, along with three other young men — Maurice Robinson, 20, Anthony Flage, 21, and Spencer LeGrande, 22 — have filed charges against Long for sexual coercion. Long is the latest to join the roster of hypocrites from evangelist Ted Haggard, who confessed he was gay, to an act, but an act is made deviant by labeling, and philosopher Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction explained how centers are created by repressing a part of one’s being to the margins.

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THIRD PARTIES
Continued from page 4

So are the Greens and the Freedom Party competing for the same 50,000 votes? “There is definitely some overlap,” says Dunlea. “We hope we both get a ballot line.”

Barron says he supports the Greens on environmental issues, but says they are “not addressing life-and-death issues in the black and Latino communities. We are the only party that’s been there.” He also emphasizes that he is the only third-party candidate in the race who is a sitting elected official.

Dunlea says the Greens had discussions with Barron in 1998 about creating a joint third party, but that Barron wanted to retain the option of working within the Democrats. Greens have merged with similar black-led parties in Boston and Washington, D.C., he adds.

FUSION VOTING

New York law is distinctive in that it allows third parties to endorse other parties’ candidates. This has given the state a history of third parties that either ran their own candidates or used their “cross-endorsements” to pull the Democrats or the Republicans to endorse other parties’ candidates or used their “cross-endorsements” to pull the Democrats or the Republicans to endorse other parties’ candidates. Greens have merged with similar black-led parties in Boston and Washington, D.C., he adds.

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But that will all come to an end unless we raise the funds to keep publishing.

More than that, the work that has gone into this paper for 10 years, building connections to grassroots movements around the city and the world, will disappear.

For instance, we just published a special 20-page issue on the education crisis to provide a tool for parents, educators and students to understand why public education and teachers unions are under attack, who is leading the assault and what are better alternatives and who is fighting for them. Since then, we’ve been overwhelmed with the positive response, as community activists stop by to take hundreds of papers back to their schools, neighborhoods and groups.

We could tell you a hundred other stories like this. But we would rather create another hundred moments. And we will do that in the months and years ahead with your help today.

Thank you,
The Indypendent

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